



# Finer Grounds Bible Study

## 1 Samuel

### Lesson 5: 1 Samuel 4

As we discussed in last week’s study, the narrative of 1 Samuel 1-7 follows the course of the “cycle of judges.” In this week’s lesson, we will see the Israelites go through the last two stages of the cycle: repentance and deliverance.

#### Read 1 Samuel 7:2-4

In these verses, it is evident that the Israelites finally desired to repent and return to God. Who better to guide them to repentance than Samuel?

#### Read 1 Samuel 3:19-21

#### Why would the Israelites listen to Samuel?

---

---

---

All Israel knew that Samuel was a legitimate prophet from God. None of his prophecies failed to come true because the Lord was with him. Now that the Israelites’ hearts are ready to hear God’s message, they listen willingly to God’s chosen prophet.

#### Write the 3 steps the Israelites took to repent (1 Samuel 7:3)

---

---

---

The first step in repentance was for the Israelites to dispose of all the things keeping them from following the one true God. Some translations refer to the idols as Baals and Ashtaroths, or as gods

and Ashtaroths. This phrase is meant to include any god or goddess to whom the Israelites gave devotion. They had to get rid of anything that they valued over their relationship with God.

#### Read Exodus 20:1-3

#### What was the first commandment that God gave to the Israelites?

---

---

---

God knew that this had to be the first commandment to His covenant people. If the Israelites were not solely dedicated to Him, they would not see the need to follow the rest of the laws that God had set before them. They could not follow God and Baal.

After they abandoned their false gods, the Israelites had to turn their hearts to the true God and then choose to serve Him alone. Repentance requires both turning away from evil and turning towards God.

#### Read 1 Samuel 7:5-6

#### What did the Israelites do to show God that they were repentant?

---

---

---

After getting rid of their idols, the Israelites humbled themselves before God by fasting and



# Finer Grounds Bible Study

pouring out water. I think we sometimes don't consider what fasting meant in a time when your entire day revolved around preparing meals. From waking-up to going to sleep, an Israelite would have been threshing grain, baking bread, and preparing a kosher meal. Fasting meant devoting your entire day to prayer and meditation.

By pouring out water, the Israelites may have been showing their willingness to deny themselves even that human need because of their desire to repent (Tsumura 234). After fasting, they confessed their sin out loud so that in both word and action, their desire to follow God and submit to Him was known.

Samuel led them through these actions. Verse 6 tells us that he judged the Israelites at Mizpah, the site of this national gathering. The Hebrew word used for judge is used throughout the bible to denote someone who is governing, leading, and adjudicating for the people. What a way for Samuel to start his judgeship! His first act was to urge the people to repent and pursue the covenant relationship that they were to have with God.

### Read 1 Samuel 7:7-12

The Philistines heard the news of the Israelites' repentance and decided that they were going to take advantage of the situation. I am sure that they thought that this would be their best opportunity to defeat their enemy once and for all. Most of Israel's leaders were gathered at Mizpah and, after fasting and even refusing water, they were no doubt weak. This should have been an easy battle for the Philistines to win.

But the Philistines did not count on one thing: the power of prayer. Instead of fleeing, the Israelites asked Samuel to call out to God to deliver

them. Samuel offered a burnt offering as atonement for the sins of the people. He prayed to God for help and God delivered. He sent divine thunder which confused and terrified the Philistines. The Israelites pushed the Philistines back to their own lands; their enemy was defeated.

This is the second battle in 1 Samuel. If you recall from 1 Samuel 4:2-10, the first battle against the Philistines at Aphek had drastically different results. The Israelites also had a very different relationship with God at that point.

### Compare the two battles between Israel and Philistia. Consider the following:

- **The Instigator of the battle:**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- **How the Israelites sought God's assistance:**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- **Samuel's involvement:**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- **God's role in the battle:**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- **The Philistines perception of God's role in the battle:**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



# Finer Grounds Bible Study

- **The outcome:**

---

---

---

In the first battle, the Israelites instigated war against the Philistines without consulting God. Even when they did consider involving God, they only sought to use the ark, believing that the object itself contained power. God did not intervene, and the Israelites suffered a crippling defeat. At Mizpah, the Israelites sought God's help and intervention through prayer, repentance, and sacrifice. They did not even attempt to fight until after the Lord intervened. Because of their obedience, God gave the Israelites a victory that was more thorough than any ever experienced before against the Philistines.

In a way, the actions of the Israelites in this second battle redeem the mistakes of the first battle. Samuel draws attention to this in verse 12 when he sets up the stone called Ebenezer, which literally means "Stone of Help." This memorial was to remind them that God had intervened despite their failings in the past.

**Where did the Israelites camp before they fought the Philistines at Aphek (see 1 Samuel 4:1)?**

---

---

---

**Read 1 Samuel 7:13-17**

**What benefits did the Israelites enjoy following their national repentance?**

---

---

---

**What became of Samuel after the battle at Mizpah?**

---

---

---

At this point in 1 Samuel, it seems like we have come to the perfect ending for Samuel's biography. Beginning with his birth and concluding with his God-centered judgeship, Samuel witnessed Israel's change from a nation that rejected God to a people that returned to God. The Israelites are finally at peace with the nations around them because of God's help. However, the Israelites don't stay content forever.

**Read 1 Samuel 8:1-5**

After many years, an aged Samuel decides to appoint his sons as judges. Nowhere in the book of Judges was judgeship hereditary. In fact, when the people tried to make Gideon their ruler, he rejected the idea that he or his sons would rule over the people.

**Read Judges 8:22-23**

All of God's judges were appointed by Him; they did not inherit their judgeship. We are not told why Samuel appointed his sons as judges, but the results were disastrous. His sons dishonored the office of judge by taking bribes. The elders of Israel used Joel and Abijah's dishonesty as a reason to ask for a king.

Does the story of the wayward sons sound familiar? Eli too struggled with keeping his sons in line. Unfortunately for Samuel, his only consistent example of parenting came from an ineffective father who refused to discipline his sons. Although



# Finer Grounds Bible Study

we cannot know for certain, one wonders if Samuel was influenced by Eli’s approach to fatherhood.

**What does it say to you that someone as esteemed as Samuel had dishonest sons?**

---

---

---

Unfortunately, we all probably know a faithful Christian whose child does not believe in God. They may have done everything “right” and yet their child still rejects God. No one is immune to having a wayward child. No matter how much they want to, parents cannot choose God for their children; that is something children must do for themselves. While parents can’t force their children to believe, they can take every opportunity to teach their children about God. They must give their children every advantage in the spiritual battle for their children’s’ souls.

**Read Deuteronomy 6:4-7**

**Read Matthew 28:18-20**

**When and how should we be teaching our children about God?**

---

---

---

Just as Hophni and Phineas’ sin caused Israel to fall away from obedient worship to God, Joel and Abijah’s sin became the impetus for the Israelites to reject God as their king. However, the blame for this decision does not fall solely on the family of Samuel. The true intentions of the Israelites are clear in verse 5.

**What reason do the elders give for wanting a king in 1 Samuel 8:5?**

---

---

---

Just as they had followed other nations in idolatry, Israel looked again to the example of other nations and requested a king of Samuel. They did not even ask if the Lord wanted them to have a king.

**Why would having a king be appealing for the Israelites?**

---

---

---

**Read 1 Samuel 8:6-9**

Samuel, in his distress upon hearing the request, did the first thing everyone should do when faced with a difficult choice: he prayed to God.

**Does God approve of the Israelites having a king? Why or why not?**

---

---

---

**Does God allow the Israelites to have a king?**

---

---

---

**What does God compare the actions of the Israelites to? (see verse 8)**

---

---

---



# Finer Grounds Bible Study

**Why would God grant a request even if He disapproved of it?**

---

---

---

God did not approve of the decision to have king. By asking for a king, the Israelites rejected God and His kingship once again. God compared their actions to idolatry; just as the Israelites had rejected God in the past and followed false gods instead, they now rejected God’s appointed judge and favored having a king instead. Still, God allowed the Israelites to have a king. In fact, He foretold that this day would come hundreds of years earlier when He gave the law to Moses.

**Read Deuteronomy 17:14-20**

**What phrase appears both in Deuteronomy 17:14 and 1 Samuel 8:5?**

---

---

---

God knew that one day the Israelites would desire a king and He knew the reason why they would ask for one.

**What is the modern equivalent to “all the other nations?” (see Romans 12:2)**

---

---

---

**Why must we resist the temptation to be like the world? (see 1 John 2:15-17)**

---

---

---

**In what ways are you trying to conform to the world? What are some ways that you can overcome this temptation?**

---

---

---

While God did not approve of the request, he granted it anyway, but with a warning to the people of Israel.

**Read 1 Samuel 8:10-18**

**List the things that God, speaking through Samuel, said that the king will do to the people.**

---

---

---

God reminds the Israelites that having a king means being subject to him. The king would require their crops, their skills, their military strength, and their possessions. With God as their king, they were entitled to keep their freedom and earthly gains, except for that which would be given back to God. Now, the Israelites would become servants to the king. Their work would not be their own and they would eventually experience oppression under the monarchy. Instead of surrounding nations causing troubles for the Israelites, the trouble would come from the king himself. Since the Israelites had asked for this king, God would not grant relief when the Israelites experienced monarchical tyranny.

**Read 1 Samuel 8:19-22**

**List the reasons why the Israelites still want a king.**

---

---

---



## *Finer Grounds Bible Study*

---

The Israelites expanded upon their reasons for desiring a king. They wanted to be like the other nations, with a king to “go out before them” as a political representative and leader in battle. It seems that they had forgotten God’s past help in warfare. There was the God who took out the Egyptian army with the Red Sea, who caused the sun to stand still while Joshua fought the Amorites, who dismantled the walls of Jericho, and who, in the not so recent past, had caused a great thunder to destroy the Philistine army. The Israelites had forgotten God’s constant provision in the past by allowing present troubles to weaken their faith. Their fear of worldly troubles caused them to eschew the greatest military leader they could ever have.

God gave the Israelites what they wanted, not because he approved of their decision, but because he allowed His people to choose their own future. Much like a parent allows their child to decide a path so that they will learn from it, God allows the Israelites to experience the consequences of living under a monarchy.

**Take a moment to recall times when God saved you in “battle.” While you probably haven’t engaged in physical warfare, think of how God has been your help in spiritual and emotional battles. Take this time to thank Him for his help and to also ask for His guidance in any conflicts you are currently facing.**

**Write down more details about Samuel. Include his new occupation as judge. Describe the character traits he exhibited at Mizpah and at Ramah. Consider his family life. Describe Samuel’s relationship with God.**

The end of chapter 8 ends the first large division of the book of Samuel. We have seen Samuel’s birth, his call to be prophet, his appointment as judge, and his careful leadership to bring the Israelites to repentance. While most would consider that to be a full and productive life, God had more for him to do. He would take on one last position for God: Kingmaker.