

1 Samuel – Week 1 – A Prophet Needed – Bible Study Helps

Title: A Prophet Needed

Sermon Summary: This introductory message to the book of 1 Samuel establishes the historical and prophetic context of the book, connecting the chaos of the Judges period to the spiritual condition of our own time in history. The sermon argues that when God's people neglect His Word and pursue their own ways, confusion and corruption inevitably follow. Yet God, always working behind the scenes, sovereignly prepares people and circumstances to accomplish His perfect purposes. Through the story of Hannah's barrenness and desperate prayer, the sermon demonstrates that God often allows impossible burdens in order to accomplish impossible works, using one praying woman's anguish to raise up Samuel, the prophet Israel desperately needed. The central application is that God is always preparing His servants before He gives them their assignment, and that the church today, living in prophetically similar times, must align its burden with God's mission and trust His timing.

Key Points:

- The book of 1 Samuel is a transitional book covering Israel's shift from theocratic government to monarchy, and from the age of judges to the age of prophets and kings
- Samuel is the last judge and the first great national prophet after Moses, making him a type of Jesus Christ as prophet, priest, and judge
- The condition of Israel during this period, described in Judges 21:25, mirrors the spiritual state of the present day, where God's Word is neglected and every person does what seems right in their own eyes
- God's Word being "precious" in those days meant it was rare and largely disregarded, not that it was unavailable
- Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were corrupt leaders who abused their priestly office, demonstrating that even religious leaders had fallen into sin
- Hannah's barrenness was not an accident but a sovereign act of God designed to produce the right kind of mother for the prophet He intended to raise up
- God often delays answering prayer because He is first preparing the heart of the one praying, aligning their purpose with His eternal purpose
- Before God sends the answer to a great need, He prepares His servant, as seen repeatedly throughout Scripture with Moses, Joseph, Esther, Elijah, John the Baptist, and Paul
- Complacency and material comfort can diminish a believer's burden for God's mission, just as it did for Israel during the Judges period
- The church today needs men and women who will faithfully declare the Word of God and refuse to let any of God's words fall to the ground, following Samuel's example

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Scripture Reference:

- 1 Samuel 1:1-20, the primary passage, covering the introduction of Elkanah, Hannah, and Peninnah, Hannah's prayer, and Samuel's birth
- 1 Samuel 3:1, describing the rarity of God's Word and open vision in that era
- 1 Samuel 3:19, describing Samuel's faithfulness in not letting God's words fall to the ground
- 1 Samuel 2:12-17, describing the corruption of Eli's sons and their abuse of the priestly sacrifices
- Judges 21:25, the key verse summarizing the period of the Judges, in which there was no king and every man did what was right in his own eyes
- Judges 2:1-19, a summary overview of Israel's repeated cycles of sin, judgment, and deliverance during the Judges era
- Genesis 2:24, cited to establish God's original design for marriage as one man and one woman

Stories:

- Hannah's barrenness and prayer: Hannah, one of two wives of Elkanah, was unable to bear children because God had shut her womb. She endured years of provocation from Elkanah's other wife Peninnah, who had many children. Despite her anguish, Hannah continued to worship God at Shiloh. In bitterness of soul she prayed and wept before the Lord, vowing that if God gave her a son she would dedicate him to the Lord for all his days. Eli the priest misread her silent prayer as drunkenness, rebuked her, and then blessed her when she explained herself. Hannah believed God's word through Eli, rose up with her countenance restored, and in due time conceived and bore Samuel, whom she named to reflect that she had asked him of the Lord
- The Angel of the Lord at Bochim from Judges 2: The pre-incarnate Christ appeared as the Angel of the Lord and confronted Israel for breaking the covenant, disobeying God's commands to drive out the nations, and making forbidden alliances, warning them that the nations left among them would become thorns and a snare
- Israel's cycles of sin in Judges 2: Following Joshua's death, a new generation arose that did not know the Lord, leading to repeated cycles of idolatry, divine judgment through enemy oppression, repentance, and deliverance through judges, only to fall back into worse sin after each judge died
- Biblical examples of God preparing servants before the need arose: Moses prepared during 400 years of Israel's bondage in Egypt, Joseph prepared through the pit and prison before the famine, Esther prepared before Haman's plot against the Jews, Elijah prepared before the wickedness of Ahab and Jezebel, John the Baptist prepared as the forerunner before Jesus, and Paul prepared before the great Gentile mission

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Discipleship Questions

The book of Judges ends with the statement that every man did what was right in his own eyes rather than following God's commands -- in what ways do you see this same pattern playing out in your own life or in the culture around you today?

Hannah endured years of barrenness, provocation from her adversary, and even misunderstanding from the priest Eli, yet she continued to worship God -- what does her perseverance reveal about the relationship between suffering and faithful prayer?

The sermon emphasizes that God was sovereignly working behind the scenes through Hannah's painful circumstances to raise up Samuel for an entire nation -- how does this truth challenge or comfort you when you are in the middle of an unanswered prayer or a prolonged trial?

Samuel is described as a man who did not let any of God's words fall to the ground, meaning he took every word of God seriously and acted on it -- what practical steps can you take to develop that same level of commitment to Scripture in your daily life?

The sermon points out that Israel was always one generation away from complete apostasy, as the generation after Joshua knew neither the Lord nor His works -- what responsibilities does this place on parents, churches, and individual believers to pass on genuine faith?

Elkanah's question to Hannah, asking whether his love was not worth more to her than ten sons, reveals how even well-meaning people can fail to understand the depth of another person's God-given burden -- how can the church better recognize and respond to burdens that others carry in silence?

The sermon draws a parallel between Israel's need for Samuel's prophetic voice and the spiritual condition of our own generation -- what does it look like practically for believers today to be voices that declare the Word of God faithfully in a culture that has largely abandoned it?

God is described as preparing His servants before He gives them their assignment, as seen in figures like Joseph, Esther, Elijah, and John the Baptist -- looking back on your own life, can you identify a season of difficulty that God may have been using to prepare you for something greater?

Hannah vowed to give her son back to God for his entire life before she had even conceived him, demonstrating a surrender of her deepest desire to God's purposes -- how does this kind of surrendered prayer differ from the way we typically bring our requests to God, and what might change if we prayed this way?

The sermon warns that God may give people exactly what they want when they persistently reject His best for their lives, as Israel would later demand a king -- in what areas of your life might you be settling for what you want rather than trusting God for what He knows is best?

Small Group Guide: A Prophet Needed

Based on 1 Samuel 1 and the Introduction to 1 Samuel

Overview

This guide is designed to help your group dig deeper into the themes introduced in this sermon. The book of 1 Samuel opens during one of Israel's darkest spiritual seasons. God, in His sovereignty, was already at work preparing the answer before anyone recognized the need. This study will help your group connect that ancient story to your own lives and to the time we are living in today.

Key Takeaways

- The book of 1 Samuel is set against the backdrop of the book of Judges, a time when "there was no king in Israel and every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). The sermon described this as prophetically describing our own day.
 - Samuel was the last judge and the first great national prophet after Moses. His birth and calling were God's sovereign answer to a nation that had drifted far from His Word.
 - Before there was a Samuel, there was a Hannah. God began a national work through one praying woman in one broken home.
 - God is always working behind the scenes, sovereignly preparing people through their burdens before He places them in their purpose.
 - The Word of God being neglected always leads to confusion and chaos, in a nation, in a family, and in an individual life.
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Discussion Questions

Opening Question

Go around the group and answer briefly: Can you think of a time when you were going through something painful and later realized God was preparing you for something specific?

Section 1: A Nation That Needed God's Voice

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1. The sermon described the time of the Judges as a period when God's people had everything they needed but still turned away from Him. In what ways do you see a similar pattern in our culture today?
 2. The sermon pointed out that Israel was "one generation away from complete apostasy" after Joshua's death. What does that warning mean for us as parents, grandparents, and members of a local church?
 3. The sermon said, "Whenever the Word of God is neglected in your life, confusion follows and chaos." Where have you personally seen that to be true?
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Section 2: A Woman Who Needed God's Help

4. Hannah was experiencing real pain, ongoing provocation, misunderstanding from a spiritual leader, and years of unanswered prayer. Yet she continued to worship. What do you think kept her coming back to God in the midst of all of that?
 5. The sermon noted that God had shut up Hannah's womb, meaning God was the root cause of her difficulty, because He was working a plan. How does that truth challenge or comfort you when you are in the middle of a painful situation that does not seem to be resolving?
 6. Elkanah asked Hannah, "Am not I better to thee than ten sons?" He meant well but completely missed what she was carrying. Have you ever been misunderstood by someone who was trying to help you? How did you respond?
 7. After Eli told Hannah to go in peace and trust God to answer her prayer, the Bible says her countenance was no more sad. She believed God before she had the answer. What does that kind of faith look like in a practical, daily way?
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Section 3: A God Who Is Already Preparing the Answer

8. The sermon listed several biblical examples of God preparing a servant before the need arose: Moses, Joseph, Esther, Elijah, John the Baptist, and Paul. Which of those examples speaks most to your current season of life and why?
 9. The sermon made this statement: "Before God sends the answer to a problem, He often prepares His servant." How does that change the way you think about what you are going through right now?
 10. The sermon asked: "What burden has God allowed in your life that He may be using to prepare you?" Take a moment as a group to discuss this honestly. What has God brought you through, and how might He want to use that in His church or in reaching others?
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Practical Applications

Work through these individually or discuss as a group.

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1. Examine your relationship with the Word of God. The sermon stated that the Word of God being precious in Samuel's day meant it was rare and neglected. Honestly evaluate your own Bible reading and study habits. Is the Word of God truly shaping your decisions, your home, and your relationships? Identify one specific, practical step you can take this week to give God's Word more authority in your daily life.

2. Bring your burden to God in prayer. Hannah poured out her soul before the Lord with honesty and with a willingness to surrender the very thing she was asking for. If you are carrying a burden right now, write it down. Then write out a prayer that moves from "God, take this away" toward "God, not my will but Yours be done." Share that prayer with a trusted person in your group if you are comfortable doing so.

3. Consider what God may be preparing you for. The sermon asked: "What is God preparing?" Think about the trials, the waiting seasons, the skills, the pain, and the experiences God has allowed in your life. Write down two or three ways those experiences might be used to serve your church, disciple someone else, or reach your community. Share at least one of those with your group.

4. Evaluate your generation's legacy. The generation after Joshua "knew not the Lord." Ask yourself honestly: What am I doing to make sure the people closest to me, whether children, grandchildren, friends, or neighbors, know the Lord and know His Word? Commit to one intentional action this week toward that goal.

Closing Reflection

The sermon closed with this summary thought: "When a generation stops asking what does God say and starts asking what seems right to me, a prophet of God is needed. Someone to speak the words of God."

Close your group time by praying together. Ask God to raise up men and women in your church who will not let His words fall to the ground. Ask Him to prepare your hearts for whatever He is calling you to. And ask Him to give your group the same faithful, persistent, surrendered spirit that Hannah demonstrated in one of the darkest seasons in Israel's history.

Suggested Scripture for Further Study This Week

- Judges 2:6-19 -- The cycle of Israel's spiritual decline and God's response
- 1 Samuel 1:1-20 -- Hannah's burden, prayer, and God's answer
- 1 Samuel 3:1-21 -- The calling of Samuel and his faithfulness to God's Word
- Romans 8:28 -- God works all things together for good for those who love Him
- Amos 8:11-12 -- The famine of hearing the words of the Lord

5-Day Bible Reading Plan and Devotional Guide

Based on 1 Samuel 1 and the Theme: A Prophet Needed

Day 1: When God Seems Silent

Reading: 1 Samuel 3:1-10

Devotional: There are seasons when the Word of God feels distant, not because God has abandoned His people, but because His people have drifted from Him. Israel in the days of the judges had everything they needed and still turned away. When the Word of God is neglected, confusion and chaos follow. Yet even in the silence, God was preparing to speak again. He is never truly absent. If your soul feels the weight of spiritual dryness today, draw near to His Word with fresh hunger. God still speaks to those who are listening.

Personal Reflection: In what areas of your life have you allowed the Word of God to become less of a priority? What would it look like to treat God's Word as precious today?

Practical Application: Set aside a specific, uninterrupted time today to read Scripture. Treat it not as a routine but as an encounter with the living God.

Day 2: The Burden God Allows

Reading: 1 Samuel 1:1-11

Devotional: Hannah's barrenness was not an accident. The text is clear that the Lord had shut up her womb. What a difficult truth to sit with. The very thing causing her the deepest grief was placed there by the hand of God. Yet God was not being cruel. He was being purposeful. Before Israel could have a prophet, God needed a praying mother. Before the answer could come, the burden had to deepen. Whatever impossible weight you are carrying today, consider that God may be preparing you for something far greater than you can currently see. Trust His timing.

Personal Reflection: What burden in your life have you been asking God to remove? Have you considered that He may be using it to shape you for His greater purpose?

Practical Application: Write down one burden you are currently carrying. Beneath it, write the words: "God is preparing something." Pray over it daily this week.

Day 3: Pouring Out Your Soul

Reading: Psalm 62:1-8; 1 Samuel 1:12-18

Devotional: Hannah did not suppress her grief. She brought it to God with everything she had. Her lips moved but no sound came out, and yet heaven heard every word. This is the picture of genuine, desperate, God-directed prayer. She was misunderstood by Eli, provoked by her adversary, and dismissed by her husband's well-meaning but inadequate comfort. Still, she poured out her soul before the Lord. And when she rose from that place of prayer, her countenance was no more sad. She had not yet received the answer, but she had trusted the One who holds all answers.

Personal Reflection: Do you bring your deepest sorrows to God, or do you carry them alone? What would it mean to pour out your soul before Him today?

Practical Application: Spend at least ten minutes in unscripted, honest prayer today. Tell God exactly what you are feeling without polishing your words. He already knows your heart.

Day 4: God Prepares Before He Provides

Reading: Romans 8:28-30; Esther 4:14

Devotional: Before Moses, there were years of bondage. Before Joseph ruled Egypt, there was a pit and a prison. Before Esther stood before the king, there were years of preparation in the palace. God never sends His servants into the work unprepared. He works behind the scenes, shaping character through difficulty, deepening faith through delay, and building endurance through disappointment. Hannah's years of barrenness were not wasted years. They were preparation years. God was not withholding from her. He was forming something in her that could not have been formed any other way. His preparation is always purposeful.

Personal Reflection: Looking back on a difficult season of your life, can you now see where God was preparing you for something you did not yet understand?

Practical Application: Identify one area where you sense God may currently be preparing you. Surrender that area to Him in prayer and ask for the faith to trust the process.

Day 5: Giving Back What God Has Given

Reading: 1 Samuel 1:19-28; Luke 1:46-55

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Devotional: When Hannah received Samuel, she did not hold him tightly as though he were hers alone. She remembered her vow. She brought him to the house of the Lord and gave him back. This is the highest form of stewardship, recognizing that what God gives, He gives for His purposes. Mary, centuries later, would echo this spirit in her song of praise. Both women received something miraculous and responded not with possessiveness but with worship. Everything we have, our children, our gifts, our callings, our very lives, belongs to the God who gave them. True faith holds all things with an open hand.

Personal Reflection: Is there something God has given you that you have been holding too tightly? What would it look like to offer it back to Him in surrender and trust?

Practical Application: Make a list of the most significant things God has entrusted to you. Pray over each one, releasing it back to Him and asking Him to use it for His glory and His purposes.