



BETHEL CHURCH  
INTERNATIONAL WORSHIP CENTRE

A STUDY ON THE LIFE OF

# SAMUEL





# INTRODUCTION

The life of Samuel is very significant in Israel's history. He adopted diverse roles during his lifetime - from a priest at a very young age, he transitioned into a judge, and a prophet, and later rose to become the national leader of Israel. As a prophet, he anointed the first two kings of Israel. As a judge, he was the last in the line to preside over Israel's courtrooms. There is so much to learn from the life of Samuel as a mediator and intercessor. His legacy as a leader of the Israelites was so impeccable that the Bible places him alongside Moses and Aaron (Psalm 99:6, Jer.15:1).

The history of Israel during the time of Samuel revolves around a theme that occurs multiple times in the Bible: the return of Israel to God and the renewal of their relationship. The book of Judges displays this cycle vividly: a period of faithfulness and blessings, a drift into unfaithfulness that results in all sorts of problems, and their cry to God for help after an extended period of suffering.

The name Samuel (Hebrew: Shemuel) means “**God heard**” or “**Lent of God**”.



## THE BIG LESSON FROM THE LIFE OF SAMUEL

The greatest lesson from the life of Samuel is his **lifelong faithful obedience to God**. Samuel was special from childhood. His story shows us the importance of listening to and obeying God's voice at all costs. Samuel was faithful to God from his birth till his death. He faithfully served God and the nation of Israel as it transitioned from the time of judges to the rule of kings. Samuel was willing to listen to God and take on different roles as a priest, judge, prophet, and national leader for the country of Israel.

God Himself held Samuel up as one of the most outstanding of His saints. Psalm 99:6-7 says; *Moses and Aaron were among His priests, and **Samuel** was among those who called upon His name; They called upon the Lord, and He answered them. He spoke to them in the cloudy pillar; They kept His testimonies and the ordinance He gave them (Psalm 99:6-7).*

Our obedience to God isn't blind. It is based on our covenant relationship with a trustworthy Father who has our best in mind and knows how to lead us to an abundant life. Our faithfulness to Christ, even when it seems like no one else stands with us, will reveal our integrity and the true state of our hearts.



**Samuel's prayer life shaped his ministry.** He stood in the space between God and the people as an intercessor. From a very young age, he developed an ear for God's voice and continued in the art of prayer. His life was structured around intercessory prayer, so much so that he considered it a sin not to pray for others (1 Samuel 12:23). Jeremiah the prophet quotes Samuel as a mighty intercessor equivalent to Moses (Jeremiah 15:1). The main goal of Samuel's life was to ensure that God alone received the glory and honour.



## THE BOOKS OF 1 AND 2 SAMUEL

The books of 1 and 2 Samuel were originally compiled as a single book. Modern Hebrew Bibles, in fact, still treat this material as simply “*Samuel*”. These 55 chapters tell the story of an important transitional period in God’s plan, centred on the judge/prophet Samuel and the two kings he anointed - Saul and David.

In fact, 1–2 Samuel narrates three overlapping but distinct transitions in the leadership of Israel:

- Transition from failing priests to Samuel—a righteous judge/prophet and kingmaker
- Transition from an absence of kingship to Saul—a king born of the people’s initiative
- Slow transition from Saul to David—a king of God’s own choosing

The authorship of 1 and 2 Samuel is traditionally attributed to the prophet Samuel and co-authored with other prophets such as Gad, Nathan, and other scribes who compiled these books.

## HANNAH'S PRAYERS AND BIRTH OF SAMUEL

**1 Samuel 1:27-28:-** *“For this child I prayed, and the LORD has granted me my petition which I asked of Him. Therefore I also have lent him to the LORD; as long as he lives he shall be lent to the LORD.” So, they worshiped the LORD there.”*

The first two verses of 1 Samuel introduce the main characters – Elkanah and his two wives – Hannah and Peninnah – and a pivotal issue in Hannah’s barrenness (1:1-2). The theme of barrenness and rivalry between two wives is similar to the stories of Sarah and Hagar, and Rachel and Leah (Genesis 16:1-4; 29:31). In those accounts, the child eventually born to the barren wife was destined for greatness. The same was true of Hannah’s child.



The story of Samuel began with his mother Hannah who prayed and waited for the Lord to open her womb. Hannah showed unmatched restraint with her words. She not only knew the right things to say but also when to say nothing. For years Peninnah - Elkanah's other wife - ridiculed Hannah for her infertility. Yet instead of responding to her tormentor, she kept her mouth shut and went straight to God with her plea. Her character was even tested when the priest Eli accused her of being drunk. However, Hannah demonstrated grace and humility through her words (1:18).

The story of Hannah is an example of praying in faith and depending on God. We can learn three things from Hannah's life:

1. She did not react negatively when provoked
2. She prayed fervently in faith
3. She gave the Lord what mattered most to her

Once Samuel was weaned, Hannah went to the sanctuary and dedicated him to the Lord's service (1:24-28). She gave Samuel to the Lord full-time.

The story did not end when Hannah gave birth to Samuel. It did not even end when she took him to the temple. God continued to answer the prayers for Hannah. She had three more sons and two daughters while Samuel "*grew up in the presence of the Lord*" (1 Samuel 2:21).



Out of Hannah's need and pain was birthed a life that would revive all of Israel. Many a time, we have barren situations in our lives that bring us pain and social stigma, situations that limit us, and those that desperately require a miracle. But we can be assured that God is working, even if He does not act immediately. Instead of wondering whether our barrenness is actually God's will, we should turn to Him in faith knowing that, when the time is right, He will act!

The birth of Samuel was the starting point for a significant transition in the history of Israel. Israel was under threat: externally from the Philistines and internally from the corruption in its priestly family at Shiloh. However, with the birth of Samuel, a change was set in motion. Yet, as ancient as this story is, there are wonderful insights that can be leveraged by parents today.

1. Hannah prayed for a child.
2. She treated the child as a gift from God.
3. She dedicated her child to God for his whole life.



## HANNAH'S SONG OF THANKSGIVING

**1 Samuel 2:1:-** *“And Hannah prayed and said: “My heart rejoices in the Lord; My horn is exalted in the Lord. I smile at my enemies, Because I rejoice in Your salvation.”*

In the second chapter of 1 Samuel, Hannah did not mourn her separation from her son; instead, she prayed a song of praise and thanksgiving. Her song will be echoed by another woman whose Son changed human history forever – Jesus’ mother, Mary (Luke 1:46-55).

Hannah’s praise began with a personal response to the miracle she has received. She sang that *her horn was lifted high* (2:1). Being lifted high implies a visible elevation in one’s situation and the establishment of one’s honour. She could boast over her enemies while celebrating the Lord’s incomparable deliverance (2:2).

Hannah warns the proud and the arrogant that God knows everything and has the ability to see past a person’s actions to their true intentions (2:3). This means that fortunes will be reversed: the strong will be made weak and the weak strong (2:4), also giving rise to barren bearing many children (2:5). The transforming power behind these reversals is the Lord, the object of Hannah’s praise. Thus, the Lord is exalted as a warrior thundering from heaven, whose judgment extends to the ends of the earth (2:10).

The God who shapes the big events of history also relates to us personally and fights for us in our daily struggles

The song concludes with a reference to a king anointed by God, which foreshadows the coming monarchy (2:10). However, Hannah was probably unaware that her thanksgiving was also prophetic and she went home, leaving Samuel to minister (2:11).

Hannah's psalm highlights most of Israel's basic themes of worship. She celebrates the fact that God is powerful and holy, God silences His people's critics, God reverses fortunes, God provides for His people, and that God deals with His adversaries and exalts the king (v. 10).



### A PARENTING CONTRAST

**1 Samuel 2:12:-** *“Now the sons of Eli were corrupt; they did not know the Lord.*

**1 Samuel 2:26:-** *“And the child Samuel grew in stature, and in favour both with the LORD and men.”*

The first chapters of the book of Samuel draw a contrast between two parents – Eli, the high priest, and Hannah an ordinary Jewish lady. Eli's example proves the fact that knowledge of the truths of Scripture does not necessarily correspond to good parenting. Eli surely was not a good parent, and he paid a hefty price for his failure to act in obedience to God.

As you read the biblical account you will find that He did nothing to stop his sons from sexually exploiting the women at the Tabernacle where the Israelites came to worship. Eli's sons also took by force the best sacrificial meat from the people who came to worship God. Eli told his sons that they should not do this, but took no action to actually stop them from continuing in their evil behaviour toward the people of God (1 Sam. 2:23-24).

The message of Eli's house is an important one for us, as it deals with the honour due God's name (1 Sam. 2:30). It has been said that "*familiarity breeds contempt*." If our familiarity with God leads us no longer to give him the honour and glory due to Him, then, like Eli and his sons, we have certainly gone too far.

The story of Eli and his sons reminds us also of the serious responsibility parents have to teach their children the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the heart-breaking consequences that can result from the negligence of this sacred obligation.



## THE CALL OF SAMUEL

**1 Samuel 3:10:-** “Now the LORD came and stood and called as at other times, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel answered, “Speak, for Your servant hears.”

Chapter 3 begins with an interesting statement: “The word of the LORD was rare in those days.” The statement is made as a backdrop to the story of the word of the Lord coming to Samuel, but it also bears witness to the low religious ebb of the day. The Scripture did not say that “there were no religious activities or religious words” in those days but rather that the word of the Lord was rare. Also, the lack of the word was not so much connected with God’s reluctance to communicate with the people as with the lack of a human instrument to receive and speak the word of the Lord.

**His mother Hannah had given him to God for his entire life, but only the Lord could call him to prophesy.** When the call came to Samuel, he thought it was his master, Eli, calling. How easy it still is not to be able to discern God’s voice from other voices. It would be so much easier if all of God’s messages to us came with a clearly printed label: “From God”. While there is a tendency to think of the more dramatic revelations of God as normative, most people experience God’s guidance in quite ordinary ways: through experiences good and bad, while reading the Scripture, through the counsel of another, or out of a growing interest.

We must be open to the possibility of God addressing us in whatever way He chooses, or else we may walk right past a burning bush instead of saying, as Moses did, *‘I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up’*

Most people find it strange to accept the fact that God speaks but at the same time one could say the most important thing in life is to hear God’s voice. When God speaks, He communicates with us. He expresses His mind, His character, and His purposes. The Bible is God’s Word for us. Moreover, Jesus is the Word of God made flesh. Since we live in a world where exchange of

**In the Bible, God calls plenty of people by name but 7 times God calls their names twice.**

1. Abraham, Abraham (Gen.22)
2. Jacob, Jacob (Gen.46)
3. Moses, Moses (Ex.3)
4. Samuel, Samuel (1 Sam.3)
5. Martha, Martha (Luke 10)
6. Simon, Simon (Luke 22)
7. Paul, Paul (Acts 9)

thoughts and ideas are frequent and prevalent, it is quite easy to forget to spend time with God. Start now to talk with God until it becomes a daily habit. Also, one needs to rely on the Holy Spirit (the still small voice) to speak to us whenever it is appropriate.

**John 10:14 -15, 26:-** *“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep... My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.”*

A marvellous aspect of Samuel's call was the provision of Eli to help him interpret the call. It was Eli who worded for Samuel the response, "*Speak, LORD, for Your servant hears*" (v. 9). Servants listen to the master differently than others.

## SAMUEL'S FIRST MESSAGE FROM GOD

**1 Samuel 3:11:-** "*Then the LORD said to Samuel: 'Behold, I will do something in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle.'*"

- The message from God to Samuel was a very serious message. **Soon, God would do certain things that would cause a great shock to everyone in Israel.** Eli's sons had done terrible things against God and God had already sent a message to Eli about what would happen in the future (2:27-36).
- **Every one of those things would happen just as God told Samuel.** The family of Eli could not imagine that their sacrifices to God would stop this punishment. Since Eli and the sons treated the sacrificial system with such disregard, the system designed to bring them atonement would be useless too.
- **Samuel had to be ready** for the following events - Eli and his two sons would be dead. Soon, the ark of God, which Samuel guarded, would go into the foreign country of Philistine. The lamp of God would no longer burn in the sacred tent where Samuel had slept.



If the main theme of Eli's life was to be summed up in one sentence, it is found in the statement made by the unnamed man of God sent to proclaim judgement against Eli and his house. In 1 Samuel 2:30, the man of God declares to Eli, "But now the Lord says, *"Far be it from Me; for those who honour Me I will honour, and those who despise Me shall be lightly esteemed."* This statement contains three key words – "**honour**," "**despise**" and "**lightly esteem**", which is important not only for Eli's story but also important in understanding the overall message of the books of Samuel.



An interesting parallel is found in Malachi chapters 1 and 2 where the prophet Malachi chastises the priests of his day for their corrupt practices. In Malachi 1:6, he uses two of the keywords found in 1 Samuel 2:30.

**Malachi 1:6:-** "*A son honours his father, and a servant his master. If then I am the Father, where is My honour? And if I am a Master, where is My reverence? says the Lord of hosts to you priests who despise My name. Yet you say, 'In what way have we despised Your name?'*"



**1 Samuel 7:3:-** *“Then Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying, “If you return to the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths from among you, and prepare your hearts for the Lord, and serve Him only; and He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines.”*

Samuel reappears in chapter 7, not as a child at the temple in Shiloh, but as the judge over Israel. The details of his life for a twenty years period are not listed. While the focus of this chapter is to picture Samuel's role as a judge of Israel, it also prepares the reader to understand the large role he played in the establishment and guidance of the monarchy.

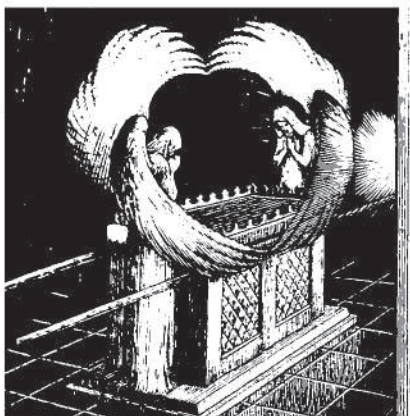
People of Israel thought as long as they have the Ark of the Covenant with them, no enemies can overtake them. But God takes away Israel's security blanket, the Ark, and now they have to look elsewhere for security. Samuel tells them where to look. He calls upon the nation to return to the LORD with all their hearts. They were to show this by putting away all their pagan idols.

We see that the Israelites gathered other idols from the neighbouring lands and even reduced the Ark of the Lord to an idol **any devotion to the blessings of God rather than God himself becomes an idol.**

The problem was not with the Ark but with the people who treated the Ark like an idol. The Ark was not the instrument through which God worked (as the Israelites previously falsely assumed).

**God does not dwell in any idols and does not work through any idols.** He works through His Word and His presence alone I will never leave you nor forsake you Hebrews 13:5

They cried out to Samuel, beseeching him to pray to the LORD on their behalf, asking Him to deliver them from the approaching Philistines. Samuel offered a whole burnt offering to the LORD on behalf of the



Israelites (1 Sam.7:9) He cried out to the LORD, pleading to deliver the Israelites, and God answered his prayer. Samuel was still offering sacrifices to the LORD as the Philistine warriors arrived. The Israelites were completely unprepared for this attack, but the LORD brought about a great thunderstorm (or at least the sounds of thunder) which caused great confusion among the Philistine warriors and enabled the Israelites to overcome them. From Mizpah, the Israelites pursued the Philistines as far as Beth Car, a city whose location is unknown. Samuel then set up a stone between Mizpah and Shen, calling the stone “**Ebenezer**,” (7:12) which means, “*the rock of my help or thus far the Lord has helped*”, a commemoration that the battle had been won with the LORD’S help.

So the word of the Lord was established as mentioned in **1 Samuel 3:19-20**:- “So Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. <sup>20</sup> And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel had been established as a **prophet of the Lord**.”

## SAMUEL AND ISRAEL'S REQUEST FOR A KING

**1 Samuel 8:6-7:-** *“But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, “Give us a king to judge us.” So Samuel prayed to the LORD. 7 And the LORD said to Samuel, “Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them.”*

Samuel was very upset with the request of the people, and there could have been a number of reasons why he was so upset. He would have been upset by the fact that they were rejecting him as he was getting old and his lifetime of faithful service to Israel was coming to an end.

Instead of arguing with the people, Samuel *“prayed to the LORD”* (v. 6) and received from the Lord both personal affirmation, which made him feel good, and instructions to honour the people's request, which frustrated him. Israel's request was seen as much more than the desire for an earthly king, they were rejecting the Kingship of God in their lives. At an earlier time, the people had tried to make Gideon their king. In his refusal, he replied, *“I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the LORD shall rule over you”* (Judg. 8:23).

God instructed Samuel to *“make them a king”* (v. 22). Unlike the foreign kings who often ruled over Israel,

this would be a king whom God permitted and who would be anointed and advised by Samuel, God's prophet. Also,



Samuel was instructed to warn the people about the ways of the kings, and verses 11–18 are a litany of the known behaviours of kings. God wanted them to know exactly what it was that they were choosing and what it would cost them. God wanted them to remember that they had been warned. It was a loving act, though there was pain involved, to help people see the long-term implications of their decision.

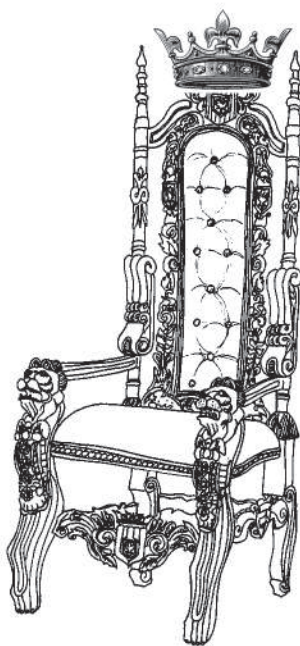
It seemed certain that Yahweh would have given Israel a king at some point. He promised kingship to the patriarchs, saying that “*kings*” would come from them. God told Abraham: I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and *kings shall come from you* (Genesis 17:6).

So, kingship was not a bad thing, and it was expected that God would give Israel a king in due time. Thus, the problem here was with the motive and the timing of Israel's request. As for motive, Israel wanted a king in order to be “*like all the nations.*”

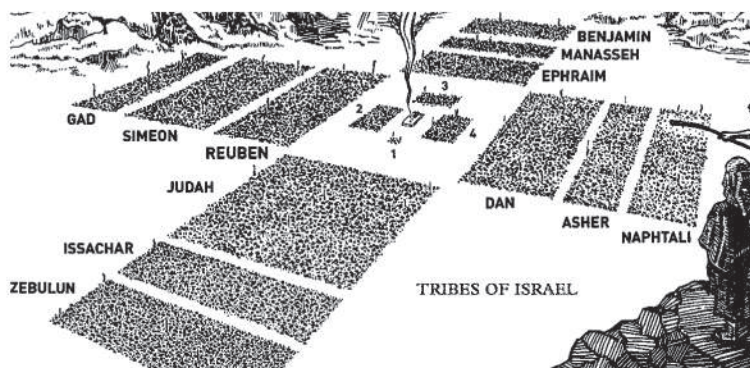
One of the threads that is woven throughout the Bible is how God works with people in the midst of their compromises to accomplish His purpose.



Israel's motives were confused. They wanted to be "like all the nations" (v. 5). When we live in the world, we are influenced by the political and cultural environment more than we realize. We often lose the ability to distinguish between that which comes from our environment and that which arises out of our relationship with God. Yet, God does not reject us or give up on us. He reject us or give up on us. He works with us to bring good out of less-than-ideal situations. This is what God did with Israel's request.



Interestingly, even though Samuel did not favour a king, he came to really love Saul to the extent that he rejoiced in the good that he did and grieved at his mistakes.



## SAMUEL ANOINTS SAUL AS KING

### a) Selection of Saul as King

1 Samuel 9 narrates the story of God at work in the life of Samuel and Saul. The first two verses describe the physical attributes of Saul. He was handsome and tall. His name meant “that which had been asked for”. He was from the tribe of Benjamin, the smallest in Israel, which was the most unlikely source for leadership. Also, 1 Samuel 9 portrays Samuel as one with the necessary credentials of a prophet. The meeting with Saul had been disclosed to him a day prior (v. 16). He knew about Saul’s mission and the lost donkeys that had been found (v. 20). The following day, just as Samuel caught sight of Saul; the Lord revealed, “*This one shall reign over My people*” (v. 17). And so, Samuel gave Saul “*the message from God*” (v. 27).

With Saul’s selection and anointing began a relationship, which would serve the kingdom well—the prophet of God and the chosen king working in unison. It created some checks and balances to protect the people from an autocratic king. It also reminded Israel that their true king was not Saul, but the Lord. The role of the prophet was to remind the people to refrain from placing their trust in armies or in treaties, but in God.



b) Samuel anoints Saul as the first king

1 Samuel Chapter 10 is distinctly divided into two parts: the anointing of Saul (verses 1–16); and his proclamation as king before the people (verses 17–27). The latter section is similar to Chapter 8, wherein Samuel reiterates his feelings about monarchic rule.

Samuel gave Saul 3 signs to authenticate the anointing.

- He told Saul that he would find two men by Rachel's tomb who would report that the donkeys had been found and that his father was worried about him (v. 2).
  
- Saul would meet three men by the "*terebinth tree of Tabor*" who would carry gifts of goats, bread, and wine to the temple at Bethel. He was to accept the gift of bread that they would offer to him (vv. 3–4).
  
- He would meet a band of prophets, and God's Spirit would come upon him to empower and transform him (vv. 5–7).

The text tells us that all three signs came to pass on the same day and the effect on Saul was such that it "*gave him another heart*" (v. 9). It would probably be a mistake to interpret this in a New Testament sense as a "*new birth*" (John 3:3), but more as a sense of encouragement. It was God's way of saying to Saul, "*I have anointed you for a task, and I am able to give you the strength that you will need.*"

This kind of encouragement is needed by God's people continually. While we may not need the signs that Saul was given, we need constant affirmation of our calling in Christ.

c) *Samuel announces the new king to the Israelites*

Samuel called a national assembly in Mizpah and reviewed God's relationship with them (10:17–18). He also pointed out their rejection of God in requesting a king (10:19).

Till the present moment in the story, only Samuel and Saul were aware that God had chosen a king for Israel. Samuel led Israel in casting lots with sacred objects in order to ascertain whom God had chosen. It was a process of elimination – starting from the nation, to the tribe, to the family, to the person. The lot fell on the tribe of Benjamin, and the family of Matri. While people held their breath, the last draw was picked... And Saul the son of Kish was crowned the king of Israel (10:20).

1 Samuel Chapters 11 and 12 give us our first glimpse of the new king in action. It was one thing to be anointed king by Samuel and to hear the people's acclamation, "*Long live the king*", but it was a different ball game altogether to lead a nation against her enemies.





## SAUL FAILS, SAMUEL GRIEVES

**1 Samuel 13:13-14:-** *“And Samuel said to Saul, “You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you. For now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. 14 But now your kingdom shall not continue. **The LORD has sought for Himself a man after His own heart,** and the LORD has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you.”*

Saul's root character flaw **was self-exaltation and self-deception**. He thought he knew better than everyone else, including God. The biggest tragedy was that he was not even aware of it.

**1 Samuel 13** and the chapters thereafter talk about how Saul was completely blind to his arrogance. He always believed that he was right. In 1 Samuel 13, he was told to wait for Samuel before offering sacrifices to God and initiating a battle with the Philistines. He was impatient and didn't obey. Saul had just finished the offering to God when Samuel arrived and asked for an explanation (v. 11). As soon as Saul had explained his actions, Samuel announced that it was a foolish thing to do and that he had *“not kept the commandment of the LORD”* (v. 13). Even though Saul eventually won the battle, he did it on his own terms instead of God's.

He didn't seem to understand that God's ways were better than his own. What happened there laid the foundation for Saul's rejection and David's ascension. Most people have so identified the phrase "*a man after God's own heart*" with David that they are surprised to find it here in Samuel's speech to Saul (v. 14).

As Saul's story progressed, the mistakes got bigger and the stakes hit the ceiling. Somehow, he was never able to own up to his mistakes when it was pointed out to him. His self-ignorance was even greater in 1 Samuel 15, where God commanded him to go and fight against the Amalekites (this nation tried to wipe out the Israelites long ago when they had just escaped Egypt, see Exodus 17:8-15). He was given clear instructions to thoroughly defeat the Amalekites. However, Saul stopped short and allowed the soldiers to plunder the spoils, even though he was explicitly told to ensure that it didn't happen. When Samuel confronted him, Saul somewhat confessed, but he put his own spin on it: "*The people spared the best of the sheep and oxen to make a sacrifice to Yahweh*" (1 Samuel 15:15). He justified his stubbornness and disobedience by making impromptu claims about a sacrifice. Samuel then called Saul to account: **1 Samuel 15:19**, "*Why then did you not listen to the voice of the Lord? And why did you rush upon the spoil and do evil in the sight of the Lord?*"

Saul was still unable to see his mistake: "*I did listen to the voice of Yahweh, and went on the mission he sent me*"

but the people took the spoil.” (1 Samuel 15:21). He shifted the blame to get Samuel off his back. But Samuel had enough: “***Does Yahweh delight in burnt offerings as much as listening to his voice? To listen (obey) is better than sacrifice***” (15:22)

It was only at this point that Saul could see his error, and so he owned up to his mistake with a confession: “*I have sinned. For I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and your words, because I feared the people, and listened to their voice.*” (15:24).

A few moments later, he revealed one of his motivations for the show of remorse in **1 Samuel 15:30**: Then Saul said, “*I have sinned, but please honour me before the elders of my people, and before Israel, and turn back with me, that I may worship the Lord your God.*” When Samuel moved to leave, Saul grabbed his robe and it tore. Samuel used it as a symbol to describe the present situation of the nation - “*The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today*” (v. 28).





When Saul pleaded with Samuel to return with him, Samuel relented and went, but it changed nothing.

**Saul valued the opinion of the people over God's wisdom.** He feared people when he should have feared God. Moreover, his worry was focused on one thing in the light of correction—his own reputation and honor. Saul perpetually downplayed his role through the bad decisions he made.

He kept shifting the blame onto other people as if they were responsible for his mistakes. The remainder of 1 Samuel recounts Saul's extended slide into moral and spiritual decay. One of the saddest verses in 1 Samuel shows the dejection of Samuel, "*And Samuel went no more to see Saul until the day of his death. Nevertheless, Samuel mourned for Saul, and the LORD regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel.*" (1 Samuel 15:35)

With Saul's kingship rejected by God, Samuel mourns Saul. However, God did two things for Samuel. He reminded Samuel that he needed to accept God's judgment over Saul. Then God pointed Samuel to the days ahead and his involvement in the anointing of a new king to succeed Saul.

Through the centuries, Christians have often been trapped by their inability to let loose the things which no longer serve God's purpose. We grow accustomed to institutions, organizations, programs, ways of thinking, and ways of doing things.



We develop such an emotional attachment that we cling to them long after their usefulness to God is passed. Sometimes the hardest thing to get rid of is something that no longer meets a need. We often need help from God to let go of the past and face the future that He has planned for us.

Saul's descent provides a striking contrast to David's rise in influence. At the end of the day, Saul placed his real trust in himself, his plan, and others' opinions of him. Contrast this with David, who is characterized in these same chapters as radically obedient and trusting of Yahweh, which eventually leads to his rise as king and solidifies his lineage.

These two characters provide us an opportunity for self-reflection, to identify and locate the blind spots in our lives where pride may be getting the better of us. We justify our poor decisions and try to negotiate with God. We let our cultural mandate sweep us away. All of this leads us to ponder if we are more similar to Saul than we think. In what ways do we elevate the opinions of other people above the wisdom and love of God? In what ways do we shift blame to avoid taking ownership of our failures?



Our deepest character flaws need not define us or conclude our story - not when we encounter Jesus, our saviour! Unlike Saul, Jesus was the king of Israel who never failed, but took upon Himself the consequences of others' failures. Unlike Saul, Jesus never flinched when faced with the dark side of humanity. Rather, He ran directly into it with His love and passion because He knew that God's power could overcome our evil and create something new. What Saul needed, and what we really need, is a new heart and mind that doesn't need to justify failure or transfer blame. What we need is what David later prays for after his greatest blunder: "*Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a spirit of integrity in me.*" (Psalm 51:10)



## SAMUEL ANOINTS DAVID AS KING

**1 Samuel 16:7-13:-** “*But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. **For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.**”* <sup>13</sup>*Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him (David) in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel arose and went to Ramah.”*

This second king was not to come at the insistence of the people. It was an initiative taken by God, for even before giving His instructions to Samuel, God had chosen the tribe, the family, and the



particular member of the family (16:1). Unlike Saul, who was a Benjaminite, the new king would be from the tribe of Judah, and his lineage would be connected with the coming of Jesus Christ, God's eternal King.

Like Samuel, we too are impressed by the things that can be seen with our physical eyes. So, God had to remind him that He looks at the inner qualities rather than outward appearances. We live in a world where physical beauty outranks spiritual depth, where success in business and



in church tends to be defined in materialistic terms, and where charisma is prized above character. We need, with God's help, to learn to examine our inward qualities.

Samuel worked his way through all seven sons of Jesse, getting the same message from God each time, "*Neither has the LORD chosen this one*" (16:8-10). It was only after inquiring directly of Jesse that Samuel learned that the youngest son, David, was herding sheep. So, like Saul who, at the time of casting lots to choose a king, was "*hiding among the baggage*" (10:21-22), David had to be called from his task of tending his father's sheep to be anointed the new shepherd of Israel.

The choice of the least likely person, from a human perspective, is a theme found throughout the Bible. The apostle Paul, in discussing the gospel of Christ, contends that God has always made choices that have surprised the world (1 Cor. 1:26-28). The study of church history or the study of the history of any congregation will usually reveal that God has often worked His purpose through some very unlikely choices.

### SAMUEL – THE 'SAFE PLACE' FOR DAVID.

**1 Samuel 19:18-24**, Saul was chasing David attempting to kill him. David, naturally fled and went to a safe place, the place of the great prophet Samuel.



His most obvious choice of a person to counsel him was Samuel. We do not know the exact location of “*Naioth*” where the two of them stayed. It may have been a section of Ramah or a community close to where the prophets lived. However, we do know their agenda. They discussed all the things that “*Saul had done to him*” (v. 18). What a help it must have been to David at that critical time in his life to have a significant person like Samuel as a mentor. Probably this association with Samuel would have developed in David a heart for God’s anointed and he decided not to kill Saul as he too was God’s anointed. He decided to wait for God’s direct actions to remove Saul rather than to take the throne forcefully. He decided to have God’s will in God’s way, in God’s time. No wonder David was known as the man after God’s own heart!

**Waiting on God is another theme that runs through 1 and 2 Samuel.** Are we willing to wait on God and accept His will no matter what the outcome might be? For a believer, God’s will may result in something that doesn’t match our expectations. In times like this, do we believe that it is for our good (Romans 8:28)? If we believe in a loving, all-wise God, then we are assured that His will is better for our lives than our own.

Our society offers many “*culturally-acceptable answers*”, but are they God’s will for our lives? A believer’s response is to wait, trust and allow God to work things out in His way and in His time.

## DEATH OF SAMUEL

**1 Samuel 25:1:-** *“Then Samuel died; and the Israelites gathered together and lamented for him, and buried him at his home in Ramah.”*

The end of the great prophet's life is recorded in brief and simple words, noting that *"all Israel mourned for him and buried him in his own town of Ramah"*.



Town of Ramah

Israel had lost the one who constantly interceded with God on their behalf. They felt secure while this good man prayed for them because *“the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much”*. It was Samuel who had taught them to love and obey God; but now that he was dead, the people thought they would be subject to the mercies of a mad king in Saul.

Samuel's story was not quite finished, however, as he made one final appearance from beyond the grave.

**I Samuel 28:3-7:-** “Now Samuel had died, and all Israel had lamented for him and buried him in Ramah, in his own city. And Saul had put the mediums and the spiritists out of the land. <sup>4</sup>Then the Philistines gathered together, and came and encamped at Shunem. So Saul gathered all Israel together, and they encamped at Gilboa. <sup>5</sup>When Saul saw the army of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly. <sup>6</sup>And when Saul inquired of the LORD, the LORD did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim or by the prophets. <sup>7</sup>Then Saul said to his servants, “Find me a woman who is a medium, that I may go to her and inquire of her. And his servants said to him, “In fact, there is a woman who is a medium at En Dor.”

This passage is one of the difficult passages in the Bible. It describes a time when the Lord had stopped talking to King Saul because of his continued disobedience.



In desperation, Saul sought out a woman who was a witch to speak with Samuel from the dead to know the future. (Please note that Saul's intention was not to seek a way back to God but to escape defeat from the hands of the enemies.)

**Few important observations here:**

1. There are several passages that teach us that **God bans the practice of talking to the dead** (Ex. 22:18; Lev. 20:6, 27; Deut. 18:9–12; Isa. 8:19). Moreover, the Bible teaches that the dead do not return to the living. The Bible does teach that death is final (Heb. 9:27), the dead do not return (2 Sam. 12:23), and God fixes a chasm between the dead and the living (Lk. 16:24).
2. In this incident, **Saul was seeking Samuel and not God**. He was not interested in God's will but was only anxious about his own future.
3. **Saul had no faith in God**. So he disobeyed God in consulting with the witches that he, himself, had forbidden from the land. It was God's commandment to banish all witches and mediums, and consult only Him and seek His presence.
4. **Witches operate through evil demonic spirits**. Consulting similar mediums and occult practices like astrology, Ouija board, horoscopes, mystic healers, etc. must be avoided for a child of God (See Deuteronomy 18:9-12). Isaiah 8:19-20, "*When they say to you, 'Consult the mediums and the spiritists who whisper and mutter,' should not a people consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living?*"



5. Interestingly, **God uses this ungodly act of Saul to bring about judgment through Prophet Samuel.** Samuel's spirit was revived to speak with King Saul. Please note that God alone can do it as He brought Moses and Elijah on the mount of transfiguration to discuss the revelation of grace. It is important to recognize that Saul didn't get a special revelation from Samuel. Instead, he gets judged for his actions and hears about his inevitable death, which was to occur the following day.
6. 1 Chronicles comments on this incident, *"So Saul died because he was unfaithful to the Lord. He failed to obey the Lord's command, and he even consulted a medium instead of asking the Lord for guidance. So, the Lord killed him and turned the kingdom over to David, son of Jesse"* (1 Chron. 10:13-14).
7. **Our God has good plans for our lives** and nobody nor any demons can see them – *"for no eye has seen, no ear has heard and no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him."* (I Corinthians 2:9)

## ● CONCLUSION ●

As a judge, he had settled disputes. As a priest, he had interceded with God on behalf of the people. As a prophet, he had anointed kings, counselled them, and raised up a school of prophets. Samuel symbolized the idea of God's overruling purpose for Israel.

In the book of Samuel, normal human patterns were reversed by God so that His plan could be furthered, showing His sovereignty over all. Hannah's barrenness gave way to children; Samuel became a prophet instead of Eli's sons; Saul rose to prominence though he was from a lowly tribe; and David was anointed king though he was the youngest and least prominent son of Jesse.

Our God is still sovereign today. He will accomplish His purposes with or without our cooperation. But as was true in the lives of Samuel, Saul, and David, our response to God's call affects our outcome. Will we obey Him as Samuel and David did and live lives marked by blessing? Or will we, like Saul, try to live on our own terms? ***"To obey is better than sacrifice,"*** Samuel told. That truth still speaks to us today!





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