

LESSON 2

GOD RESCUES ISRAEL



Introduction

As Samuel grew in stature, so did his reputation as a prophet. Before long, Samuel's reputation spread throughout the whole of Israel (1 Samuel 3:20). To establish Samuel as His prophet, God appeared to Samuel in Shiloh, the seat of religious worship. While 1 Samuel 3:1 makes known the rarity of prophecies when Samuel was a young man, 1 Samuel 4:1 notes the change that has occurred after Samuel's selection as a "prophet of the LORD." Enter the Philistines—Israel's old nemesis—to unsettle the region.

Scripture records the constant raiding of the Philistines into Hebrew territory. Their five cities—Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron, and Gath—are all located in southwestern Canaan in the area known today as the Gaza Strip. Moses writes of a Philistine presence at the time of Abraham, subsequently identifying Abimelech as their king (Genesis 21:32, 34; 26:1). During Samson's day, the Philistines subjugated several Hebrew tribes (Judges 15:11). They held Samson captive at the time of his death during the destruction of the temple of Dagon, their fertility god (see Judges 16:23–31).

The origin of the Philistines is not well-known, except that they came into Canaan from Caphtor (Genesis 10:14). Historians identify Caphtor with the Mediterranean Sea island of Crete. The name *Philistine* was attached to them during the time of Ramses III after he defeated them in a sea battle in 1188 BC.

As our study resumes, the Philistine army has again invaded Israel, setting the stage for God's rescue through Samuel.

Israel at a Crossroads

Are there incidents in your life that define who you are as a child of God? Chances are you can find them if you reflect on your life. Now is such a defining moment in Israel's history. She stands at a crossroads. She can continue relying on herself—following pagan gods and thinking, "We have nothing to fear because we are God's chosen people"—or she can repent of her self-reliant ways and return to a covenant relationship with God. Which path will the Hebrew nation follow? When she looks back over the years, what will she see? How Israel reacts to this Philistine invasion and the events that immediately follow provides a spiritually defining moment.

17. Are there spiritually defining moments in your life? If you feel comfortable, share one of these times.

18. Why might God allow such defining moments in our lives?



The Ark Captured

Read 1 Samuel 4:1–22. Since the days of Joshua, the ark of the covenant had stayed in Shiloh (Joshua 18:1) as a symbol and as a place of God’s special presence (1 Samuel 4:4) among His people. However, that ark now fell into pagan hands.

- 19. What evidence proves that some Israelites in Samuel’s day considered God’s holy ark nothing more than a good luck charm?
- 20. Eli’s sons followed the ark into battle. What happened to them (4:11)?
- 21. Upon receiving the news of his sons’ deaths and the capture of the ark, what happened to Eli?

God’s Mighty Hand

Read 1 Samuel 5–6. By God’s hand, the ark of the covenant traveled to Ashdod, one of the five Philistine cities. The delight among the Philistines was overwhelming. They thought that their god, Dagon, had triumphed over the God of Israel.

- 22. How did God make His presence known among the Philistines (5:1–5)?
- 23. God gave the Philistines another sign (vv. 6–12). What was this second sign?
- 24. Did God delight in the deaths of the thirty thousand Hebrew foot soldiers who treated the ark like a lucky charm? Did He enjoy the suffering and deaths of the Philistines, who likewise misused the ark? If you need help with your answer, read Ezekiel 18:23.

Samuel Defeats the Philistines

Read 1 Samuel 7. After the Philistines returned the ark to the Israelites, it came to the city of Kiriath-jearim, then on to the house of Abinadab, where it remained until King David moved it into his new capital city—Jerusalem.

- 25. How did God use Samuel before He delivered Israel from the Philistines (7:3)?

Give Us a King to Judge Us

Read 1 Samuel 8. Samuel appointed his sons Joel and Abijah as judges over Israel. Unfortunately, Samuel’s sons did not follow their father’s example.

- 26. How do Samuel’s sons remind you of Eli’s sons?
- 27. Israel wanted a king. She wanted to be like the other nations (v. 5). Match the disadvantages of a king with the corresponding Bible verses on the right.

A. King will take your sons.	___ 1 Samuel 8:12b
B. King will take 10% of grain.	___ 1 Samuel 8:13
C. King will take property.	___ 1 Samuel 8:16
D. King will take your daughters.	___ 1 Samuel 8:14
E. King will appoint commanders.	___ 1 Samuel 8:12a
F. King will take best of vineyards.	___ 1 Samuel 8:15
G. King will take servants.	___ 1 Samuel 8:11
- 28. How can we say that Israel’s request for a king provides a defining moment in her history?



God's Word for Today

Sometimes we show contempt for God's authority. We do this each time we put ourselves and our desires at the center of our lives. In so doing, we replace God with a god of our own choosing.

29. Give examples of how Christians show contempt for God's authority.

30. When we sin, it is good to know that we stand before a just but loving God. How does God ask us to respond to the knowledge of sin in our lives (1 John 1:9)?

31. Can we be like Samuel in someone's life? How is this possible?

In Closing

- Discover information about the tribe of Benjamin. Saul is a member of this Israelite tribe.
- Using a Bible dictionary or other resource, find the definition of the word *anoint*.
- Read 1 Samuel 9–11 to prepare for the next session.

Pray: Lord, guide us in true faith. Be with us, Lord, and protect us during our defining moments. Send us Your Holy Spirit to turn us to the salvation that Jesus won for us at the cross. Amen.