



Finer Grounds Bible Study

1 Samuel

Lesson 1: Introduction to 1 Samuel

1 Samuel is one of the most thrilling books of the Old Testament. It records the history of well-known Bible heroes like the mother Hannah, the prophet Samuel, and the shepherd boy David. While many know their career highlights, few take the time to dig deeper and understand the hearts and minds of these people; people that God chose to use mightily. This is your chance to do just that. This study will examine the spiritual, political, and personal motivations that guided the actions of the individuals documented in this book. At the same time, we will look at the circumstances that led to, and resulted from, the events in this era of Israel's history. Before we begin our study, let's start out with some background on the book itself.

The book of 1 Samuel tells the story of a short, but pivotal, era in the history of Israel. The events span the time from Samuel's birth (about 1100 B.C.) to Saul's death (around 1011 B.C.) It is a continuation of the history contained in the books that precede it (Judges and Ruth) and sets up the books that follow (2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, and 1 and 2 Chronicles.) Know too that 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel were originally conceived as one book in the Hebrew bible, only to be divided by the writers of the Septuagint.

Read 1 Chronicles 29:29

We cannot be sure who all had a hand in writing 1 Samuel. From the above passage, we do know that writings by Samuel, the prophet Nathan, and the prophet Gad existed. These three men play pivotal roles in the books of Samuel. A later chronicler probably compiled their writings into a complete narrative. Some scholars believe that the book was edited and compiled sometime between the reign of Hezekiah and the end of the Jewish captivity while

others believe that there is a good case to be made for the compilation occurring as early as the reign of Solomon (Tsumura 31). Whenever it was written, we do know that the writer/writers were inspired by God (see Timothy 3:16).

As you start your study of 1 Samuel, I would recommend reading through the book in one sitting. It is a longer book and reading it through may take some time, but it will help you to understand the book as one continuous narrative.

Read 1 Samuel

Main Figures

Now that you have a basic concept of the book, let's talk about some of the main themes and people involved. Throughout this study, you will meet several influential figures in biblical history. Most of the book focuses on the lives of three men: Samuel, Saul, and David. Samuel is a priest, a prophet, and a judge of Israel. Saul is appointed by God to be the first king of Israel, while David is called to be the second king when Saul fails to follow God and is deprived of a dynasty as a result.

By the end of this study, you will complete a character study on each of these three men. There is much to learn about their family backgrounds, their occupations, their character traits, and the state of their spiritual lives. Taking the time to glean this information will help you to understand each man at a deeper level than what you may have learned in Sunday School. My hope is that by doing this, you will understand the lessons they learned, or failed to learn, and will then be able to apply these lessons to your own life.



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Main Enemies

The major conflicts in the book involve two of Israel's greatest enemies; the Philistines and the Amalekites. The Amalekites were Israel's oldest enemies. Because of the unscrupulous nature of their first encounter with the Israelites during the exodus, God would proclaim the harshest of judgements against them.

Read Exodus 17:8-16

What judgment did the Lord declare against the Amalekites?

God would call upon the first king of Israel, Saul, to carry out this judgment. Saul did not follow God's word precisely, leading to disastrous consequences. We will discuss the Amalekites more later.

The Philistines were the newest enemies of Israel. Originally from southern Greece, the Philistines migrated to the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, southwest of Israel's territory. They established the pentapolis of Gath, Ekron, Ashdod, Gaza, and Ashkelon and built trade routes directly through Israel. They are first presented as an enemy to Israel in the book of Judges, immediately before and during the time of Samson.

Read Judges 13:1

Why were the Philistines allowed to dominate Israel?

For background on the Philistines, read Judges 14-16. List the encounters between the Philistines and Samson.

The Philistines are constantly at war with Israel throughout the book of 1 Samuel. God will use them both to punish Israel in times of disobedience, and to prove His own authority during times of Israel's repentance.

Main Historical Themes

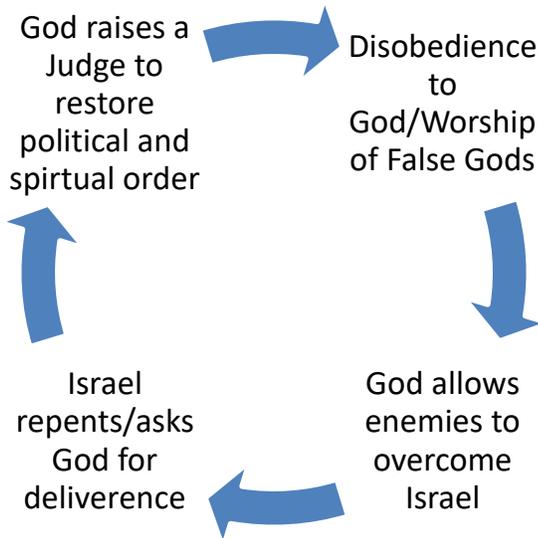
1 Samuel focuses on two significant changes for the Israelite Nation. The first focus is on the change in Israel's government from a theocracy to a monarchy. Israel began as a theocratic nation; it was to be ruled by God who had selected Israel to be His own special people. From the time of Joshua to the time of Samuel, God raised up Judges to help his people in times of national distress.

If you have time, read through the book of Judges. It will help you to understand the political and social circumstances that led to the events of 1 Samuel.

By the end of the book of Judges, the spiritual state of Israel had become so corrupt that no one followed God's rule. If you read through Judges, you saw that Israel was caught in a cycle of disobedience and restoration.



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Read Judges 21:25

According to this verse, what part of the cycle best describes the state of Israel at the end of the book of Judges?

The statement “Everyone did what was right in their own eyes” indicates that this was a time when society allowed right and wrong to be determined by each person, not by God (sound familiar?) The writer of Judges highlights the fact that no king reigned at that time. The end of Judges points to the time soon coming when a monarchy would be established.

The first eight chapters of 1 Samuel focus on the book's namesake, Samuel, who would be the last judge of Israel. His lifetime would see the completion of the cycle of Judges as he would help the people to repent and return to God. But he would eventually step down at God's request so that Israel could be ruled by a king instead. To understand the importance of this change, let's look at some differences between a judge and a king.

Read Judges 2:11-23 and Deuteronomy 17:8-13.

Who selected the judge?

What was the purpose of the judge?

Who chose to have Israel led by judges?

Who else could render judgements in disputes beside judges?

Read Deuteronomy 17:14-20 and 1 Samuel 8:10-18

Who would decide that a king was needed?

Who would select the king?

What are some of the rules a king must follow?

What afflictions would be caused by having a king?



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God desired to be the king over His people. He used judges and priests to serve as His earthly ambassadors. However, He knew that this arrangement wouldn't last; the Israelites would eventually ask for a king. God allowed it, but not without warning them about the earthly problems a king would bring. He knew that a king could only rule if he was supported financially and militarily by his people. This would require taxes, service, and military participation on the part of the Israelites. Unlike a judge, a king would be a burden on the people.

And yet, the Israelites still desired to have a king like all the other nations. God granted their request with two conditions: He would get to personally choose the king and would provide guidance as to how the king was to rule the nation. In 1 Samuel, Israel changes from a nation guided by judges to one ruled by kings.

The second major historical theme is the changing state of the priesthood. While the nation shifts politically from a judgeship to kingship, the high priesthood changes families from that of the line of Ithamar to the line of Eleazar.

The High Priest was to be a descendent of Moses's brother Aaron. Who were the sons of Aaron? (Numbers 3:2)

At the beginning of 1 Samuel, the high priest Eli is a descendent of Aaron's son Ithamar. Because of the sins of Eli's sons, God would eventually take the high priesthood from Eli's descendants and give it to Zadok, a descendant of Eleazar. This would not be accomplished until 1 Kings 2:35, but you will witness the events that lead to this change throughout 1 Samuel. As you study 1 Samuel, try to track the events that relate to the priesthood to see how God

intertwines the lives of the prophets, priests, and kings in order to accomplish His plans.

Main Spiritual Themes

Several spiritual truths unite the events of this book. One truth is that God is the one who gives power and takes it away. He proves this over and over by elevating people in relatively weak societal and physical positions, while allowing those with political or physical power to fall. You will notice that the writer likes to link the stories of two people in order to show the rise of one and the fall of another. These linked pairs include Eli and Hannah, Samuel and Eli's sons, Saul and Jonathan, and Saul and David. Usually, the one considered disadvantaged is raised by their faith in God to a position of admiration, while the powerful figure falls because of their lack of faith and commitment to God.

Another spiritual truth is that God desires our obedience over acts of sacrifice. This theme is manifested in the lives of Eli, Hophni, Phineas, and most notably, Saul. These men on multiple occasions willingly sacrifice to God. However, their worship is not acceptable because it is either not done in the manner that God commanded, or it is done with self-serving intentions.

Read 1 Samuel 15:22. What is more important to God: obedience or sacrifice?

The final spiritual truth that runs through the entire book of Samuel is that God values the contents of our heart over our visible qualities and actions.

Read 1 Samuel 16:7. Rewrite this verse in your own words.



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This verse represents the key spiritual idea of the book of 1 Samuel. While we tend to judge by what we see on the outside, God understands and judges our hearts. Think of the things that you say you do for God. Do you go to church because you truly desire to worship God and remember Jesus's death, or do you go because, well, you should, and people would think badly of you if you weren't there? Do you give your money to the poor because it is the right thing to do, or because you want others to see you be charitable? God knows your heart and understands your motives, even if those around you don't.

Read Proverbs 4:23. What motivates our actions?

As you read through 1 Samuel, pay careful attention to what is motivating each person to act the way they do. Sometimes, the reasons are clearly stated while much of the time, the reasons must be inferred. By taking some time to evaluate the hearts of the people involved, you will better understand their actions and God's reactions.

Reading 1 Samuel is like reading an epic novel. Its composition, characters, and style of writing are often compared to those of the great epics of ancient authors like Homer. But this story is even more exciting and inspiring because it is true! As you read, listen carefully as God offers you insight into how He qualifies the called, raises up the weak, and uses faithful hearts for His glory.

Works Cited

Rose Book of Bible Charts, Maps, and Time Lines. Rose Publishing, 2009.

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