



1 SAMUEL

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Lesson 01



Lesson 1: Samuel's Story



Bible Verses: 1 Samuel 1:1-28, 3:1-21, 8:1-22; Ephesians 2:10



Bottom Line: Samuel's identity was found in God



Topic: Identity, faith, obedience and perseverance

SERIES PREP

If you would like to give your groups, leaders, and/or students an overview of 1 Samuel before your study, use this link to the [Bible Project - 1 Samuel Book Summary Video](#).

At the time of publishing this series, this link works. If it no longer works when you try to use it, see if you can find some videos online at www.bibleproject.com.

INTRODUCTION

Hey students!

I am so excited for this new series we are jumping into on the book of **1 Samuel**!

The book of **1 Samuel** is paired with the book of **2 Samuel**, which is one whole story told in two parts.

What we see in this first part is the nation of Israel needing a king to help them live a better life that honors God.

From here, we see a few key characters emerge that most of us have heard of.

The first is the prophet Samuel. His story is told in the first few chapters, and then he is present throughout the rest of the book on the side of the other two characters, Saul and David.

Saul is the man that becomes the very first king of Israel.

David is the second king of Israel.

And yes, this is that same David from the David and Goliath story – we will get to that one later in the series.

So as we journey through the book of **1 Samuel** together, I want you to begin thinking about the idea of finding true identity.

There are several reasons I want you to be thinking about that.

First off, the nation of Israel was a group of people without a ruler.

Remember that they were God's chosen people that God wanted to use to show His power and glory to the world and guide others to follow and honor Him.

They found themselves struggling with their identity and wanted to place in into a person – a ruler.

Second, Samuel, Saul, and David each will wrestle with their own identity and deal with a few of their own failures and mistakes.

INTRODUCTION

What is amazing, though, is watching God use them in a big-way to still further His purposes.

And lastly, Israel transitions from tribal living to kingdom living.

God grants their request for a king and allows them to be established as a kingdom instead of being nomads wandering around the earth looking for a home.

However, God does this in a way that will help them see their need to stay dependent on Him as their true King, not in someone else who has their own flaws, struggles, and shortcomings.

So as we journey through this together, let's discover how Israel's inner battle with their identity and desires can be compared with how we find our true identity in God and not the world or our own ambitions and goals.

TEACH

When was a recent time when you had an answer to prayer?

Maybe it was for someone who was sick and needed healing or for help in a tough situation.

Regardless of the circumstance, there are times in our lives when we go to God in prayer and hope that He answers.

In the beginning of the book of **1 Samuel**, we will see two people who are asking God for help.

The first is a woman who wishes she was able to have a child.

The second is a group of people – the Israelites – who wish they had a leader to lead them and guide them in life.

As this opening scene is told, God answers both of these with the birth of Samuel.

Samuel plays a key role in the start of this story.

Not just as a new, young prophet, but also as the one who will appoint the first and second kings of Israel later in the story.

Before we get to that, let's stick with the idea of answered prayer.

Let's think about times in our lives when we have experienced an answer to prayer and how God has used that to help us know Him and draw closer to Him.

Discussion Questions

1. Have you or someone close to you ever experienced an answer to a prayer? How did God answer that prayer?
2. When you pray, how do you pray?
3. What do you pray for?

4. Do you think someone's prayer life reveals their view of God? If so, how?
5. Do your prayers sound the same or different when you are in need versus when you are not? How so?

Read **1 Samuel 1:1-20** (New Living Translation) – Samuel's Birth

1 There was a man named Elkanah who lived in Ramah in the region of Zuph in the hill country of Ephraim. He was the son of Jeroham, son of Elihu, son of Tohu, son of Zuph, of Ephraim.

2 Elkanah had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah did not.

3 Each year Elkanah would travel to Shiloh to worship and sacrifice to the Lord of Heaven's Armies at the Tabernacle. The priests of the Lord at that time were the two sons of Eli—Hophni and Phinehas.

4 On the days Elkanah presented his sacrifice, he would give portions of the meat to Peninnah and each of her children.

5 And though he loved Hannah, he would give her only one choice portion, because the Lord had given her no children.

6 So Peninnah would taunt Hannah and make fun of her because the Lord had kept her from having children.

7 Year after year it was the same—Peninnah would taunt Hannah as they went to the Tabernacle. Each time, Hannah would be reduced to tears and would not even eat.

8 "Why are you crying, Hannah?" Elkanah would ask. "Why aren't you eating? Why be downhearted just because you have no children? You have me—isn't that better than having ten sons?"

9 Once after a sacrificial meal at Shiloh, Hannah got up and went to pray. Eli the priest was sitting at his customary place beside the entrance of the Tabernacle.

10 Hannah was in deep anguish, crying bitterly as she prayed to the Lord.

11 And she made this vow: "O Lord of Heaven's Armies, if you will look upon my sorrow and answer my prayer and give me a son, then I will give him back to you. He will be yours for his entire lifetime, and as a sign that he has been dedicated to the Lord, his hair will never be cut."

12 As she was praying to the Lord, Eli watched her.

13 Seeing her lips moving but hearing no sound, he thought she had been drinking.

14 "Must you come here drunk?" he demanded. "Throw away your wine!"

15 "Oh no, sir!" she replied. "I haven't been drinking wine or anything stronger. But I am very discouraged, and I was pouring out my heart to the Lord.

16 Don't think I am a wicked woman! For I have been praying out of great anguish and sorrow."

17 "In that case," Eli said, "go in peace! May the God of Israel grant the request you have asked of him."

18 "Oh, thank you, sir!" she exclaimed. Then she went back and began to eat again, and she was no longer sad.

19 The entire family got up early the next morning and went to worship the Lord once more. Then they returned home to Ramah. When Elkanah slept with Hannah, the Lord remembered her plea,

20 and in due time she gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel for she said, "I asked the Lord for him."

21 The next year Elkanah and his family went on their annual trip to offer a sacrifice to the Lord and to keep his vow.

22 But Hannah did not go. She told her husband, "Wait until the boy is weaned. Then I will take him to the Tabernacle and leave him there with the Lord permanently."

23 “Whatever you think is best,” Elkanah agreed. “Stay here for now, and may the Lord help you keep your promise.” So she stayed home and nursed the boy until he was weaned.

24 When the child was weaned, Hannah took him to the Tabernacle in Shiloh. They brought along a three-year-old bull for the sacrifice and a basket of flour and some wine.

25 After sacrificing the bull, they brought the boy to Eli.

26 “Sir, do you remember me?” Hannah asked. “I am the very woman who stood here several years ago praying to the Lord.

27 I asked the Lord to give me this boy, and he has granted my request.

28 Now I am giving him to the Lord, and he will belong to the Lord his whole life.” And they worshiped the Lord there.

The first thing you can notice about this first passage in 1 Samuel is the idea of longing.

Hannah longs for a child and is unable to have one.

Interestingly, this is the first story we begin reading about in a bigger story of the nation of Israel that is also longing for something.

As we see, Hannah is grief-stricken by this. She feels unworthy in comparison to her husband’s other wife, who bears children.

You see, for a woman in this Biblical time period, bearing children and caring for them was one of the main roles that women held within society.

To not have this ability was to not feel like they were doing their job or their sole responsibility within a male-dominated culture.

Not being able to bear children was a huge issue for Hannah, especially because her husband’s other wife did have children.

So she prays to God and gives a vow to dedicate the child solely to God if He were to grant her a child.

Discussion Questions

1. Why was having a son so important to Hannah? How does this contribute to her understanding of her own identity?
2. When has God helped you or “remembered” you in a time of great need? What happened? How did God answer your prayer?
3. Did your prayer request, like Hannah’s, relate to something you find part of your identity in? If yes, how so?
4. How have you seen or experienced an answer to prayer paving the way for something bigger and much more amazing later on?

What’s incredible about this opening narrative is that Samuel later becomes instrumental in helping Israel step into its next phase of history, which becomes the establishment of the Davidic monarchy.

Through one woman’s grief and faith, a child is born that will help lead Israel into a better future that then paves the way for the Davidic line that ultimately leads to Jesus.

So as small or as minor as this story may seem, God has a way of bringing something good out of something that is hard, difficult, and full of pain, hurt, and sadness.

Let’s take a look at Samuel as he grows up, a bit, and see what we can learn from Samuel’s story.

Read **1 Samuel 3:1-21** (New Living Translation) – Samuel’s Calling

1 Meanwhile, the boy Samuel served the Lord by assisting Eli. Now in those days messages from the Lord were very rare, and visions were quite uncommon.

2 One night Eli, who was almost blind by now, had gone to bed.

3 The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was sleeping in the Tabernacle near the Ark of God.

4 Suddenly the Lord called out, “Samuel!”

“Yes?” Samuel replied. “What is it?”

“I didn’t call you,” Eli replied. “Go back to bed.” So he did.

6 Then the Lord called out again, “Samuel!” Again Samuel got up and went to Eli. “Here I am. Did you call me?”

“I didn’t call you, my son,” Eli said. “Go back to bed.”

7 Samuel did not yet know the Lord because he had never had a message from the Lord before.

8 So the Lord called a third time, and once more Samuel got up and went to Eli. “Here I am. Did you call me?” Then Eli realized it was the Lord who was calling the boy.

9 So he said to Samuel, “Go and lie down again, and if someone calls again, say, ‘Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.’” So Samuel went back to bed.

10 And the Lord came and called as before, “Samuel! Samuel!”

And Samuel replied, “Speak, your servant is listening.”

11 Then the Lord said to Samuel, “I am about to do a shocking thing in Israel.

12 I am going to carry out all my threats against Eli and his family, from beginning to end.

13 I have warned him that judgment is coming upon his family forever, because his sons are blaspheming God and he hasn’t disciplined them.

14 So I have vowed that the sins of Eli and his sons will never be forgiven by sacrifices or offerings

15 Samuel stayed in bed until morning, then got up and opened the doors of the Tabernacle as usual. He was afraid to tell Eli what the Lord had said to him.

16 But Eli called out to him, “Samuel, my son.”

“Here I am,” Samuel replied.

17 “What did the Lord say to you? Tell me everything. And may God strike you and even kill you if you hide anything from me!”

18 So Samuel told Eli everything; he didn’t hold anything back. “It is the Lord’s will,” Eli replied. “Let him do what he thinks best.”

19 As Samuel grew up, the Lord was with him, and everything Samuel said proved to be reliable.

20 And all Israel, from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south, knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the Lord.

21 The Lord continued to appear at Shiloh and gave messages to Samuel there at the Tabernacle.

Now this section talks about another huge part of Samuel’s life.

This is where Samuel receives his calling from the Lord and becomes a prophet of God, delivering God’s messages to the people.

However, as this section begins, we see that Samuel doesn’t initially recognize God’s voice.

In fact, he believes it to be Eli – the temple priest that his mother gave him to to care and watch over him.

However, it wasn’t Eli’s voice. It was God speaking to Samuel.

It wasn’t until Samuel got help and assistance from Eli that he was able to understand who was talking to him and recognize the voice.

There are many ways that God can talk to us and there are many ways that we probably have not recognized God’s voice in our lives.

But once we do, we can begin to listen and hear and understand what God is wanting to tell us ... and what He wants us to do.

And for Samuel, that includes God’s calling on his life.

Because when Samuel is able to recognize God’s voice, everything begins to fall into place.

God calls him to be a prophet and to speak His message boldly, not leaving anything out.

In this first instance, it was against Eli, the priest, and his house for his sons had not been acting appropriately.

This is a true test for Samuel to begin his calling and new identity as a prophet of God.

And it starts with recognizing God's voice.

Discussion Questions

1. GROUP ACTIVITY: How good are you with recognizing people's voices? Try this! Have someone from your small group close their eyes and have the rest of the group, one at a time, say something and see if one person can recognize that person's voice. Was it easy? Hard? Whose voice was the hardest to recognize? Why? *[You can do this once with regular voices and then have each person disguise their voice.]*
2. Why do you think Samuel had a hard time recognizing God's voice?
3. When have you been able to recognize God's voice, in your life? Did anyone have to have help from an "Eli"-type person to recognize God's voice?
4. After Samuel recognized God's voice, God gave him a message to share, and it wasn't a positive one. How do you think you have responded if you were Samuel?
5. Like Samuel, being a Christ-follower means that we are called to do hard things. How have you been led by God to do something that was hard or difficult for you?

Samuel's new identity is now found in God's calling on his life as a prophet and a messenger.

Because of this, God will now call Samuel to do many things in His name.

And as Samuel finds out, sometimes living in that calling can be hard.

And other times it can be an amazing opportunity to help and guide others in the calling God has given them in their lives.

As a prophet, Samuel will have to endure some hard times with Israel, where they clearly are ignoring God's voice in their life.

And God puts Samuel right there next to them to remind them to focus on doing the things that God has planned for them.

It reminds me of **Ephesians 2:10** that says:

For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

The things God calls us to do are good!

And even though this was written by Paul much later than **1 Samuel**, the principle is the same.

God wants His people to follow Him and not other things or other people.

God gives Samuel the task of helping the people of Israel to know what God is calling them to do – he becomes God's messenger to help Israel recognize God's true voice.

And it's this voice that Israel will struggle to consistently recognize throughout the Old Testament.

But before we talk more about that and how that leads to their first king, let's take a look at one more account from Samuel.

Read **1 Samuel 8:1-22** (New Living Translation) – Samuel's Obedience

1 As Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons to be judges over Israel.

2 Joel and Abijah, his oldest sons, held court in Beersheba.

3 But they were not like their father, for they were greedy for money. They accepted bribes and perverted justice.

4 Finally, all the elders of Israel met at Ramah to discuss the matter with Samuel.

5 "Look," they told him, "you are now old, and your sons are not like you. Give us a king to judge us like all the other nations have."

6 Samuel was displeased with their request and went to the Lord for guidance.

7 “Do everything they say to you,” the Lord replied, “for they are rejecting me, not you. They don’t want me to be their king any longer.

8 Ever since I brought them from Egypt they have continually abandoned me and followed other gods. And now they are giving you the same treatment.

9 Do as they ask, but solemnly warn them about the way a king will reign over them.”

10 So Samuel passed on the Lord’s warning to the people who were asking him for a king.

11 “This is how a king will reign over you,” Samuel said. “The king will draft your sons and assign them to his chariots and his charioteers, making them run before his chariots.

12 Some will be generals and captains in his army, some will be forced to plow in his fields and harvest his crops, and some will make his weapons and chariot equipment.

13 The king will take your daughters from you and force them to cook and bake and make perfumes for him.

14 He will take away the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his own officials.

15 He will take a tenth of your grain and your grape harvest and distribute it among his officers and attendants.

16 He will take your male and female slaves and demand the finest of your cattle and donkeys for his own use.

17 He will demand a tenth of your flocks, and you will be his slaves.

18 When that day comes, you will beg for relief from this king you are demanding, but then the Lord will not help you.”

19 But the people refused to listen to Samuel’s warning. “Even so, we still want a king,” they said.

21 So Samuel repeated to the Lord what the people had said,

22 and the Lord replied, “Do as they say, and give them a king.” Then Samuel agreed and sent the people home.

This new section talks about a time when Israel is desperately asking for a king.

Samuel relays God’s message of warning to the Israelites and plays mediator between them both.

This is a hard place to be.

Have you ever had to battle between two people that didn’t always see eye to eye?

Have you had to step into a situation, feeling like you know what they need but allowing them to still make their own decisions and hope they make it out okay?

This must have been how Samuel felt.

However, Samuel was still obedient to God and did what he was told, even when he felt like Israel was not making the best decision for themselves.

What we see here is Samuel’s obedience.

He could have come in like a true judge and scolded them for being ignorant to God’s kingship over them. He could have told them “no” and directed them to follow God or else.

However, God also told Samuel to give the people what they wanted, with a warning, and be there to support and guide them as he was able to.

This is such a test of faith and obedience for Samuel.

And one that Samuel will have to learn to navigate as the first king, Saul, begins to reign in both good ways and bad.

Discussion Questions

1. When did your parents let you learn the hard way by letting you have or do something they knew was not good for you?
2. What were the sins of Samuel's sons? What do you think they placed their identity in?
3. What reasons does Israel give in its request for a king?
4. What was wrong with their willful intent to have a king? What were kings of "other nations" like then?
5. Samuel was displeased with the request made by the Israelites for a king, but he still went to God for guidance. What does this teach us about how we should act?
6. Samuel listens, delivers the message, and does what God tells him to do. How does Samuel's obedience reflect his identity?

Samuel's role in this book is pivotal to the future of Israel.

Even with Israel's neglect of God's kingship, desiring a human king over God, Samuel becomes a stable figure for Israel to lean on.

Samuel had a hard job of being a voice for God to the nation of Israel and an advocate for the Israelites before God.

Samuel was one perseverant referee.

While trying to find balance between God's will and Israel's humanity, Samuel helps lead the way for Israel to be shaped into a stable nation, which opens the door for God's Son to be born into the world to bring hope, peace, joy and salvation.

So here's something to remember from Samuel's story.

Samuel's identity was found in God and not in his wants or desires.

Once Samuel recognized God's voice in his life, he learned to listen to it more than others.

And this is what makes him a good prophet that God used to help Israel.

Discussion Questions

1. If you had to give yourself a grade for how well you find your identity in God instead of in other things, how would you grade yourself?
2. What can we learn from Samuel that will help us be obedient to God as well?