

SAMUEL: HEARD AND SPOKE THE WORD OF GOD

1 Samuel 1 - 8

STRUCTURE

Key-person: Samuel

Key-locations: Israel: Shiloh, Ramah, Gibeah

Key-repetitions:

- The Lord Almighty (1:3, 11; 44.)
- Prayer (1:9-15; 2:1-10; 3:8-10; 7:8-9; 8:6).
- Blessings result from faith in the Lord and obeying him; but afflictions result from unbelief and disobedience (2:30; 7:3).
- Family problems: Elkanah, Hannah and Peninnah (1:2-13); Eli and his sons (2:12, 22, 27-30; 3:11-14); Samuel and his sons (8:1-3).
- The Lord's message proclaimed: by a holy man (2:27-36); to Samuel in a dream (3:11-14); by Samuel to Eli (3:17); by Samuel to the people (7:3; 8:10-18).
- Samuel served the Lord (2:11, 18, 26; 3:1, 19-21; 4:11; 7:15).
- The people want a king (8:4-5, 6, 19, 21).

Key-attitudes:

- Rivalry between Hannah and Peninnah.
- Hannah's agony because she had no children.
- Hannah's joy when Samuel was born.
- Eli's impotence with his sons.
- The wickedness of Eli's sons.
- The irreverent bossy attitude of Eli's sons.
- The weakness of Eli even though he had good intentions.
- Samuel was likeable and respected.

- The Israelites feared the Philistines.
- Samuel's displeasure when the people requested a king.
- God's reluctance in giving the people a king.

Initial-situation:

Under Joshua's leadership, Israel conquered Canaan. Israel served the Lord during the lifetime of the leaders who had experienced the Lord helping them conquer Canaan. Another generation grew up that served the god Baal and goddess Ashtoreth. Then the Israelites experienced cycles of: The Lord raising up enemies who oppressed them; they cried for help; the Lord raised up a judge who delivered them; when the judge died, the people returned to their old ways and became worse than their fathers. During the time when judges ruled, Israel had no king; everyone did what he thought was right, and each generation became worse than the one of his parents.

Samuel was the last judge. The book of 1 Samuel records the transition from judges to kings.

Initial-problem:

Hannah, the wife of Elkanah, had no children.

Final-situation:

The Israelites asked Samuel for a king. Samuel warned them about the way a king would treat them. But the people insisted they wanted a king just like the other nations.

BIBLE STORY

Samuel's Birth and Childhood

Elkanah lived in Ramah with his two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. Peninnah had children; Hannah had no children. Every year Elkanah left his home in Ramah and went to Shiloh to worship and sacrifice to the Lord Almighty. Shiloh was where Eli and his two sons served as priests. Peninnah never let Hannah forget that she had no children. Every time Hannah went up to the house of the Lord, her rival provoked her until she cried and would not eat.

Elkanah would ask her, "Hannah, why are you crying? Why don't you eat? Why are you depressed? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?" (1:1-8).

Once Hannah slipped away and entered the tabernacle. Priest Eli was sitting on a chair by the entrance to the Lord's tabernacle. Hannah cried and cried. She prayed and made a promise to the Lord, "O Lord Almighty, if you will only look at my misery and remember me by giving me a son, I will give him back to you all the days of his life."

Eli saw that Hannah's lips moved, but no words were heard. Eli thought she was drunk and said to her, "You're drunk! How long will you keep on getting drunk? Throw away your wine!"

Hannah replied; "Oh, no sir. I was pouring out my soul to the Lord. I am not a wicked woman; I have been praying because of my desperate torment and sorrow."

Eli answered, "Go in peace. May the God of Israel answer your prayer."

Then Hannah ate something, and her face was radiant (1:9-18).

Elkanah's family returned home to Ramah. Hannah became pregnant, gave birth to a son and named him Samuel, saying, "I asked the Lord for him" (1:19-20).

Shortly after weaning Samuel, Elkanah and Hannah took him to the tabernacle of the Lord at Shiloh. Hannah presented the little child to Eli, and told him, "Sir, I am the woman who stood at this very spot, praying to the Lord for this child, and the Lord gave me what I asked for. Now I give him back to the Lord. He is dedicated to God for all his life" (1:21-28).

Elkanah and Hannah went home to Ramah. The boy stayed and served the Lord under Eli the priest (2:11).

Eli's sons were wicked men. Ordinarily, whenever anyone offered a sacrifice, and while the meat was boiling, the priest would come with a three-pronged fork in his hand. He would plunge it into the cooking pot, and the priest would take for himself whatever the fork brought up. But Eli's sons sent their servants to interrupt whoever was sacrificing and say, "Give the priest some meat to roast; he won't accept boiled meat from you, but only raw."

If the man replied, "Let the fat be burned up first, that's God's portion! Then take whatever you want," the servant would demand, "No, hand it over now; if you don't, I'll take it by force."

The young men's sin was horrible in the Lord's sight. They showed no respect for the offerings made to the Lord (2:12-17).

In the midst of all this, the boy Samuel was dressed in priestly robes and served the Lord. The boy Samuel grew up serving the Lord (2:18-22).

Eli was an old man. He kept hearing reports on how his sons were ripping off the people and how they slept with the women who served at the entrance to the tabernacle (2:23-25).

The boy Samuel continued to grow up. He pleased the Lord and the people (2:26).

A holy man told Eli, "This is the Lord's message: 'I chose your ancestors out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priests. I promised that your house and your father's house would be my priest indefinitely.' But now the Lord declares, 'Those who honor me I will honor, but those who despise me will be despised. The time is coming when no one in your family will make it to old age! All your descendants will die in the prime of life. Both your sons will die on the same day. I will raise up for myself a true priest. He will do what I want him to do; he will be what I want him to be'" (2:27-36).

The boy Samuel served the Lord under Eli's direction. In those days it was rare for the Lord to speak directly to people (3:1).

One night Eli was lying in bed. It was before dawn. Samuel was in bed in the tabernacle of the Lord, where the Ark of God stayed. Then the Lord called, "Samuel, Samuel!"

Samuel answered, "Yes, I'm here." Then he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me."

But Eli said, "I did not call; go back to bed." So Samuel went back to bed.

Again the Lord called, "Samuel, Samuel!"

Samuel got up, went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me."

Again Eli said, "Son, I did not call; go back and lie down."

Samuel did not yet know the Lord personally. The Lord had not yet spoken directly to him.

The Lord called a third time, "Samuel, Samuel! The boy got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me."

Eli realized that the Lord was calling the boy and he told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, Lord. I'm your servant, and I'm ready to listen.'" Samuel returned to his bed.

The Lord called again, "Samuel! Samuel!"

Then Samuel said, "Speak Lord, I'm your servant, and I'm ready to listen."

And the Lord told Samuel, "I will do to Eli's family everything that I warned him of. I told Eli that I would punish his family forever because he knew that his sons were desecrating the Lord's name and the Lord's place, and he did nothing to stop them" (3:1-18).

The Lord was with Samuel as he grew up. Samuel's prophetic words always came true. And all Israel recognized that Samuel was the real thing, a true prophet of the Lord. The Lord continued to reveal himself to Samuel through his word at Shiloh (3:19-21).

Whatever Samuel said was broadcast throughout Israel (4:1).

Israel Defeated; the Ark Captured

The Israelites went to war against the Philistines. The Philistines killed about thirty-four thousand Israelite foot soldiers. They captured the Ark of God and killed Eli's two sons. When Eli heard the report from the battle, he fell backward off his chair, broke his neck and died (4:1-18).

Samuel: Judge and Liberator of Israel

About twenty years later, Samuel addressed the Israelites, "Return to the Lord with all your hearts. Clean house. Get rid of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths. Commit yourselves to the Lord and serve him and him alone. He will deliver you from Philistine oppression." So the Israelites put away their Baals and Ashtoreths, and served only the Lord."

The Philistines were defeated and did not invade Israelite territory again.

Samuel continued as judge over Israel his entire life (7:1-17).

The Israelites Wanted a King

When Samuel became an old man, he appointed his sons as judges. But his sons sought dishonest gain, taking bribes, and were dishonest in their judging.

The older leaders of Israel met Samuel at Ramah and told him, "You are an old man, and your sons are not following in your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, just like all the other nations."

Samuel prayed to the Lord. The Lord answered him, "Give them what they want. It is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. Let them have their way, but warn them about the way kings operate and let them know what they will get from a king."

Samuel told the people, "Your king will take your sons and make soldiers of them, or he will put them to forced labor on his farms. Your king will take your daughters. You yourselves will become his slaves. When that day comes, you will cry out in desperation because of the king you have chosen, but the Lord will not answer you."

The people answered, "No! We want a king over us. Then we will be just like all the other

nations. Our king will rule us, lead us and fight our battles."

The Lord told Samuel, "Do what they say. Give them a king."

Then Samuel dismissed the men of Israel, "Everyone go home to your town" (8:1-21).

GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

1. What catches your attention in the story?
2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand?
3. Who are the main characters in the story?
4. What problems did the characters face?
5. How did the characters face their problems?
6. How have you faced similar problems?
7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you?
8. What does the story tell about God?

SPECIFIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What problems did Hannah face in her family?
2. What problems did Priest Eli face in his family?
3. What message from God was received by different people in this story?
4. How did Samuel become the Lord's spokesperson?
5. Why did Israel want a king?

LIFE-LESSONS

1. God answers prayers. He answered Hannah's prayers (1:9-20) and Samuel's prayers (3:8-10;7:8-9; 8:6-9;12:18, 23).
2. The spiritual leader who disobeys the Lord and despises the people of God is guilty of a great sin. Eli's sons were evil men who mistreated the people who came to worship the Lord, and they disrespected offerings made to the Lord (2:12-16). They were guilty of a great sin (2:17).
3. There are times in history when God avoids revealing himself to people. During the time when Eli was priest, it was rare for God to speak to people (3:1).
4. One may be guilty of sin by either doing wrong or by omitting to do right. Eli's sons were guilty of doing wrong (2:12-17, 22); Eli was guilty of omitting to discipline his sons (3:13).
5. A person can be faithful to God in an environment where others disobey him. Samuel was raised around Eli's sons who mistreated those who offered sacrifices to the Lord, who had no respect for offerings dedicated to the Lord (2:12-17) and who had sex with women that worked at the tabernacle's entrance (2:22). However, Samuel faithfully served the Lord (2:26).
6. The people of God should be different from other people. The fact that the Lord chose them and they are dedicated to him should make them different. When the Lord's people want to be like everyone else, they reject God's leadership and lose their identity as the people of God. When Israel wanted to have a king like everyone else, she rejected the Lord God as her king (8:5-9).