

engage

In **engage** this issue we're full of questions: Is God fair? Isn't the Bible irrelevant now? How do you explain the gospel? What on earth is a Thessalonian? How do I understand the Bible? Aren't snowboarders too cool to be Christians? Read on and discover the answers with us.

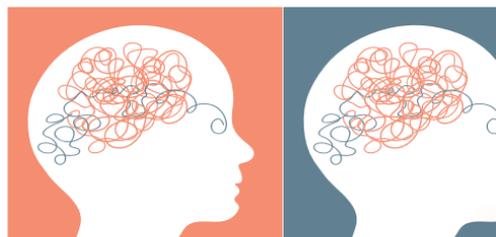
* **DAILY READINGS** Each day's page throws you into the Bible, to get you handling, questioning and exploring God's message to you — encouraging you to act on it and talk to God more in prayer.

THIS ISSUE: Search for a king in **1 Samuel**; grow as a Christian with **2 Thessalonians**; expand your view of God with **Isaiah**; and travel the globe with Paul in **Acts**.

* **TAKE IT FURTHER** If you're hungry for more at the end of an **engage** page, turn to the **Take it further** section to dig deeper.

* **ESSENTIAL** Articles on the basics we really need to know about God, the Bible and Christianity. This issue, we ask the question: **What is the gospel?**

* **TRICKY** tackles those mind-bendingly tricky questions that confuse us all, as well as stuff our friends bombard us with. This time: **Isn't the Bible irrelevant?**



* **REAL LIVES** True stories, revealing God at work in people's lives. This time — **Olympic snowboard champion Kelly Clark**.

* **STUFF** Articles on stuff relevant to the lives of young Christians. This issue: **What music should we listen to?**

* **TOOLBOX** is full of tools to help you understand the Bible. This issue we concentrate on **how to interpret the Bible**.

All of us who work on **engage** are passionate to see the Bible at work in people's lives. Do you want God's word to have an impact on your life? Then open your Bible, and start on the first **engage** study right now...

HOW TO USE **engage**

- 1 Set a time you can read the Bible every day
- 2 Find a place where you can be quiet and think
- 3 Grab your Bible, pen and a notebook
- 4 Ask God to help you understand what you read
- 5 Read the day's verses with **engage**, taking time to think about it
- 6 Pray about what you've read

BIBLE STUFF

We use the NIV Bible version, so you might find it's the best one to use with **engage**. If the notes say "**1 Samuel 2 v 5-13**", look up 1 Samuel in the contents page at the front of your Bible. It'll tell you which page the book starts on. Find chapter 2 of 1 Samuel, and then verse 5 of chapter 2 (the verse numbers are the tiny ones). Then start reading. Simple.

In this issue...

DAILY READINGS

- 1 Samuel:** Search for a king
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Isaiah: City of dreams
Acts: Paul on tour
Psalms: Blast from the past

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1 Samuel

The search for a king

Get ready for an action-packed read. The book of 1 Samuel has a miracle birth, evil priests, ark theft, vicious battles and the search for a great king.

The story continues where Judges left off. God's people, the Israelites, were in Canaan — the land God had promised them. But things were not going well. Despite a series of judges who'd rescued them from God's punishment, they still refused to obey Him. In 1 Samuel, incredibly, God still cared for His unfaithful people. He would still keep His promises and use them in His perfect plans.

In this book we see God appoint Samuel as the last of the judges, then pick Saul as Israel's first king, then David to replace him. You see, a king was now the thing. A big change was underway.

1 Samuel will sharpen our thinking about God: what He's like; what He's doing; what He wants; how He acts.

And it will remind us to look ahead — into the New Testament — for the perfect King chosen by God, who would fully achieve God's plans.

So prepare for a search for a great king with many incidents along the way. 1 Samuel poses the big question: who will be king? Who would lead the Israelites in battle as their king? And more importantly for us, who will be the king of our lives?

Let's start the search...





1

Family fortunes

1 Samuel opens with the spotlight on a strange little family — one husband, two wives and a bitter rivalry. It can only end in tears.

Read 1 Samuel 1 v 1–8**ENGAGE YOUR BRAIN**

What do we learn about this unhappy family?

v2:

v3:

v5:

v6–7:

What a miserable way to begin a book! Poor childless Hannah being taunted to tears. And we're even told that *God* had closed her womb (v6). It all seems so unfair. But it was part of God's perfect plan for His people.

Read verses 9–20

What did Hannah do at her lowest point? (v10–11)

What did Eli the priest think was happening? (v13–14)

How did he encourage Hannah? (v17–18)

What did God do for Hannah? (v19–20)

How did she respond? (v20)

Before: Hannah was miserable and childless, so she took it all to God in prayer. And even promised to give her son over to God.

After: Just talking to God seemed to lift Hannah's spirits (v18). Amazingly, the Lord gave her a little boy. God won't always answer our prayers in the way we want or expect, but we can trust He'll always do what's best for us.

PRAY ABOUT IT

When you pray, pour out your heart to God. Leave your worries with Him. Why not start right now, by talking honestly to God about how you're feeling?

THE BOTTOM LINE

Pour out your heart to God.

TAKE IT FURTHER

Try page 108 for a little bit more.



2

Bye bye baby

Hannah tearfully asked God for a son, promising to give him over to God, to serve Him in the temple. Miraculously, God gave her a baby boy but would Hannah keep her word?

Read 1 Samuel 1 v 21–28**ENGAGE YOUR BRAIN**

- Why didn't Hannah join in with the yearly sacrifice? (v22)*
- How did Hannah keep her promise to God? (v24–25)*
- Why? (v27–28)*

In those days a baby was weaned (stopped being fed its mother's milk) at about 3 years old. It must have been heart-wrenching for Hannah to leave 3-year-old Samuel at the temple. Would she go back to her miserable, tearful ways?

Read 2 Samuel 2 v 1–11

- What did Hannah praise God for? (v1–2)*
- How do v4–8 describe God?*
- What will He do for His people? (v9)*

What about His enemies? (v10)

Rather than being tearful at seeing her son go, she praised God for miraculously giving her a son and making her so happy. She knew that God is in control of everything (v4–8). He will protect His people ("saints", v9) but punish those who reject Him.

Hannah also glimpsed the future — a time when God's people would be ruled by a king. With Samuel, though, God was miraculously raising up a judge to rescue and lead His people. That's all to come later in 1 Samuel.

PRAY ABOUT IT

Use Hannah's prayer as a guide and:

1. Thank God for specific things He has done for you.
2. Praise Him for what He's like.
3. Praise God for being a fair Judge and for protecting His people.

TAKE IT FURTHER

Bye bye! Call in on page 108.



3

Stealing from God

God had miraculously brought Samuel into the world. Little Sam was now serving God, helping Eli the priest in Shiloh. But the priest's other servants weren't doing such a good job.

Read 1 Samuel 2 v 12–17

ENGAGE YOUR BRAIN

- ▷ *What should have been happening? (v13–14)*
- ▷ *But what did Eli's sons do even before the meat was offered to God? (v15–16)*
- ▷ *What did this show? (v12, v17)*

God had given instructions (in the book of Leviticus) that a part of some sacrifices should be used as food for the priests. But only *after* it had been offered to God — not *during* the sacrifice, and certainly not *before* it.

Read verses 18–21 & 26

- ▷ *How was Samuel different from Eli's sons? (v26)*
- ▷ *How did God bless Hannah even more? (v20–21)*

Read verses 22–25

- ▷ *What else were Eli's sons doing? (v22)*
- ▷ *How did they respond when their father warned them? (v25)*

Verse 25 sounds harsh, but God's judgment is always fair. Because of their continuing sin, God decided to put them to death, and so they didn't listen to Eli's warning. If someone continually refuses to obey God, one day the Lord will confirm that decision and they will be deaf to any warnings. We can't assume we can keep rejecting God and then turn to Him on our deathbed. We must turn to God now, before it's too late.

GET ON WITH IT

- ▷ *Who do you need to warn about God's punishment?*
- ▷ *Whose warnings and advice do you need to listen to more?*

PRAY ABOUT IT

Pray for people you know who refuse to live God's way. Ask for His mercy so their hearts will soften and they'll turn to Him.

→ TAKE IT FURTHER

Fat facts on page 108.



4

Punishment and promise

We don't know his name, we don't know where he came from, in fact we know nothing about him. But, suddenly, out of nowhere, a “man of God” came to Eli with a message from God.

Read 1 Samuel 2 v 27–34

ENGAGE YOUR BRAIN

- What had God done for Eli's family? (v27–28)*
- How had they treated this privilege? (v29)*
- How would God punish them?*

God had given these guys the fantastic privilege of serving Him in a special way. But they threw it back in His face. Eli tolerated his sons misusing God's sacrifice and dishonouring the Lord. Eli put his sinful sons before God (v29). We shouldn't let anything come between us and God, not even our family.

God punished Eli's whole family. Both his sons would die and none of the family would live a long life. Eli's family had sinned against God and so God rightly punished them. But it wasn't all bad news...

Read verses 35–36

- What did God promise to do?*

God wasn't going to let this disobedient family stop His plans. Eli and his family would be punished by God and He would raise up a faithful priest in their place. The books of 2 Samuel and 1 Kings say that Zadok was such a priest who served God faithfully.

Despite His people's sins, God would always have a faithful priest. The New Testament tells us that Jesus was the perfect priest — His death was the ultimate sacrifice, which brings us back to God.

PRAY ABOUT IT

Never forget how seriously God treats sin. And remember, whatever people do, God's plans can't be stopped! Spend time talking to God about this stuff and whatever's on your mind.

→ TAKE IT FURTHER

Who on earth was Zadok? Page 108.



5

Wake-up call

In Old Testament times, God spoke to His people through prophets who had visions telling them what God's message was. The Israelites had stopped listening to God so He didn't speak to them often any more.

Read 1 Samuel 3 v 1–10

ENGAGE YOUR BRAIN

- ▶ *Who was calling Samuel?*
- ▶ *Why was this particularly surprising? (v1)*
- ▶ *What did Eli tell Sam to say to God?*

God is incredibly patient and kind to His people. The Israelites had been mostly ignoring Him for years and yet He still hadn't given up on them. He was even patient with young Samuel — calling out to him three times, waiting for Sam to work out what was going on.

Read verses 11–18

- ▶ *What was God's frightening message? (v11–14)*
- ▶ *Why would Eli be punished? (v13)*
- ▶ *What did Eli rightly recognise about the bad news? (v18)*

Read verses 19–21

- ▶ *How did God help Samuel? (v19)*
- ▶ *How did He use Samuel? (v20–21)*

- ▶ *How did Samuel learn more about God? (v21)*

These days, God doesn't usually speak to us through prophets, visions or late night shouting. But like Samuel, we have God's word. For us, that's the Bible, and that's how God reveals Himself and His plans to us.

GET ON WITH IT

- ▶ *Do you look elsewhere for God and His guidance?*
- ▶ *How can you study God's word more and learn more about His Son Jesus?*

PRAY ABOUT IT

Try this over the next week: every time you read the Bible, talk to God first, asking Him to reveal Himself to you. You could even say: *"Speak, Lord — your servant is listening."*

→ TAKE IT FURTHER

Wake up! And find more on page 108.



6

God's box

Next up is the story of the ark. No, not the one packed with hippos and lemurs, the other one. This was a very special box which... well, you'll find out.

Read 1 Samuel 4 v 1–3**ENGAGE YOUR BRAIN**

- What was the shock result of the battle?*
- What did the Israelite leaders rightly recognise? (v3)*
- But what mistake did they make? (v3)*

The ark was a wooden box which contained the Ten Commandments. It represented God's presence with them and reminded them of His great promises to them. But they treated it as a box of tricks that would give them victory in battle.

Read verses 4–11

- What effect did the ark have on the Israelites? (v5)*
- And on the Philistines (v7–8)*
- But what happened? (v10)*

What else? (v11)

A disastrous, death-filled defeat for the Israelites. They had trusted in the ark to save them, rather than God. They used the ark like a lucky charm, but God wanted His people to turn to Him, heart and soul, and ask for His help. Instead, they ignored God and lost the symbol of His presence.

THINK IT THROUGH

Church, crucifixes, communion, baptism, saying the right things. People think these are important but none of them makes us Christians. Only turning to Jesus for forgiveness does that. Only He can change our lives around.

PRAY ABOUT IT

Ask God to help you not to rely on the wrong things, but to trust in Him and turn to Him for help throughout your life.

TAKE IT FURTHER

More ark-eology on page 109.



7

Goodbye God

Three disastrous things have happened: many Israelites have been killed in battle; Eli's sons have died; and worst of all, the ark of the covenant has been stolen. But Eli hasn't heard the news yet.

Read 1 Samuel 4 v 12–18

ENGAGE YOUR BRAIN

- ↳ *How did the people of Shiloh react to the news? (v13)*
- ↳ *Which piece of news was more than Eli could stand? (v18)*

The ark was much more than an old box. It was a sign that God was with His people. So when the ark was stolen, Eli knew God had left His people. It was more than Eli could bear — the shock killed him.

Read verses 19–22

- ↳ *Who else took the news badly?*
- ↳ *What did the boy's name mean?*
- ↳ *Why was he called that?*

This was a tragic day for Israel. Many of their men had been killed by the Philistines. As horrific as that was, something far worse happened. The ark of the covenant had left Israel.

God had left His people because they had turned away from Him.

But this wasn't the end of the story. God hadn't left His people for good. In fact, He's already raised up young Samuel as the prophet to lead the Israelites back to living God's way.

THINK IT THROUGH

- ↳ *Do you ever feel that God has left you?*
- ↳ *What do you think is really the case when you feel like that?*

PRAY ABOUT IT

Read Deuteronomy 31 v 6. Thank God that He has promised to never leave His people. Thank Him that Jesus guarantees that all believers are safe with Him forever.

TAKE IT FURTHER

Goodbye! Please drop by page 109.



8

God vs Dagon

The Israelites were defeated by the Philistines, who stole the ark of the covenant. God's glory left Israel. Now the action switches to the Philistines — surely life is now great for them.

Read 1 Samuel 5 v 1–5

ENGAGE YOUR BRAIN

- ▷ *Where did they keep the ark? (v2)*
- ▷ *What happened? (v3)*
- ▷ *And the next day? (v4)*

The Philistines worshipped false god Dagon and assumed he was way stronger than God. They got a wake-up call the next two mornings about who was the true God. Dagon bowed down before the Lord! And God hadn't finished with the Philistines...

Read verses 6–12

- ▷ *What happened to the people of Ashdod? (v6)*
- ▷ *What did they recognise? (v7)*
- ▷ *What happened in Gath? (v9)*
- ▷ *And in Ekron? (v10–12)*

The Philistines thought the precious ark had fallen into their hands, but actually they had fallen into God's hands. They worshipped false gods and not the Lord, so He showed them His devastating power. The Philistines realised God's ark was responsible for all their suffering and their god Dagon could do nothing about it.

GET ON WITH IT

- ▷ *What idols do you have?*
- ▷ *What gets far more of your respect and attention than God?*
- ▷ *How will you kick these idols out of your life?*

PRAY ABOUT IT

Talk these things over with God.

THE BOTTOM LINE

God alone deserves our worship. He is unbeatably powerful.

→ TAKE IT FURTHER

Handy tips on page 109.



9

Raiders of the lost ark

The Philistines are regretting stealing the ark from the Israelites. God has struck them down with a nasty plague. They can't get rid of the ark soon enough.

Read 1 Samuel 6 v 1–12

ENGAGE YOUR BRAIN

▷ *What did the Philistines send along with the ark? (v4, v7)*

▷ *What did they hope this would achieve? (v5)*

Imagine making statues of tumours and rats! Out of gold! But these guys were not joking — they were desperate to please God, get rid of the ark, and hopefully God would stop punishing them. They remembered what happened when the Egyptians treated God badly (v6).

Read 1 Sam 6 v 13 – 7 v 1

▷ *How did the Israelites in Beth Shemesh react when they saw the ark? (v13)*

▷ *But what spoiled the party? (v19)*

▷ *Why did this happen?*

▷ *What did this show? (v20)*

The ark was where God was present among His people. No one could look at it and expect to live. That's why it was usually covered. God is perfect and holy. We can't expect to go into His presence and survive.

And yet Jesus solved this problem for us. His death was the ultimate sacrifice and has made it possible for us to go safely into God's presence. But we must remember how holy and perfect and awesome God is. And how much He hates sin. God is not to be messed with.

THINK IT THROUGH

▷ *Do you give God the respect He deserves?*

▷ *In what ways do you need to take God more seriously?*

THE BOTTOM LINE

We must not take God lightly.

TAKE IT FURTHER

Make a raid on page 109.