



# DAVID THE KING

## STUDY GUIDE

A Catholic Study Program presented by  
*MOST REV. ROBERT E. BARRON*

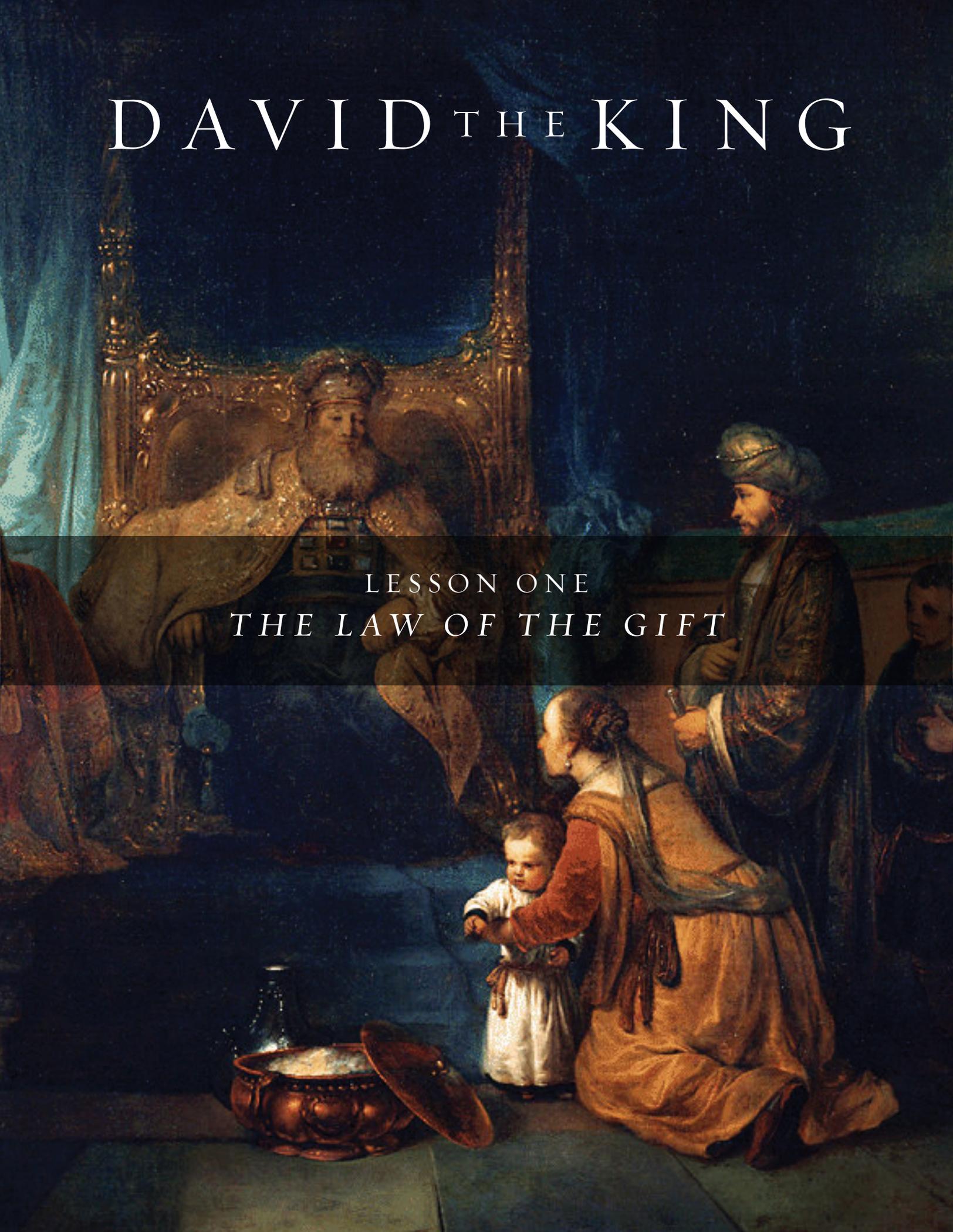
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LESSON ONE  
*THE LAW OF THE GIFT*

LESSON ONE IMAGE

*Hannah Presenting Her Son Samuel to the Priest Eli.* Gerbrand van den Eeckhout, 1665.  
Paris, Musée du Louvre.



# THE LAW OF THE GIFT

## LESSON ONE OUTLINE

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- I. 1 & 2 SAMUEL
  - A. Psychological perceptiveness and literary quality
  - B. Originally one story, but translated on two scrolls
  - C. Unknown authorship. Martin Noth's theory—same author for Book of Deuteronomy through 2 Kings (“Deuteronomistic Historian”)
  
- II. THEME OF KINGSHIP
  - A. Adam
  - B. David
  - C. Jesus Christ
  
- III. HANNAH'S STORY
  - A. Hannah is pivotal to salvation history
  - B. Hannah is barren and held in disregard
  - C. Hannah prays for a child and interacts with Eli
  - D. Hannah bears a son, Samuel, and consecrates him to the Temple
  - E. God often enters through the weakest parts of life
  
- IV. THE “LAW OF THE GIFT”
  - A. “Your being increases in the measure you give it away.”
  - B. Hannah's song
  - C. Biblical family values





## LESSON ONE

# THE LAW OF THE GIFT

In this first talk, Bishop Barron does two things for us. First, he introduces the text of 1 and 2 Samuel and gives us a general orientation to it. Second, he discusses the theological significance of the figure of Hannah.

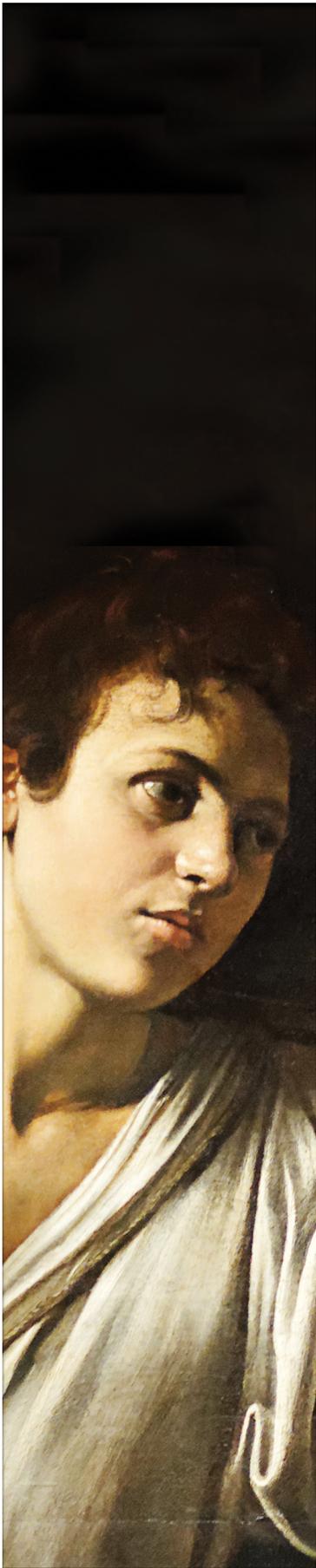


## INTRODUCTION

As Bishop Barron was unpacking some background information about 1 and 2 Samuel, drawing allusions to the classical epic poems of Greek literature and introducing characters, perhaps you may have found yourself asking: “If Scripture is, as the Church teaches, a place in which the Father speaks to his children (*Dei Verbum* 21), why not just dive straight into the text and start applying it to our lives right away?”

There are actually two good reasons why Bishop Barron’s introduction is essential if we want to come to a deep understanding of how God speaks to us in the text. Both are related to what Bishop Barron calls God’s “non-competitive activity.”

When Bishop Barron says that God’s action is “non-competitive” with ours, he means that God prefers to work *with* us, not *against* us (CCC 306). For example, when God wanted to bring perfection to the earth he had made, he didn’t just snap his fingers and make it perfect; he made Adam and Eve to till and keep it. From that point forward it wasn’t as though God, Adam, and Eve had to fight over who got to do the gardening! God worked with and through Adam and Eve; their work was his work, and the perfection they brought to the garden was his perfection. There was no competition between God and humanity. Adam and Eve had what the Greek Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas calls a “priestly vocation.” God gave creation to Adam and Eve so that they could perfect it by their work and make an offering of it back to him. As Bishop Barron points out, this is what it meant for Adam and Eve to have “dominion” over the earth (CCC 307).



It is similar with the Sacred Scriptures. God created the world to be in a relationship with him, and just as God asked the people he had made to work with him in perfecting it, so likewise he asked the people he made to work with him in speaking to it. First he did this on a person-to-person basis. God spoke directly to Adam, to Eve, to Noah, to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob, to Moses, and to countless other people so that they could announce their encounter with him to their families, their friends, their tribes, their nations, and ultimately to the world. In the fullness of time, he sent his Son, Jesus, who spoke to the apostles so that they too might announce to the world their encounter with the Word made flesh. It is that encounter which constitutes God's Revelation first and foremost, as Bl. John Henry Newman observed in the nineteenth century in the *Grammar of Assent*, and as the Church subsequently taught at the Second Vatican Council (DV 4).

God's many encounters with his people led to writings that would bear witness to the definitive structure that the relationship had taken and would take. Here, too, he wanted to work with us and through us, so he selected specific people and gave them the charism of *inspiration*, the gift of making his words their words. That's precisely how the Bible came about. But how did God make human words his words? The answer is as simple as it is mysterious: he gave certain people a special grace, so that what they said would be infallibly what he was saying.

This does not mean that God put the human authors of Sacred Scripture in a kind of unconscious state and forcibly took over their hands. God had no fear that if they put too much of their own thought into it the text it would somehow get corrupted and would not be his anymore. Since God made human reason, he had nothing to fear from working through people who used their reason. Thus, the Church teaches that when God gave the human authors of Sacred Scripture the grace of inspiration, they acted as "true authors" (DV 11) in full possession of their reason and authorial creativity (CCC 106).

The human authors of Sacred Scripture are therefore in one sense no different than the authors of any other great work of literature; they lived in a specific place at a specific time and flourished in a specific culture. Just as you would want to know about thirteenth-century Italy when reading Dante or sixteenth-century England when reading Shakespeare, it helps

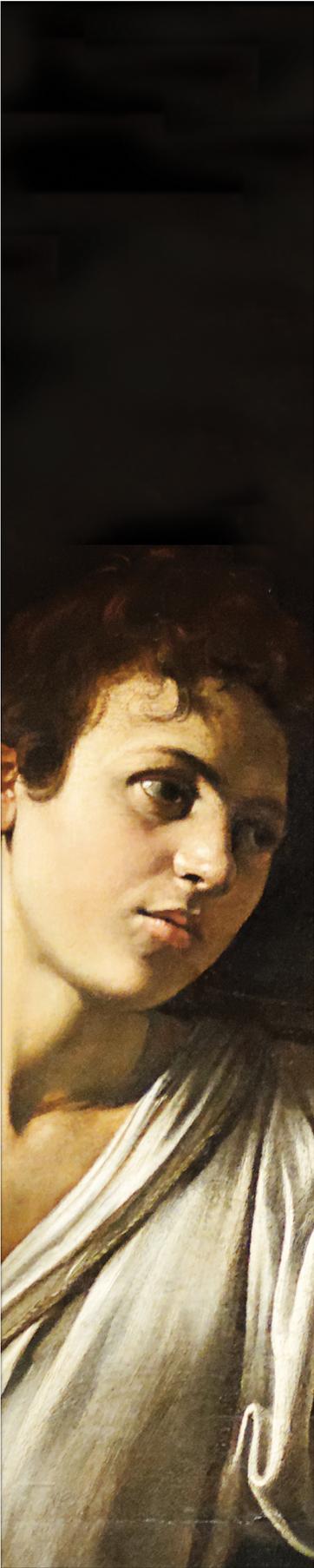
to know about the historical and cultural milieu of the human authors of Scripture if you want to understand the books that they wrote under the inspiration of God (CCC 110). It's a point that St. Augustine recognized even in the fourth century: since the Sacred Scriptures are written by human beings and bear witness to human life, we need to make use of all of the human sciences to understand them fully: history, art, philology, archaeology—the list goes on! (*De doctrina Christiana* 2).

The first reason we need an introduction, then, has to do with the human author. Who was the human author of the books of Samuel? When and where did he or she compose the books?

Even with all the tools that the human disciplines afford us, it is not easy to nail down the answers to all the questions we might have about the human authors of the Old Testament. As Bishop Barron informs us, authorship in the Ancient Near East was not as simple as authorship is today. For a start, many of the books of Scripture have not come down to us with a name attached to them, and even those that have, like Joshua, Ruth, and the two books of Samuel, are more than likely named for the people they speak *about* than the people who wrote them. Even within individual books of the Old Testament, many scholars hypothesize that there may have been multiple inspired hands at work, contributing by God's grace and providence to the finished work as the Church has received it. For example, although ancient Jewish and Christian tradition ascribes the authorship of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament) to Moses, since the nineteenth century most scholars accept some variation of Julius Wellhausen's hypothesis that at least four human authors had a hand in writing the Pentateuch, and that none of them were Moses.

One of Wellhausen's hypothetical sources was called the "Deuteronomist." The Deuteronomist was thought to be a person or persons writing in the sixth century BC. By that time, God's people, Israel, had undergone a number of difficult trials. After reaching a Golden Age of fidelity to the Lord and abundant blessings of culture, wealth, prestige, and power during the reign of Kings David and Solomon in the late eleventh and early tenth centuries BC, Israel's fidelity to the Lord waned. Under Solomon's successor, Rehoboam, the kingdom split. The ten northern tribes broke off and became the Kingdom of Israel; the two southern tribes remained as the Kingdom of Judah. Israel was conquered by the Assyrian Empire in about 721 BC and carried off into captivity. In 586 BC, the Babylonian Empire did the same to Judah. It was during that time, Wellhausen thought, that the Deuteronomist made his contribution to the Pentateuch.

The Deuteronomist, Wellhausen argued, interpreted the history of God's people in terms of the covenant that God established with Moses on Mount Sinai. That covenant, including the



Mosaic Law, promised blessings for fidelity to the Lord and threatened curses for infidelity.

See, I have today set before you life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of the LORD, your God, which I am giving you today, loving the LORD, your God, and walking in his ways, and keeping his commandments, statutes and ordinances, you will live and grow numerous, and the LORD, your God, will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. If, however, your heart turns away and you do not obey, but are led astray and bow down to other gods and serve them, I tell you today that you will certainly perish; you will not have a long life on the land which you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth today to witness against you: I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live, by loving the LORD, your God, obeying his voice, and holding fast to him. For that will mean life for you, a long life for you to live on the land which the LORD swore to your ancestors, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give to them. (Deut 30:15-20)

Unfortunately, the people were not ultimately faithful to their covenant relationship with the Lord. During the period of the Babylonian captivity, they understood themselves to have received the curse that Deuteronomy records in response to a period of infidelity that was so great, it even involved the loss of the Book of Deuteronomy itself!

After Wellhausen, scholars debated what to make of the historical material that comes immediately after Deuteronomy: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel, and 1-2 Kings. Where did it come from? When was it written? Many supposed that it was a collection of stories from disparate times and places. But in 1943, the Old Testament scholar Martin Noth argued convincingly that the books had such a similar style and set of themes that they seemed to come from the same human source, a source similar to or identical with the Deuteronomist from the Pentateuch. Noth called this source the “Deuteronomistic Historian.”

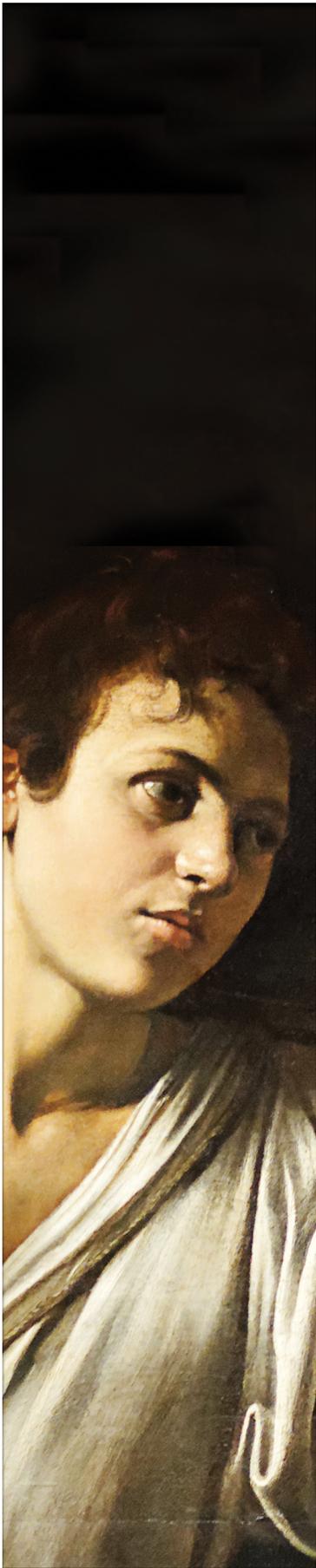
The Deuteronomistic Historian, he argued, did not just give the basis in the Law for Israel's exile and captivity. He also provided the people with an entire account of their history, read in terms of their covenant relationship to the Lord, which explained and culminated in their Babylonian Captivity. In that context, fidelity to the Deuteronomic Covenant became the rule by which Israel's kings, its society, and all of its history were measured; it also became the key to how the people understood themselves at any given time.

Noth's hypothesis convinced scholars to read 1-2 Samuel as part of an integral whole, a story which tells of the development of the Israelite people from their entry into the Promised Land of Canaan (Joshua), their establishment as a tribal people under a series of judges (Judges), their transformation into a kingdom and ascent to power (1-2 Samuel), and their peak and decline through the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities (1-2 Kings).

Moreover, as Bishop Barron observes, this approach to the text is supported by its manuscript history. In Hebrew, there was originally only one book of Samuel—the division into two books was adopted when the text was translated into Greek because it would not fit on a single scroll. From there, since the early Latin translations of the Bible were based upon the Greek, and since St. Jerome followed the early Latin conventions when he standardized the Latin Vulgate, the division of the Book of Samuel into 1 and 2 Samuel became customary in both the Eastern (Greek) and Western (Latin) Church.

We should read 1-2 Samuel, then, as part of a single story. That story is the history of Israel from the Deuteronomic Covenant under Moses until the Babylonian Captivity, when the people of Judah received the curse of the Deuteronomic Covenant. 1-2 Samuel tells the story of how that people went from a tribal federation to a kingdom, and takes us almost to Israel's peak of its fidelity to the covenant and its flourishing as a kingdom.

A second reason why an introduction is essential to understanding 1-2 Samuel is that the meaning of the text does not stop with what was in the mind of the human author when he or she composed it, nor does it stop with the end of that author's story at the Babylonian Captivity. The Church teaches that, on account of the charism of inspiration, God is just as much the author of the text as is the person who first put the pen on the paper (or the stylus on the papyrus, as the case may have been) (DV II; CCC 105). The meaning of the text extends far beyond what the human author thought to all the things that the Holy Spirit wants to say (CCC III). We also need an introduction so that we can know how to arrive at the Holy Spirit's intention in the text.



It is tempting to think that the human meaning of the text and the divine meaning of the text can be separated from one another, that we can bypass the difficulty of understanding the human meaning of the text and skip straight to the divine meaning. That would surely be convenient if it were possible, but it is something that the Church warns us not to do (DV 12; CCC 116). If the divine meaning of Scripture were completely separated from the human meaning, then the human authors of Scripture would not be God's willing cooperators. If God simply used them to say things that had nothing to do with what they intended, then however much God may have appeared to have gained their willing consent and participation, he would in reality have been, in a sense, tricking them into doing and saying what they did not intend to do and say.

God gave a special grace to the human authors of Sacred Scripture so that they would do two things:

- 1) They would intend his principal meaning, which is called the literal sense of the Scripture.
- 2) They would be open to his other intended meanings (the allegorical, tropological, and anagogical senses of Scripture).

## INTERPRETING SACRED SCRIPTURE

The "principal meaning" of Scripture is what the tradition calls the "literal sense." The literal sense is not a "plain sense" and it is not necessarily a "historical sense." It is not a plain sense because every passage of Scripture has a literal sense, but not every passage of Scripture is plain. Some passages of Scripture are very, very difficult to understand; others are ambiguous at first glance (St. Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana* 3). That is why people often argue about what a given passage of Scripture means.

Furthermore, the literal sense is not necessarily a historical sense because not every passage of Scripture is written in the genre of history. Some are historical, to be sure, and for those passages the literal sense is historical. But others are in the genre of law, or liturgy,

or poetry, or exhortation, of song, or of any one of a number of other genres. For those passages, the literal sense is the principal meaning in terms of the genre's form of literary expression (CCC 110).

The other intended meanings are what the tradition calls "spiritual senses" (CCC 117). The spiritual senses are extensions of the literal sense. They take the literal sense and refer it to other things that God wants to say to us. There are three main spiritual senses:

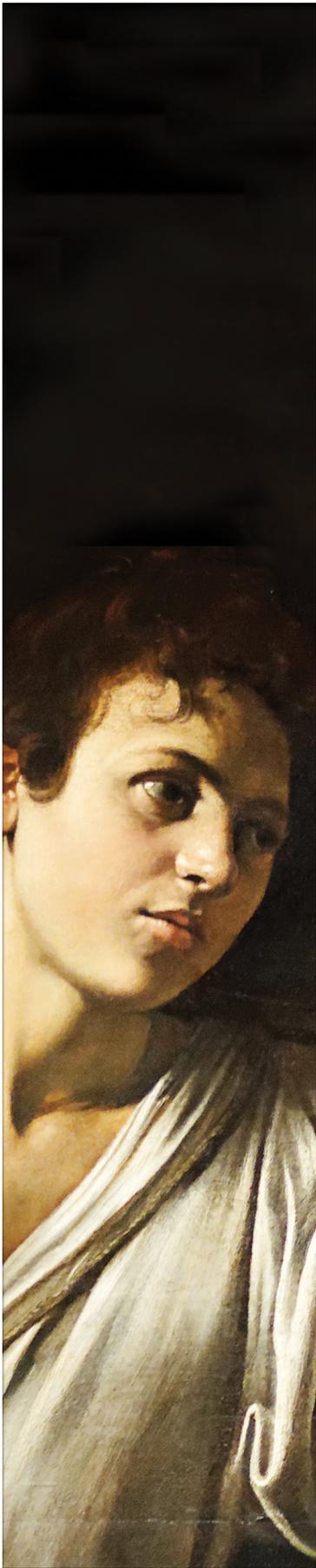
1. The allegorical sense teaches us about Christ and his Church.
2. The tropological sense teaches us about how we should live our lives.
3. The anagogical sense teaches us about the union of our souls with God now and in eternity.

Once we know the literal sense of a passage, how can we come to know its spiritual meanings? The spiritual meaning of Sacred Scripture has been teased out by holy men and women for two millennia. That's not to say that the saints of ages past have pondered everything there is or ever will be to ponder in the Scriptures—the Scriptures contain an infinite amount of wisdom that no human person nor all of us put together could ever exhaust—but it is to say that the Magisterium of the Church has established some normative criteria of which we need to be aware. These criteria can be found in the Decrees on Scripture from the Council of Trent (DH 1507) and in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith, *Dei Filius*, from Vatican I (DH 3007).

The first rule is the rule of faith (CCC 114-15). The rule of faith states that we should interpret any given passage of Scripture according to the faith of the Church because all Scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit, and it is that same Spirit that guides the Church into all truth. St. Augustine, an early formulator of this rule (*De doctrina Christiana* 2.2.2), annexes to it the rule of charity: when interpreting the Scriptures according to the rule of faith, we should always seek those meanings that build up our love of God and of our neighbor. Since we know that the fulfillment of those two greatest commandments is God's intention for us, we know that when we interpret the Sacred Scriptures according to them, we will be acting in accord with God's intention (*De doctrina Christiana* 3.10.15-16).

The second rule is the rule of the Fathers. It states that, as we are interpreting Scripture according to the rule of faith, we should never interpret Scripture contrary to the unanimous consent of the Church Fathers. The reason for this is that the Church Fathers are among the primary vehicles through which the Tradition of the Faith has been passed down to subsequent generations.

*Interpretation of the inspired Scripture must be attentive above all to what God wants to reveal through the sacred authors for our salvation. What comes from the Spirit is not fully "understood except for the Spirit's action". (CCC 137)*



So how can we put all this together? Bishop Barron gives us the example of David. In the literal sense, whoever wrote 1-2 Samuel was thinking of David as a historical king. David lived in the eleventh century BC, united the disparate Israelite tribes, and established the capital of the Israelite kingdom in Jerusalem. But whoever wrote 1-2 Samuel was also open to what God might want to say to us by the life of David that he was narrating.

In the allegorical sense, David was a figure of Christ because he teaches us about who Christ is and prefigures it to a certain extent—David brought all Israel into one people, and Christ brings all nations into one people; David was given a never-ending royal line, and Christ was given a never-ending royal throne. In the tropological sense, David teaches us how we should act because he placed his covenant with God at the center of his life; he led others to it; and, when he sinned against God, he repented with a contrite heart. In the anagogical sense, David teaches us how to seek union with God in the total consecration of himself and his people to the will of the Lord. If we don't know who David is literally, we'll never know what David can teach us about Jesus, our lives, and our ultimate perfection in God; so likewise if we don't know the human meaning or literal sense of a passage, we'll never come authentically to its divine meaning.

In light of the four senses, the full richness of Scripture begins to come alive for us. The people of the Old Testament, though belonging to a distant place and time, are brought near to us as we learn about their history. Also, their history points us towards and participates in the history of our own salvation. As Bishop Barron sums it up, when we read 1-2 Samuel, our purpose “is to look at David and the figures around him precisely to understand Christ more fully.”



## HANNAH AND THE LAW OF THE GIFT

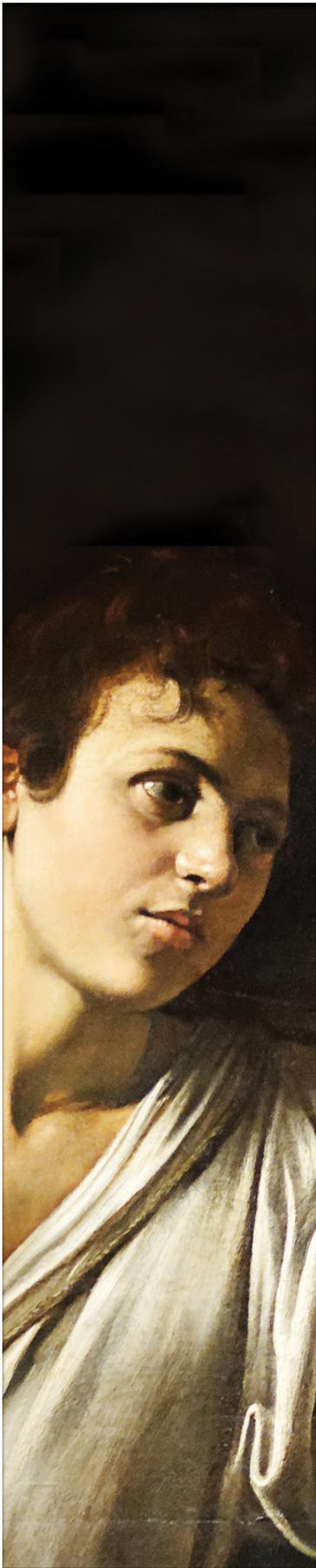
If our purpose in reading 1-2 Samuel is to understand Christ more fully, and if in the New Testament we first come to Christ through Mary, then it is fitting that as we approach the various figures of Christ presented to us in the story of David, we begin with one figure of Mary—Hannah (CCC 64).

In the literal sense of I Samuel 1-2, Hannah, whose name means, “[God] has shown favor,” is one of the wives of Elkanah, and she is unable to bear children. Hannah is mercilessly teased by his other wife, Peninnah, because of her barrenness. One year, while in Shiloh to offer the yearly sacrifice, Hannah was worshipping at the tabernacle when the high priest, Eli, mistakes her for an alcoholic. She explains that she is entirely sober and that she has been praying for deliverance from her barrenness. Eli intercedes for her and she conceives and bears a son, Samuel, whose name may mean “God has heard.” Thereafter, she sings a song praising and exulting the Lord for raising her up from lowliness and for putting down Peninnah’s pride. Her song anticipates many of the exact words that Mary sings in the Magnificat. Hannah then consecrates Samuel to the Lord and to the Temple as a Nazirite.

A Nazirite is someone who is dedicated to the Lord for a certain period of time, during which he or she abstains from alcohol and from cutting his or her hair (Num 6:1-20). Nazirites observed the same ascetical disciplines as priests (Lev 10:9) and Levites (Ezek 44:20-21) when they went into the sanctuary to offer sacrifice. Nazirites were like priests who continually offered a sacrifice of their lives to God.

In the allegorical sense, Hannah’s physical barrenness represents the spiritual barrenness of Israel as it awaits the Savior. Hannah’s prayer, mistaken for drunkenness, represents her being full of the Holy Spirit as Mary was. In fact, the mistaking of spiritual fullness for drunkenness is a theme in Scripture; people made the same mistake about the Apostles on the day they were filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:13). Hannah’s offering of Samuel to the Lord as a Nazirite represents Mary’s offering of Jesus as a sacrifice to God the Father. Just as Hannah offered Samuel in such a way that Samuel’s life became a sacrifice, so when Mary learned that “you yourself a sword shall pierce” (Luke 2:35), she offered herself as a sacrifice united to her Son, whose whole life would be offered to God on the cross.

As Bishop Barron notes, the deepest union between Hannah and Mary is evident in the songs that each holy woman sings. These songs describe the pattern according to which God’s gracious action unfolds in history. They begin with praise: “My heart exults in the Lord,” says Hannah; “My soul magnifies the Lord,” says Mary. They continue with an acknowledgement of their humility before God and their need for him. “My strength is exalted in the Lord,” says Hannah; “He has looked with favor on his lowly servant,” says Mary. They then describe that what has happened to them is a microcosm of the entire pattern by which God relates to humanity: putting down the mighty, exalting the lowly, filling the hungry, making the poor rich. Each woman sees in herself a figure of God’s love for his entire people, even as she prepares to raise a son who will bear concrete witness to God’s mercy. On account of Hannah’s sacrifice, Samuel will grow up as a prophet, priest, and ruler of Israel—moreover,



he will anoint the paradigmatic King of Israel, David. On account of Mary's sacrifice, Jesus will grow up as the fulfillment of all prophecy, priesthood, and kingship, as the *Messiah*, the anointed one of God.

In the tropological sense, Bishop Barron shows us how this Marian paradigm gives us a law according to which God governs the entire metaphysical and moral order: the law of the gift. "The law of the gift," Bishop Barron explains, "is a metaphysical and spiritual principle, and it runs like this: your being increases in the measure that you give it away." That principle is operative throughout the story of Hannah. The more Hannah gives herself away, the more she gives herself to the Lord in prayer, the more she offers up her much-desired son to the Lord through the Nazirite vow, the more she receives. This law is fulfilled in the person of Mary, who gives so completely of herself that she rightfully prophesies that she will be called "blessed" throughout all ages. Every time we say a "Hail Mary," that prophecy comes true, and we affirm the law of the gift whereby God calls each and every one of us to live according to the pattern of these holy women of God. And so, in the anagogical sense, every time we give ourselves away as a sacrifice to the Lord, we enter into a greater share of the divine life that Hannah anticipated and that Mary brought into the world.

## THE STORY OF RUTH

Another figure of Mary who predates Hannah is Ruth. As Bishop Barron observes, Ruth seems to interrupt the long, sweeping, and male historical narrative that goes from Joshua to 2 Kings with a short, personal anecdote. But, as Bishop Barron also mentions, if we pay close attention to Ruth, we find that she and her life are packed with theological significance.

In the literal sense, the story of Ruth is quite simple. There is a famine in Israel, and an Israelite named Elimelech travels from his home in Bethlehem with his wife, Naomi, and two sons to a foreign land, Moab, whose people worship foreign gods, to find food. While they are there, Elimelech dies, and his two sons marry two foreigners, Orpah and Ruth. They settle in for a decade, and then the two sons die. This leaves Naomi, Orpah, and Ruth destitute—no father, no husband, and no children. As Bishop Barron points out, a woman without a child was about as low in social status as one could get at

that time. A woman without a husband or father, the Book of Ruth tells us, was not only destitute, but in constant danger of sexual violence.

After all this calamity, Naomi hears that the Lord has given food to the Israelites, so she starts off to go home to Bethlehem. But she fears that Orpah and Ruth—being foreigners—won't be able to find a husband among the Israelites, and so will remain childless and destitute. Out of concern for their temporal welfare, she sends them back home to Moab. But going back home does not just mean returning to the house they had lived in for a decade. Without an Israelite husband, it also means return to the worship of foreign gods. Orpah gives Naomi a kiss goodbye and goes back to her gods. Ruth, on the other hand, clings to Naomi and to the Lord. Naomi and Ruth then return to Bethlehem, together.

Here is where the story takes an unexpected turn. According to Deuteronomy 25:5-6, a deceased husband's brother has the duty to marry his brother's wife and to father children with her in his brother's name. This is called a "levirate" marriage. In the process of searching for food, Ruth runs into someone who happens to be one such kinsman, Boaz. The only trouble is that Boaz is not the immediate next of kin. Boaz therefore justly informs the next of kin of Ruth's situation and of the levirate duty. The next of kin, realizing that this would mean partitioning the inheritance due his children with the children of Ruth, rejects the levirate marriage, and thus the right passes to Boaz. Boaz subsequently marries Ruth and they have a son, Obed, who is the grandfather of David.

In the allegorical sense, the story of Ruth is the story of Mary. Naomi represents the land of Israel, and Elimelech, whose name means "My God is King," represents Israel's covenantal relationship with God. Elimelech's death represents the breaking of the covenant, when Israel no longer sees God as its king. That is the deeper meaning of the phrase that Bishop Barron quotes from the end of Judges, "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what he thought best." The death of Elimelech's sons represents the Deuteronomic curse, the loss of the blessings that depended on the covenant. Orpah and Ruth represent the two kingdoms: Orpah represents the Kingdom of Israel, and Ruth represents the Kingdom of Judah. The Kingdom of Israel turns away from God and so departs from the land of Israel into the Assyrian Captivity. The Kingdom of Judah clings to the land and to God, and so returns after the Babylonian Captivity.

Here again is where things get interesting. Boaz's next of kin represents Satan. With the death of the people's relationship with God, Satan has dominion over them. Thus even after Judah returns from captivity, it is not spiritually fruitful because it is still in bondage to sin. But Satan's lack of love for the people is his ultimate undoing. Boaz represents Christ. He is a just man who by his love for the people redeems them from bondage to Satan and makes them fruitful once more. That makes Ruth the first-redeemed, the first-restored to fruitfulness when the people stray from the covenant. And it is through this figure of Mary that we receive David, the forefather of the Savior.

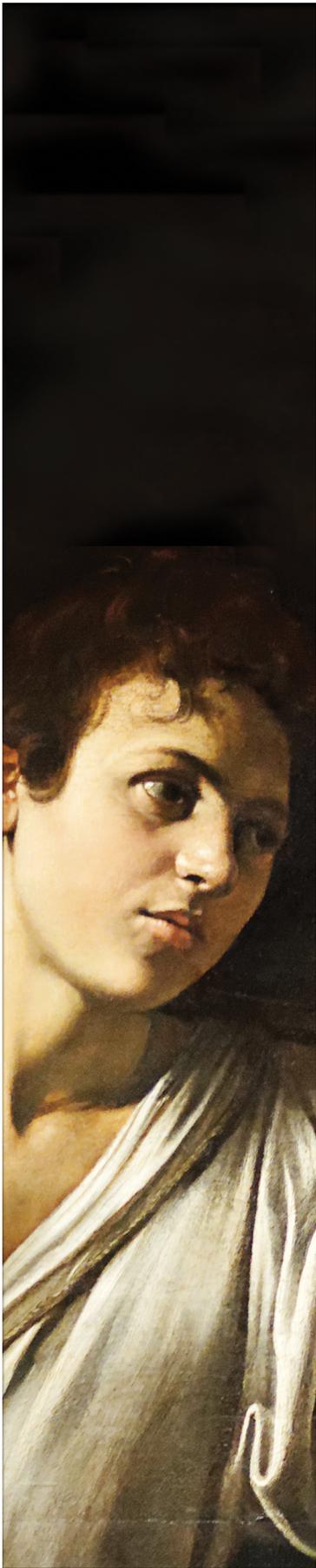
## QUESTIONS FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. What human and spiritual insights can we gain by understanding the authorship of 1-2 Samuel? (CCC 109-114)

2. Summarize the literal and spiritual meanings of the story of Hannah (1 Sam 1:1-28)







2. How does living according to the “law of the gift” compare with the societal “law” or attitudes in your local community? What challenges you most about the differences between the two “laws”?

3. Write your own song of praise and gratitude using Hannah’s song as an example (1 Samuel 2:1-10).