

Samuel

We've already learned many things about Samuel. His parents were Elkanah and Hannah. Elkanah was from the tribe of Levi, but not serving as a priest. When Hannah, his first wife, produced no heirs he took a second wife to give him the son he needed. Rather than trusting God to give Hannah a child he conformed to the ways of the world which caused division in his home. However, they were a godly family who made the trip to Shiloh every year to worship the Lord. Even though the temple was being defiled by Eli's sons, Elkanah didn't fall away. He remained faithful to the Lord. We know Hannah was a woman of faith and diligent in prayer. She consecrated Samuel to the Lord's service before he was even born and kept her word to give him back to the Lord.

I Samuel 3:1-21

Samuel was born during the days of the judges when there was no ruler so everyone did whatever seemed right in their own eyes. Israel had been on a never ending rollercoaster ride going from highs when they were serving the Lord to the lows of God's judgment on them for their times of rejection and disobedience. People had slipped into an immoral, lawless, violent, and permissive lifestyle: adultery, gang rape, homosexuality, sexual perversion, murder, brutality, savagery, mob violence, kidnapping, drunkenness, child and spousal abuse, terrorist attacks, rebellion, and war. Sounds a little familiar, doesn't it? There were so few serving the Lord that there was no one for Him to call as a prophet. His Word was rare because no one listened to Him; their hearts were hard and the priesthood was corrupted. God speaks and guides when His people diligently seek Him.

So Samuel was a breath of fresh air. Here was a young man who had been set apart to serve the Lord even before birth. Samuel had been assisting Eli in the temple and learning from him for several years. In spite of the bad influences around him like Eli's sons, Samuel grew in the Lord. One factor that contributed to his growth was probably the spiritual grounding he received as a child in the few years he had with his mother. Another was that Eli invested more time in Samuel than his own sons, perhaps trying to make amends for his dismal failure with them. At this time, Samuel was probably about 12 years old and God was ready to call him personally.

Because Eli was old and blind, Samuel slept near him so he could care for Eli during the night. He was accustomed to Eli's voice calling which is why he ran to Eli the first times God called. He didn't know it was God because he didn't know the Lord and could not yet distinguish His voice. Samuel was a godly and obedient boy serving God, but he hadn't given his heart to the Lord and come to know Him personally. Fortunately Eli still had the discernment to realize that God was calling Samuel and told him how to respond. A reminder to us: our own children can be raised in a godly home and go to church but that doesn't mean they know God personally. Each of them must make their own decision to give their heart to God when He calls them.

For his first prophecy from God, Samuel was given a very disturbing message of condemnation and judgement against the family of Eli. God had already warned Eli that there would be judgement, so telling Samuel was confirming the truth to Eli. Can you imagine how Samuel felt? Eli had been his family and he had to tell him that "judgement is coming. It's too late. The time for repentance has passed and your judgement is sealed." You wouldn't want to tell that to someone you loved but Samuel followed through and told Eli everything.

So the Lord was with Samuel from that day on and he grew in his relationship with God. "*Let none of his words fall to the ground*" meant all of Samuel's prophecies came to pass and were known to

be the Word of God. All of Israel, from the north to the south, knew that Samuel had been established as a prophet of the Lord. It says God revealed himself to Samuel through His Word. That is how we still come to know Him even today for God's Word is true and always remains.

I Samuel 7: 3-17

The Israelites had been defeated in war and under the oppression of the Philistines. They were downtrodden and discouraged. Even the worship center at Shiloh had been destroyed. They realized they were cut off from God. These verses cover a span of twenty-some years: years of mourning and crying out to God for deliverance. The loss of the Ark and the temple caused them to start turning back to the Lord. Samuel spent the next twenty years preaching a message of repentance. He instructed them to:

- return to God with all your heart; truly repent
- put away your false gods and false worship
- serve Him only

Gradually, over time, the Israelites obeyed what Samuel taught them. So he called the nation to gather at Mizpah where they did three significant things:

- drew water and poured it out before the Lord symbolizing the pouring out of a person's heart in repentance and commitment to the Lord
- fasted and confessed their sins
- the people began to look to Samuel as their leader, as the judge of Israel

When the Philistines heard all of Israel was gathered at Mizpah, they felt threatened and mobilized their troops for an all out attack. The Israelites had gone unprepared for battle because they had assembled for worship - not war. Unlike the previous encounter with the Philistines where they looked to the Ark to give them victory, this time they asked Samuel to pray and ask the Lord to save them. God fought from heaven on behalf of Israel and defeated the Philistines. He sent thunder, confusion, and defeat to the Philistines and confidence and victory to the Israelites. Today, all kinds of enemies attack us and our conquest over them comes the same way - through prayer.

Samuel knew they needed to remember this amazing defeat so he set set up a stone and called it *Ebenezer*, meaning "stone of help." It's a stone of memorial to remember that God has 'brought me thus far' and He will continue to see me through all of the way. He will never leave me. From that time on, the Philistines were never again as dominant and formidable as a foe. The cities they had taken from Israel were returned and they stayed away from Israel while Samuel was alive. Samuel was used of God all his days and finished well. He gained the respect of the Israelites as a judge and as a prophet throughout the entire nation. He traveled from city to city, like a circuit judge, to help settle disputes and promote righteousness.

I Samuel 12:1-25

This chapter brings us to the coronation of Saul as the new king of Israel and Samuel's farewell speech to the people. Samuel knew that now there was a king, his role would change and diminish. He accepted that he would step aside and turned the leadership over to King Saul. There were four major points he addressed in his message:

1. His ministry to the people had been righteous and godly

- he had listened to what the people wanted; when they said they wanted a king he did as they asked; he hadn't insisted on his sons as his successor: Joel and Abiah were known as judges who accepted bribes, were greedy and dishonest, and twisted justice; (I Samuel 8)
- he affirmed he had served faithfully his whole life from the days of his youth
- he gave everyone the opportunity to witness to any time that he had stolen, cheated, or oppressed anyone; if he had favored the rich or taken a bribe; they could accuse him now so he could make it right
- the nation's verdict was that he was innocent of any evil and had lived a righteous life

2. Samuel vindicated the Lord

- Samuel proclaimed all the righteous acts the Lord had done for the Israelites down through history; how He had delivered them through the repeated cycle of following/obeying and then rejecting God
- His big question to them: Would they forget God and look to their new king as their savior and provider or would they acknowledge the new king himself must be as dependent on God as all? Would they acknowledge that God was the ultimate authority over all?

3. Their rejection of God as their king was a sin

- when they demanded an earthly king, they rejected the Lord
- they asked for a king like all of the other nations but they should have asked for a king "after God's heart"
- Samuel put the choice before them: even though they were disobedient in wanting a king, if they feared the Lord and served Him, God could still bless them. However, if they did not obey the Lord then His hand would be turned against them.
- To remind them of God's power, Samuel called for a sign from heaven: a thunderstorm in the midst of the dry, hot harvest season; most likely some crops were destroyed, reminding them God has the power to bring judgment on them
- They were convicted of their sin in asking for a king; but notice they didn't repent and ask for Saul's removal, they wanted to stick with their choice

4. Samuel called for repentance

- His advice to the people:
 - a. You must not turn away from the Lord, never forsake Him again
 - b. Serve the Lord wholeheartedly
 - c. Do not turn again to idols and false worship
 - d. If you do these things, God will always accept you.
- When the people ask Samuel to pray for them, he could have felt hurt that the people rejected him and the Lord. He could have chosen to be bitter against the people and refuse to pray for them. But Samuel was a more godly man than that. He was already praying for them and assured them he would continue.
- Samuel not only prayed but continued teaching them as well.

As we begin Chapter 16, the Lord commissioned Samuel to take on a highly secret job: anointing the young boy who would be the future king of Israel. God had already rejected Saul as king and sent Samuel to tell him. Saul started out well and Samuel had high hopes for him. Now he was still grieving over Saul and the loss of his kingdom. When God tells him he will be going to anoint the future king, Samuel panics at the thought. If Saul finds out he will have him killed for treason. The Lord solves the problem by telling Samuel to go with the purpose of offering a sacrifice, which would be normal in his role as a traveling judge/prophet.

Samuel obeyed and went to Bethlehem, the home of Ruth and Boaz. Jesse was their grandson and that is where Samuel went to share the ceremonial meal. When Jesse's sons arrived Samuel was immediately drawn to the oldest, Eliab. He was tall and attractive and Samuel thought for sure he looked like a king. God rejected him immediately and rebuked Samuel for looking at the wrong thing. The heart, not the physical appearance, is what the Lord was looking for. Jesse presented his next six sons to Samuel, one by one, and all were rejected. It wasn't that they were bad men, they were just not God's choice.

When questioned by Samuel if all the young men were there, Jesse responded "*there remains the youngest.*" This shows the low regard David had among his own family. First, his father didn't even call him by name. Second, he wasn't even invited to the feast. Third, he was only called because Samuel insisted on it. It wasn't because of David's character or conduct that they tended to discount him. He was simply the youngest of eight boys, only about 16. His main responsibility was keeping the sheep - usually the job of a servant if you had them, but they didn't. When David arrived Samuel had a good impression of him. He was "ruddy" which means he had a healthy complexion. He was good looking with piercing bright eyes. The Lord immediately let Samuel know that this was His choice. He was a young boy with a heart after God's heart which made him a better man than Saul.

David had probably learned valuable lessons in tending the sheep:

- he had time to think and observe the glory of God's creation; God built in him a heart to sing about God's glory
- it took a special heart and special care to know what the sheep needed and provide that care; you learned you were a sheep and God was your shepherd; God built a heart in David that would sing about the Lord as His shepherd (Psalm 23)
- you had to trust God in the midst of danger: David had lions, bears, and wolves to contend with in protecting his sheep

So David was anointed privately in the presence of his father and brothers and no one else. This secret anointing was totally unknown to King Saul. The Spirit of the Lord came upon David and remained on him from that day forward; God's Spirit never left him as it had Saul. This young shepherd would become one of the greatest men of the Bible mentioned more than 1,000 times in the Scriptures. And Samuel had the sole honor of anointing the first two kings of Israel.

*"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,"
says the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts."*

Isaiah 55:8-9