

# LESSON 1

## SAMUEL, THE EARLY YEARS



### Introduction

Two Old Testament books bear the name of Samuel, the last of God's judges (Acts 13:20). These books record not only how God saved His chosen people from self-destruction, but also how God established a powerful kingly dynasty. While Samuel's judgeship brought about some order, Saul, Israel's first king, united his country to stave off attacks from pagan nations inside Israel's own borders.

Saul's fall from faith is described in 1 Samuel. Saul's self-pride and malicious jealousy forced God to remove His Spirit from Saul, favoring instead a young boy named David (1 Samuel 16:13). As he matured, David became the yardstick by which all future kings of Israel would be measured. Although David was "brought forth in iniquity" [a sinner] (Psalm 51:5), his prayers of repentance continue to serve as examples of faith centuries after his death. Through David's lineage, God delivered on the prophetic promise that penitent sinners may hear the Good News that "the LORD also has put away your sin" (2 Samuel 12:13). Jesus Christ, David's great descendent, guaranteed this forgiveness in His blood shed at Calvary.

Samuel's original manuscript probably comprised a single scroll. When scholars translated the Old Testament from Hebrew into Greek to form a version known as the Septuagint, a shorter scroll length had come into vogue. To accommodate the shorter scroll length, Samuel's single scroll became two scrolls—1 and 2 Samuel as we know them today.

Who wrote Samuel? Rabbinical tradition claims Samuel. However, this theory is not without flaw. Samuel's death occurs in 1 Samuel 25:1, leaving a gap of seven unfinished chapters in 1 Samuel and twenty-four in 2 Samuel. Most likely, Samuel wrote all the events of his life and later writers, Nathan the prophet and Gad the seer, wrote the remaining chapters. Some rabbis claim that God revealed the future events of David's life and that Samuel wrote them all down before he died. This is possible. However, there is scriptural support for the three author approach to Samuel: "Now the acts of King David, from first to last, are written in the Chronicles of Samuel the seer, and in the Chronicles of Nathan the prophet, and in the Chronicles of Gad the seer" (1 Chronicles 29:29).

As you study Samuel, keep in mind God's desire to live among His people and rule over them as their King (Numbers 23:21). This desire culminates in the eternal kingdom of Christ our Lord.



## Samuel, the Early Years

1 and 2 Samuel begin where the Book of Judges leaves off. We find extraordinary times— for “in those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25). Had we lived then, we would have seen that many Israelites were worshiping pagan gods. The pressure to follow other gods was so strong that Israel’s faith was cracking under the weight of it.

So why study 1 and 2 Samuel when they contain events thousands of years old? Because, in these two books, God presents details on how He finally conceded to Israel’s request for a human king. This is significant because, in so doing, God is paving the way for the one true King, Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Son of David.

1 and 2 Samuel sketch out the lives of four individuals—first, Hannah, Samuel’s mother, then Samuel and his call into the Lord’s service. We also meet Israel’s first two kings, Saul and David—two men with entirely different relationships with the Lord, who anointed each of them king.

Samuel’s birth occurred during the latter part of the period of judges. As such, he is the last judge. As a judge, Samuel called Israel to repent and renew her obedience to her covenant relationship with God. Yet even the Lord’s intervention on Israel’s behalf against the mighty Philistine army could not prevent the people’s demand for a “king to judge us like all the nations” (1 Samuel 8:5).

### Meet Hannah

Against a backdrop of idolatrous religious practices—even among the Jews—God sketches in the lives of one faithful family living in Ramathaim-zophim, some 18 miles southwest of the religious center of Shiloh. In Ramathaim, we meet Elkanah and his wives, Peninnah and Hannah. Peninnah has children; Hannah does not. The rivalry between these two women flared up daily. Elkanah noticed it, but even his tender words brought little healing to a wound made by the constant chaffing of Peninnah’s words. Hannah found no relief. In her anguish, Hannah turned to God.

1. Have you ever felt painfully discouraged? Have situations brought you to your knees in frustration?
2. What do the words “everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25) tell you about the times into which Samuel was about to be born?



### **Hannah's Prayer and Promise**

Read 1 Samuel 1. At the time of the Old Testament, most people looked upon barrenness as God's punishment for some unrepented sin. Hannah's rival took every opportunity, including feast days, to make fun of Hannah's barrenness.

3. How do verses 10, 11, 15, and 16 provide a snapshot of Hannah's feelings as she came before God in prayer?
4. In her prayers, Hannah made a vow to God. What did Hannah promise to God in exchange for the birth of a son?
5. Eli did not ask Hannah about her prayer request but rewarded her faithfulness with a priestly benediction (1:17). What did Eli ask of God?
6. How would you have reacted to Eli's benediction? Why? How did Hannah react?
7. Hannah called her son *Samuel* ("God has heard"). Why do you think that this name was a good choice?

### **Hannah's Praise**

Read 1 Samuel 2:1–11. Take a moment to walk in Hannah's sandals. God has made you a mother after years of barrenness. In your joy, you praise God with all your heart.

8. In verse 2, Hannah calls God a "rock." What images come to mind with this word? Why is a rock a good metaphor for God?
9. God granted Hannah a glimpse of a better future. Her son would anoint Israel's first two kings, a foreshadowing of an even greater king. Who is "the anointed one" (John 4:25–26)?

### **Eli and His Sons**

Read 1 Samuel 2:12–36. God allows us to contrast the lives of those responsible for ministering before Him at Shiloh. God compares the actions of Hophni and Phinehas (vv. 12–17; 22) to Hannah (vv. 18–21) and Samuel (v. 26).

10. How did Hophni and Phinehas abuse the sacred privilege God gave them as priests?
11. How did Hannah demonstrate her continued faith in God?
12. Contrast the description of Samuel with that of Hophni and Phinehas. What were God's plans for Hophni and Phinehas?

### **God Calls Samuel**

Read 1 Samuel 3. The circumstances of Samuel's birth reflect the nature of God's plans for his life. God rescued Hannah from her barrenness. Through Samuel, God will rescue His people. Samuel's call is no less dramatic than the circumstances of his birth.

13. Eli taught Samuel how to respond to God's call. What did Eli teach Samuel?
14. How would you have reacted to Samuel's words of judgment (v. 18)? How did Eli's response show his trust in God?



### God's Word for Today

Both Hannah and Eli showed their strong faith and reliance on God. In humble petitions, Hannah came to God for relief from her barrenness. Eli trusted God and submitted his life to Him, although it meant the death of his two sons.

15. What do you learn about prayer from Hannah?

16. What do you learn from Eli about submitting to God's will regardless of the circumstances?

### In Closing

Encourage participants to begin the following activities:

- Pray that God would guide you to submit to His will.
- Learn more about the ancient Philistines—where they came from and the gods they worshiped.
- **Read 1 Samuel 4–8** to prepare for the next session.

Pray: Heavenly Father, send Your Holy Spirit to teach me Your ways. Help me to learn from Your Word how to conform my will to Yours, and teach me to pray as Hannah did— “pouring out my soul before the Lord.” May we forever praise You for Your salvation through Jesus Christ. Amen.