



BUILDING A KINGDOM

4 studies in
1 Samuel

FOR INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS OR 1:1

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Welcome to **Building a Kingdom**

This series of four studies is designed to accompany the teaching series at Trinity Mount Barker during April-May 2015.

The books of Samuel are books about bringing renewal from despair. About a 'changing of the guard' for God's people Israel. The 'dark' period of the judges in which *'everyone did as he saw fit'* (Judges 21:25) is drawing to a close. After the birth of Samuel there is the birth of hope in a time in which *'the word of the Lord was rare [and] there were not many visions'* (1 Samuel 3:1). So the first 3 chapters of 1 Samuel move from despair to hope. Hannah's prayer in 2:1-10 prepares us for the theme that will shape the books of Samuel. It is God alone who brings renewal and regeneration in the lives of his people. Israel, through the gracious activity of God, is about to receive her king (see Deuteronomy 17:14-20), the one who will be strengthened and exalted, and through whom God's saving activity will be ultimately achieved.

At Trinity Mount Barker our Bible Study Groups normally explore a study in the week leading up to the sermon. Our purpose in adopting this approach is to encourage the study of Scripture that is not influenced by having already heard the sermon, and allows groups and individuals to independently *'wrestle with the Bible'* in each of the studies.

These studies can also be used for private study or undertaken with a friend, but we encourage you to join a Bible Study Group to gain the benefit of group learning that promotes our growing toward maturity in Christ. If you are doing these studies individually, we encourage you to let someone know, and arrange a time to meet with them to tell them how God's Word is changing your life and to pray together.

In order to get the most out of these studies, you can do three things each week before your study time:

1. **Read the passage in advance** (it really helps your understanding to read it out aloud to yourself)
2. **Pray** that God would help you to understand it more fully and how it applies to you
3. **Think about the passage**, and if you have time, take a look at the questions in the Study Guide.

This will certainly help you, but an even better principle is to think about how you can serve each other. Your preparation and attendance will help your brothers and sisters in Christ as they come together each week, so please do make it a priority.

Recommended Reading

- ❑ Robert D. Bergen — 1-2 Samuel [*New American Commentary*]
- ❑ Andrew Reid — 1 and 2 Samuel [*Reading the Bible Today*]
- ❑ Dale Ralph Davis — 1 Samuel [*Focus on the Bible Commentary*]
- ❑ William Dumbrell — The Faith of Israel

Study 1 — 'I asked the Lord'

1 Samuel 1:1-2:11

Chapter 1-2 not only introduces us to the person of Samuel but also sets the scene for understanding the whole book of Samuel. Hannah's experience is deeply personal in that it reveals her dependent relationship on God and at the same time reflects God's nature and actions toward His people in general. Hannah's song functions as a thematic, structural and theological introduction to the whole book and provides a framework for interpreting it.

Conversation Starters

Identify some of the political/cultural/social shifts that have occurred in our world in the last 50 years. What influence have they had on communities and countries e.g. ISIS militancy and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism or gender debates and its impacts on the redefinition of marriage.

Study Questions

1. 1 Samuel 1:1 says '*There was a certain man*', which is a phrase only occurring elsewhere in Judges 13:2 about Samson. These words remind us that at this time, there was no king over Israel and everyone did what was right in their own eyes (Judges 17:6; 21:25). What do these introductory words tell us about the expectations and hopes of the nation of Israel?
2. Is there a reason that geography seems to play an important part in 1 Samuel 1-2 (Ramah is seen in the start, middle and end of the story; Shiloh is the place of worship)? Why was Shiloh so significant (see 1 Samuel 3:3)?
3. The title 'Lord Almighty (or more literally '*Lord of Hosts*'; 'hosts' infers physical or spiritual armies) first appears in the Bible at 1 Samuel 1:3. What does this title of God tell us about His nature and sovereignty? Why does the author place it here in the story; what does he want us to notice?

4. Identify the overall structure for Chapter 1-2 and the repeated pattern in the story: a) a problem is raised, b) an action is initiated by Hannah, c) Hannah and Eli talk and d) there is a response of worship. In what ways do you think the two problems that are raised (1:4-8; 1:21-23) are connected by Hannah's vow in 1 Samuel 1:11?

5. Hannah is desperate, stressed and considered a social outcast; why is her pain so intense? What are the sources of Hannah's stress (1:5,6,7; 1:8)?

6. Hannah turns to God in desperation. What does her prayer reveal about her (1:9-11)?

7. The Hebrew word for 'give' (*ntn*) occurs twice in v11 and 8 times in the rest of our passage (1:4, 5, 11, 16, 17, 27; 2:10). Note that the NIV Bible inconsistently translates this word as '*give*', '*take for*' or '*grant*'. Why might the simple word 'give' be important for shaping our understanding of the rest of the story?

8. Looking at chapter 2; what shift do you see in Hannah's focus between chapters 1 and 2? What does Hannah believe about God? (Find several strong beliefs.)

9. This is seen not only in the story, but also in Hannah's Prayer (1 Samuel 2:1-10) as she reflects on what has happened to her and God's kindness to her. Read and examine the prayer. How might you divide the prayer up into sections, giving a theme for each?

Study 2 — 'A Voice in the Night'

1 Samuel 3:1-21

Amid the hustle and bustle of daily life, we often find it hard to hear God's voice. Many 'voices' shout for our attention—deadlines to meet, bills to pay, meetings to attend, phone calls to make, children to care for. We try to read our Bible but struggle to be still and to receive a word from God. In the days of Samuel few people were listening to God's voice. Politically and spiritually Israel was in terrible shape as they "had no king" and "everyone did as he saw fit" (Judges 21:25). In this study we observe Samuel as a young man, hearing the word of the Lord for the first time and beginning his prophetic ministry.

Conversation Starters

How have you heard God speak to you?

4. Eli was physically and spiritually blind (1 Samuel 3:2, 11-14; 4:18). He was not only fat physically, but spiritually complacent (he lies in his usual place in 1 Samuel 3:2; he was a negligent father in 1 Samuel 3:13). What impact does poor spiritual leadership have on a community and nation? How important is it that pastors and Christian leaders maintain a high moral standard and what is the evidence when they don't (you might want to also refer to 1 Timothy 3)?

5. Why do you think Samuel has difficulty discerning God's voice from Eli's (see 1 Samuel 2:26; 1 Samuel 3:7)? Knowing God is more than just knowing information *about* God. What does this teach us about the knowledge (i.e. knowing) of God (see Matthew 11:27)?

6. What do you think Samuel thought and felt as he listened to Eli and then returned to his bed (1 Samuel 3:9-10)?

7. Why is the attitude '*Speak, for your servant is listening*' (v. 10) so important in order to hear from God? What point is the author making about the contrast between Eli's sons refusal to hear from their father and Samuel listening to God?

8. Why would God's message in verses 11-14 have been particularly hard for Samuel to hear?

9. What does 1 Samuel 3:18 demonstrate about Eli's character in the closing stages of his life? How different would the story have been had he responded in this way earlier in his life?

Study 3 — 'The Lord has helped us'

1 Samuel 7:2-17

Chapter 7 offers an account of Samuel assuming his responsibilities as Israel's priest, prophet and judge as he initiates Israel's religious reformation. This chapter also acts as a bridge between the Ark narrative in chapters 4-6 and the narrative of the founding of Israel's monarchy that will begin in chapter 8 and continue through the rest of 1st and 2nd Samuel and the first two chapters of 1st Kings. Chapters 4 and 7 are strongly linked by language and the similarity of events that tie together the story of Samuel up to this point (you may want to read through chapters 4-7 in preparation for this study); the emphasis is on the Lord's presence as seen through the movement of the Ark of the Covenant that reminds us who is truly in control. Whether in the presence of His enemies or of His own people, the Lord is to be rightly feared and these chapters reveal for us the consequences of those who consider that God can be 'manipulated' to achieve their own ends. The Philistines discover this (1 Samuel 5) and then the Israelites likewise (1 Samuel 6:19-20). In chapter 7 Samuel as prophet and intercessor seeks to restore to repentance the Israel that has been so severely judged by God and we trace God's mercy through Samuel's ministry.

Conversation Starters

In what ways do you see gods or deities '*domesticated*' by people? What evidence do you see that Christians attempt to '*domesticate*' the one true God?

Study Questions

1. Why does God seem distant and unapproachable to the nation of Israel (see 1 Samuel 4:1-3; 1 Samuel 7:2)? What problem does Israel face (think about Hannah's problem in chapter 1)

2. Samuel is now a grown man who has taken up his spiritual leadership role as successor to Eli (God's prophet, priest and judge). What three commands does he give to the nation of Israel for them to demonstrate their genuine repentance and return to God (1 Samuel 7:3-4)?

3. In what ways does the attitude of the Israelites to God change in Chapter 7 from their attitude to God in chapters 4-6?

4. If repentance must move to concrete action (1 Samuel 7:3-6), can the same be said also of faith?

5. Samuel begins his role as Israel's judge and leader by gathering Israel to Mizpah, the traditional place for national assemblies (Judges 20:1), in order for them to confess their sins. What three things did they do to humble themselves to God (1 Samuel 7:6)¹?

¹ After the return of the people of Judah from the Babylonian exile (6th century BC), it became the practice in the Second Temple period (6th century BC-70 AD) to demonstrate ritual cleansing associated with repentance by immersion (in Greek *baptisma*), as St. John the Baptist ritually immersed Jews after repenting their sins to prepare them for the coming Kingdom of the Messiah (Matthew 3:1-6; Mark 1:4-5; Luke 3:1-3; John 1:19-28). At this time, however, ritual purification was accomplished by a visible act that demonstrated the washing of one's soul through confession and sacrifice by pouring water mixed with some of the ashes of the sacrifice over the person: '*For the unclean person, put some ashes from the burned purification offering into a jar and pour fresh water over them (Numbers 19:17)*'. This may have been the ritual Samuel had the people perform at Mizpah.

6. How essential is prayer in our whole approach to life with God? Why?

7. How did the Philistines misinterpret the spiritual assembly at Mizpah? What was their response? What is Israel's response (1 Samuel 7:8-9; see Psalm 20)?

8. God demonstrates His sovereignty over the forces of nature (thunder) following Israel's repentance and reconciliation with Him (1 Samuel 7:10-11). Rather than place confidence in their own military prowess, Israel turns to God and seeks salvation from their enemies. What encouragement does this example provide us about our own response to trusting God and making him the centre of our lives (see Deuteronomy 6:2-4; 1 Kings 11:2-4)?

9. To commemorate 'their' victory, Samuel set up a stone (*eben*) and named it *ezer* ('help') in honour of God's help for Israel (1 Samuel 7:12). This is the same name as the town near the Israelite camp (1 Samuel 4:2) when the Philistines defeated the Israelites and the Ark was captured. The reoccurrence of the name is likely because Samuel is drawing attention to Israel's reversal of fortune now that they have made atonement for their sins and have been restored to fellowship with God². What '*Ebenezer's*' stand as testament to God's saving work in your life?

10. What is the point of the statements in 1 Samuel 7:13-14 (see Deuteronomy 7:12-19)?

² The Fathers of the Church believed that the naming of the stone *Ebenezer*, meaning '*the stone of help*' signified (pointed to) Jesus Christ in fulfilment of Psalm 118:22 — '*The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone...*' (Jerome, *Homilies on the Psalms*, 46). Saint Augustine wrote that the erection of the stone symbolised how conversion shifts one's focus from earthly happiness to spiritual happiness (*City of God* 17.7).

Study 4 — ‘What does a king look like?’

1 Samuel 9:1—10:27

Israel’s monarchy becomes the focus of these chapters. Samuel rules effectively as Israel’s last judge, but his wayward sons undermine the hopes of God’s people. Israel demands ‘*a king to govern us like all the [other] nations*’ (1 Samuel 8:5, 19-20). The Lord graciously grants their request, but the nature of the kingship that Israel has in mind led it to rely foolishly on its own king rather than the true king Yahweh, to whom all kings must submit. Any kingship, even one approved by God (as happens here) will ultimately fail if it does not lead people to live humbly before him (1 Samuel 12:20-25). 13. The story of Saul is really a study on self-rule. By in large people prefer to rule for themselves than to submit to God. That is the nature of man's rebellion. When the people in 1 Samuel 10:24 shouted ‘*Long Live the King*’, they were declaring allegiance to Saul (self) over God. (1 Samuel 10:19; 12:16-17). God seemed to tolerate self-rule but only for a season. Later Israel would pay dearly for their decision to reject God as their king. (See 1 Samuel 10:11-18).

Conversation Starters

Why does the world think the statement ‘*God and politics don’t mix*’ is true? How do Christians live at times as if it were true?

Study Questions

1. In chapter 8 the nation of Israel demands a king (1 Samuel 8:4-5) to take over from Samuel's corrupt sons (1 Samuel 8:1-3). What is the problem with this request when considering the lessons God taught the nation of Israel in chapters 4-7?
2. God had made provision for the request of a king in the law (Deuteronomy 17:14-20) and Samuel warns Israel about the implications of demanding one (1 Samuel 8:10-18). In asking for a king over Israel, whom is Israel rejecting and why (see 1 Samuel 8:5)?
3. Saul is introduced as an ordinary man going through the ordinary experience of searching for a lost donkey. God worked in this ordinary situation to confront Saul with the high calling of becoming the King. How would you describe Saul's life in 1 Samuel 9:1-5? Did he ever expect what was coming?

7. What was Saul's reaction to hearing God's plan for him (1 Samuel 9:19-20)? How would you react?

8. Can you think of unlikely people in Scripture and from your own experiences who have been greatly used by God? Perhaps they might not have seemed like natural leaders or even leaders at all? What does this teach us?

9. What three signs does Samuel tell Saul to notice (1 Samuel 10:2-8)? Why are they so specific and what do they signify (point to) regarding God's plans for Saul?

10. As God's prophet, Samuel speaks God's words; what does 1 Samuel 10:8 tell us about the submission of God's chosen king? How do our lives reflect common obedience to God's Word?

11. Why do you think Saul kept all this to himself in 1 Samuel 10:14-16? Read 1 Samuel 10:20-22 for a possible explanation.

12. Read 1 Samuel 10:17-19 and discuss together the significance of Samuel's words here. Did it really have much impact on the people in 1 Samuel 10:22-27?

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