

LifeChange

A NAVPRESS BIBLE STUDY SERIES

*A life-changing
encounter with God's Word*

1 & 2 SAMUEL

*God uses even our missteps to lead us
into His best ways.*

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NAVPRESS 

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1 & 2 Samuel

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Along with all the volumes in the LIFECHANGE series of Bible studies, this guide to 1 and 2 Samuel shares common goals:

1. To provide you with a firm foundation of understanding, plus a thirst to return to 1 and 2 Samuel throughout your life.
2. To give you study patterns and skills that help you explore every part of the Bible.
3. To offer you historical background, word definitions, and explanation notes to aid your study.
4. To help you grasp as a whole the message of both 1 and 2 Samuel.
5. To teach you how to let God's Word transform you into Christ's image.

As You Begin

This guide includes ten lessons, which will take you chapter by chapter through all of 1 and 2 Samuel. Each lesson is designed to take from one to two hours of preparation to complete on your own. To benefit most from this time, here's a good way to begin your work on each lesson:

1. Pray for God's help to keep you mentally alert and spiritually sensitive.
2. Read attentively through the entire passage mentioned in the lesson's title. (You may want to read the passage from two or more Bible versions — perhaps at least once from a more literal translation such as the New International Version, English Standard Version, New American Standard Bible, or New King James Version, and perhaps once more in a paraphrase such as *The Message* or the New Living Translation.) Do your reading in an environment that's as free as possible from distractions. Allow your mind and heart to meditate on these words you encounter, words that are God's personal gift to you and to all His people.

After reading the passage, you're ready to dive into the numbered questions in this guide that make up the main portion of each lesson. Each of these questions is followed by blank space for writing your answers. (This act of writing your answers helps clarify your thinking and stimulates your mental engagement with the passage, as well as your later recall.) Use extra paper or a notebook if the space for recording your answers seems too cramped. Continue through the questions in numbered order. If any question seems too difficult or unclear, just skip it and go on to the next.

Each of these questions will typically direct you back to 1 Samuel or 2 Samuel to look again at a certain portion of the assigned passage for that lesson. (At this point be sure to use a more literal Bible translation, rather than a paraphrase.)

As you look closer at this passage, it's helpful to approach it in this progression:

Observe. What does the passage actually *say*? Ask God to help you see it clearly. Notice everything that's there.

Interpret. What does the passage *mean*? Ask God to help you understand. And remember that any passage's meaning is fundamentally determined by its *context*. So stay alert to all you'll see about the setting and background of 1 and 2 Samuel, and keep thinking of these books as a whole while you proceed through them chapter by chapter. You'll be progressively building up your insights and familiarity with what they're all about.

Apply. Keep asking yourself, *How does this truth affect my life?* (Pray for God's help as you examine yourself in light of that truth and in light of His purpose for each passage.)

Try to consciously follow all three of these approaches as you shape your written answer to each question in the lesson.

The Extras

In addition to the regular numbered questions you see in this guide, each lesson also offers several "optional" questions or suggestions that appear in the margins. All of these will appear under one of three headings:

Optional Application. These are suggested options for application. Consider these with prayerful sensitivity to the Lord's guidance.

For Thought and Discussion. Many of these questions address various ethical issues and other biblical principles that lead to a wide range of implications. They tend to be particularly suited for group discussions.

For Further Study. These often include cross-references to other parts of the Bible that shed light on a topic in the lesson, plus questions that delve deeper into the passage.

(For additional help for more effective Bible study, refer to the "Study Aids" section starting on page 179.)

Changing Your Life

Don't let your study become an exercise in knowledge alone. Treat the passage as *God's Word*, and stay in dialogue with Him as you study. Pray, "Lord, what do You want me to notice here?" "Father, why is this true?" "Lord, how does my life measure up to this?"

Let biblical truth sink into your inner convictions so you'll increasingly be able to act on this truth as a natural way of living.

At times you may want to consider memorizing a certain verse or passage you come across in your study, one that particularly challenges or encourages you. To help with that, write down the words on a card to keep with you and set aside a few minutes each day to think about the passage. Recite it to yourself repeatedly, always thinking about its meaning. Return to it as often as you can, for a brief review. You'll soon find the words coming to mind spontaneously, and they'll begin to affect your motives and actions.

For Group Study

Exploring Scripture together in a group is especially valuable for the encouragement, support, and accountability it provides as you seek to apply God's Word to your life. As a group you can listen jointly for God's guidance, pray for each other, help one another resist temptation, and share the spiritual principles you're learning to put into practice. Together you affirm that growing in faith, hope, and love is important and that *you need each other* in the process.

A group of four to ten people allows for the closest understanding of each other and the richest discussions in Bible study, but you can adapt this guide for other sized groups. It will suit a wide range of group types, such as home Bible studies, growth groups, youth groups, and church classes. Both new and mature Christians will benefit from the guide, regardless of their previous experience in Bible study.

Aim for a positive atmosphere of acceptance, honesty, and openness. In your first meeting, explore candidly everyone's expectations and goals for your time together.

A typical schedule for group study is to take one lesson per week, but feel free to split lessons if you want to discuss them more thoroughly. Or omit some questions in a lesson if your preparation or discussion time is limited. (You can always return to this guide later for further study on your own.)

When you come together, you probably won't have time to discuss all the questions in the lesson, so it's helpful to choose ahead of time the ones you want to be sure to cover thoroughly. This is one of the main responsibilities that a group leader typically assumes.

Each lesson in this guide ends with a section called "For the Group." It gives advice for that particular lesson on how to focus the discussion, how to apply the lesson to daily life, and so on. Reading each lesson's "For the Group" section ahead of time can help the leader be more effective in guiding the group.

You'll get the greatest benefit from your time together if each group member also prepares ahead of time by writing out his or her answers to each question in the lesson. The private reflection and prayer that this preparation can stimulate will be especially important in helping everyone discern how God wants you to apply each lesson to your daily life.

There are many ways to structure the group meeting, and in fact you may want to vary your routine occasionally to help keep things fresh.

Here are some of the elements you can consider including as you come together for each lesson:

Pray together. It's good to pause for prayer as you begin your time together, as well as to incorporate a later more extensive time of prayer for each other, after you've had time to share personal needs and prayer requests (you may want to write these down in a notebook). When you begin with prayer, it's worthwhile and honoring to God to ask especially for His Holy Spirit's guidance of your time together.

Worship. Some groups like to sing together and worship God with prayers of praise.

Review. You may want to take time to discuss what difference the previous week's lesson has made in your lives as well as recall the major emphasis you discovered in the passage for that week.

Read the passage aloud. Once you're ready to focus attention together on the assigned Scripture passage in this week's lesson, read it aloud. (One person could do this, or the reading could be shared.)

Open up for lingering questions. Allow time for the group members to mention anything in the passage that they may have particular questions about.

Summarize the passage. Have one or two persons offer a summary of what the passage tells us about.

Discuss. This will be the heart of your time together, and will likely take the biggest portion of your time. Focus on the questions you see as the most important and most helpful. Allow and encourage everyone to be part of the discussion on each question. You may want to take written notes as the discussion proceeds. Ask follow-up questions to sharpen your attention and to deepen your understanding of what you discuss. You may want give special attention to the questions in the margin under the heading "For Thought and Discussion." Remember that sometimes these can be especially good for discussion, but be prepared for widely different answers and opinions. As you hear each other, keep in mind your various backgrounds and personalities and ways of thinking. You can practice godly discernment without ungodly judgment in your discussion.

Encourage further personal study. You can find more opportunities for exploring this lesson's themes and issues under the marginal heading "For Further Study" throughout the lesson. You can also pursue some of these together during your group time.

Focus on application. Look especially at the "Optional Application" listed in the margins throughout the lesson. Keep encouraging one another in the continual work of adjusting our lives to the truths God gives us in Scripture.

Summarize your discoveries. You may want to read aloud through the passage one last time together, using this opportunity to solidify your understanding and appreciation of it and to clarify how the Lord is speaking to you through it.

Look ahead. Glance together at the headings and questions in the next lesson to see what's coming.

Give thanks to God. It's good to end your time together by pausing to express gratitude to God for His Word and for the work of His Spirit in your minds and hearts during your time together.

Get to know each other better. In early sessions together, you may want to spend time establishing trust, common ground, and a sense of each other's background and what each person hopes to gain from the study. This may help you later with honest discussion about how the Bible applies to each of you. Understanding each other better will make it easier to share about personal applications.

Keep these worthy guidelines in mind throughout your time together:

Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

(HEBREWS 10:24)

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

(GALATIANS 6:2)

Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

(ROMANS 15:7)

THE BOOKS OF 1 & 2 SAMUEL

God's Kingdom Comes

The easily apparent purpose of the books of 1 and 2 Samuel is to preserve the history of God's work in establishing the kingdom of Israel three thousand years ago.

"In the books of Samuel, monarchy becomes a reality. Three dominant figures—Samuel the kingmaker, Saul the abortive king, David the ideal king—highlight its agonies as well as its ecstasies."¹

"The central theme of the books of Samuel is God's exercising of his cosmic kingship by inaugurating a David dynasty ('house') in Israel (2 Samuel 7; Psalm 89) . . . and by electing the holy city Zion (Jerusalem; 2 Samuel 6; Psalm 132) as the place where David's successor will establish the temple ('house') for the worship of the divine King Yahweh (see 2 Samuel 24:18)."²

It's fitting that a work that focuses on such an exalted subject should be frequently read and highly appreciated by God's people, as has traditionally been the case with 1 and 2 Samuel.

A Display of God's Love

The dramatic establishment of this kingdom is a further reflection of God's compassion toward Israel, especially after so many long decades of turmoil in its history.

"The period of the Judges shows the serious problems Israel had, both in its leadership and among the people as a whole. The books of Samuel show God's continued care for his people, in raising up for them a king whose job was to be their champion, representative, and example."³

"A major purpose of Samuel, then, is to define monarchy as a gracious gift of God to his chosen people."⁴

Energy and Motion

The story that conveys this larger context of the great new kingdom is a gripping one, filled with striking details and movement. “Sweeping change . . . is a hallmark of the Samuel narratives — change guided and energized by the Lord himself through fragile vessels of the likes of Samuel, Saul, and David.”⁵

Authorship

Some scholars believe that the same author or authors may well have composed the books of Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings. (In some ancient traditions, the two books of Samuel and the two books of Kings are presented as four parts of the same work.) However, the books themselves provide no clear indication of who their author is. Fortunately, identifying that author is unnecessary for understanding and highly appreciating their content.

Although we don’t have an authoritative description of how these books were first written or later arranged—or by whom—in 1 Chronicles 29:29 we read, “As for the events of King David’s reign, from beginning to end, they are written in the records of Samuel the seer, the records of Nathan the prophet and the records of Gad the seer.” These “records” from the prophets Samuel, Nathan, and Gad may well have formed at least the core of what we know today as 1 and 2 Samuel.

A connection is frequently noted between 1 and 2 Samuel and the Mosaic teaching and perspective in Deuteronomy, which is seen as a dominant theme throughout these books. “The books of Samuel were probably given their final form by someone deeply influenced by the theology of the Book of Deuteronomy.”⁶

Taken together, the text of 1 and 2 Samuel has about the same number of words as the later combined books of 1 and 2 Kings or of 1 and 2 Chronicles. Each of these three combined works—Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles—is only slightly shorter than the book of Jeremiah, the longest of all the Bible’s books (in terms of total words). So in sheer size alone, the combined work of 1 and 2 Samuel commands a prominent place in the Old Testament and in all of Scripture.

Interpreting Old Testament Narratives⁷

A narrative is a story. When we read a biblical narrative, we are reading part of the true story about God as He revealed Himself to people over the centuries. Here are some principles for interpreting any biblical narrative, particularly Old Testament ones:

1. Not every episode in Israel’s history is meant to teach an individual moral lesson. Sometimes a story is significant only as part of the whole history of God’s dealings with Israel.
2. Narratives record what happened, not necessarily what ought to happen every time. So again, a particular story may not have its own

moral. (For example, the fact that Hannah made a vow to dedicate Samuel may not be a timeless model for barren women.)

3. Not every detail of a narrative has deep significance. (The exact way Eli's sons exploited worshipers probably doesn't.) The point may be in the overall message. However, the point may not be clear until we carefully observe many details. (By comparing the sons' practices to the laws in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, we can see that their behavior violated not just general courtesy but express commands of God.)

4. Narratives often teach by clearly implying something without actually stating it. (We may infer that 1 Samuel 2:18-21 is meant to imply that the Lord rewarded Hannah for her generous gift of her son.) However, we should be wary of teachers who see "hidden" meanings that other Christians do not see.

5. A narrative will never imply something that another passage of Scripture explicitly contradicts or forbids. We use the plain teaching portions of Scripture to evaluate what happens in the narrative portions.

6. "All narratives are selective and incomplete. Not all the relevant details are always given (see John 21:25). What does appear in the narrative is everything that the inspired author thought important for us to know." (We must be content with our curiosity unsatisfied about details of Samuel's, Saul's, David's, and others' lives that the Scripture does not give.)

7. "Narratives are not written to answer all our theological questions. They have particular, specific, limited purposes and deal with certain issues, leaving others to be dealt with elsewhere in other ways." (The text doesn't address whether Eli was "saved" or "damned," and we shouldn't speculate.)

8. God is the main character (the hero) of all biblical narratives. The human beings are always secondary characters in a story about what God did.

Applying Old Testament Narratives⁸

Keep the following five guidelines in mind as you seek to apply Old Testament narratives to yourself:

1. What people do in narratives is not necessarily a good example to us. Frequently it is just the opposite (1 Samuel 4:3-4 is an instance of this).

2. Most of the characters in narratives are far from perfect, and so are their actions. This is true of obvious sinners like Eli and great men like David. Thus, we should not try to copy everything even David does. We should let the rest of Scripture, especially the New Testament, guide us in drawing lessons for application.

3. We are not always told at the end of a narrative whether what happened was good or bad. (Was it good or bad that the ark was captured?) We are expected to be able to decide that on the basis of what God has said directly elsewhere in the Scriptures.

(continued on page 14)

(continued from page 13)

4. In every case, God is speaking to and dealing with a particular person (such as Samuel, Eli, Saul, or David). We should not think we are supposed to do everything He tells someone in the narrative to do.

(For instance, since He commanded different tactics in almost every one of Israel's battles, we can't assume that we should adopt one or another of those tactics for one of our battles. Samuel's instructions to Saul in 1 Samuel chapters 13 and 15 are also specific to those situations.) Instead of looking for tactics to copy, we should focus on God's character, His aims, and the variety of His methods. We should pray for discernment from the Holy Spirit and uncoerced confirmation from other Christians before we apply a specific command (such as to wait, go forward, or make peace) to ourselves.

5. If God's Word illustrates a principle that the New Testament would uphold, then we can apply the principle to *genuinely comparable* situations in our own lives. Our task is to discern the principle accurately and make sure that our situations are truly comparable. This is not always easy, and it always requires wisdom from the Holy Spirit and guidance from the New Testament. Discussion with other discerning Christians also helps guard against error.

Timeline — From Samuel to Solomon

Birth of Samuel (1 Samuel 1:20)	1105 BC
Birth of Saul	1080
Saul anointed to be king (1 Samuel 10:1)	1050
Birth of David	1040
David anointed to be Saul's successor (1 Samuel 16:1-13)	1025
Saul's death; David begins reign over Judah in Hebron (2 Samuel 1:1; 2 Samuel 2:1,4,11)	1010
Birth of Solomon (2 Samuel 12:24)	991
David's death and beginning of Solomon's reign (2 Samuel 5:4-5; 1 Kings 2:10-11; 3:7; 11:42)	970
Solomon's death; Israel splits into Israel and Judah (1 Kings 11:41-12:24)	930

1. Ronald F. Youngblood, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 3, *1–2 Samuel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 557.
2. *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), introduction to 1–2 Samuel: “Theme.”
3. *ESV Study Bible*, introduction to 1–2 Samuel: “History of Salvation Summary.”
4. Youngblood, 558.
5. Youngblood, 560.
6. *New Geneva Study Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), introduction to 1 Samuel: “Author.”
7. Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 74–75, 78. Fee and Stuart’s book is the source for all the material in this sidebar.
8. Fee and Stuart, 78. Again, this book is the source for the material used in this sidebar.

1 SAMUEL

A Kingdom Born

First Samuel focuses on the dramatic stories of the three central characters in the kingdom's birth: Samuel, Saul, and David. Their stories are filled with triumph as well as tragedy—and their examples offer much for us to learn from.

Along with the purpose of highlighting the kingdom's establishment, “a second purpose of the book is to embody universal human experience as the means of teaching moral and spiritual lessons for all people at all times. Some of the lessons are individual and personal, involving (for example) the specific family situations of Eli, Saul, and David. But others apply to communities and nations, such as the lessons we learn about good and bad leadership for a people as seen in the conduct of Eli, Samuel, and Saul. Presented with such positive and negative examples, we can learn much about our daily lives by reading and pondering the book of 1 Samuel. Because the author is more interested in a few important figures than in groups and movements, we naturally remember the book partly by the characters who remain in our memory, especially Hannah, Eli, Samuel, Saul, Jonathan, and David.”¹

The compelling personalities of these key figures in 1 Samuel draw us into the story to closely observe each of them—for our lasting benefit. “First Samuel is a book of personalities, so paying close attention to characterization is important. Similarly, the book is rich in universal, recognizable human experience, with the result that building bridges between the world of the text and one's own experiences is an inviting approach to the book. Even though this book does not cover the vast spans of Israelite history that the other Old Testament historical chronicles cover, it provides in-depth analyses of what makes for good and bad leadership. What is true for leaders, moreover, is true for all individuals in their choices for or against God. A leading literary purpose of the book is to embody universal human experience as the means of teaching moral and spiritual lessons for all people at all times.”²

Ultimately—and most profoundly—1 Samuel points us to a future King. “First Samuel recounts the history of Israel at a very crucial stage of its existence. The crucial development in the nation was its unwillingness to have God as its only king. As we observe this phase of Israelite history, we are led to ponder what kind of rule we need and to conclude that only the eventual Son of David, Christ, is sufficient.”³

Overview

1. Leland Ryken and Philip Graham Ryken, eds., *The Literary Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), introduction to 1 Samuel: “The Book at a Glance.”
2. *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), introduction to 1–2 Samuel: “Literary Features.”
3. Ryken and Ryken, “1 Samuel as a Chapter in the Master Story of the Bible.”

1 SAMUEL 1-7

Samuel's Rise

1. For getting the most from 1 and 2 Samuel, one of the best guidelines is found in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, words Paul wrote with the Old Testament first in view. He said that *all* Scripture is of great benefit to (a) teach us, (b) rebuke us, (c) correct us, and (d) train us in righteousness. Paul added that these Scriptures completely equip the person of God “for every good work.” As you think seriously about those guidelines, in which of these areas do you especially want to experience the usefulness of 1 Samuel? Express your desire in a written prayer to God.

2. Glance ahead through the pages of 1 Samuel, and look for a recurring theme or thought in each of the following verses: 3:19; 10:7; 16:18; 17:37; 18:12; 20:13 (see also 2 Samuel 5:10; 7:3,9). What is that theme? Why is it important to God, and why is it important for all of God's people in all ages?

Optional Application: We read that after His resurrection, when Jesus was explaining Old Testament passages to His disciples, He “opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures” (Luke 24:45). Ask God to do that kind of work in *your* mind as you study 1 Samuel, so you're released and free to learn everything here He wants you to learn — and so you can become as bold and worshipful and faithful as those early disciples of Jesus were. Express this desire to Him in prayer.

For Further Study:

The book of Judges gives important background to the events of 1 Samuel. Read Judges 1:1–3:6 (which describes the overall pattern of events during the period of the judges), 6:1-6 (which explains the severity of the foreign oppression Israel suffered), and 19:1–20:48 (which recounts the nation’s internal difficulties). What important information do you discover in these passages?

Optional

Application: Just as God’s presence with David is a major theme throughout 1 and 2 Samuel, so David was able to say to God, “I will fear no evil, for you are with me” (Psalm 23:4). What to you is the greatest indication of God’s presence with you? And what to you is the greatest benefit of His presence?

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3. In one sitting if possible, read through the first seven chapters of 1 Samuel. What two or three things stand out most to you from your reading?

Hannah and Samuel (1 Samuel 1:1–2:12)

4. How would you describe Hannah’s plight, as we see it in 1:1-7?

5. a. In 1:9-11 and 1:15-16, what attitudes does Hannah show toward her situation?

- b. In those same verses, what attitudes toward the Lord does Hannah demonstrate?

Ramathaim (1:1). Perhaps another name for Ramah (see 1:19; 2:11). It is probably the Ramah in Benjamin about five miles north of Jerusalem.

Ephraimite (1:1). Since his son became a priest, Elkanah was probably a Levite whose family belonged to the clans that had been allotted towns in Ephraim (see Joshua 21:20-21).¹

Two wives (1:2). Having more than one wife at once was never the rule in the ancient world, and only kings had large harems. Yet several Old Testament figures, such as Abraham and Jacob, had more than one wife. The reasons for polygamy were more cultural and economic than erotic. When organized government was weak or nonexistent and each family had to care for itself, a large number of children was often considered a necessity. Thus when one wife failed to bear children for her husband, he might take another also (see Genesis 16:1-4; 25:1-4). Even in the case of monarchs, marriages were often more a means of sealing an alliance than anything else (see 1 Kings 3:1). So polygamy, while never God's purpose for the human race, should not be regarded in itself as a sign of immorality.

Year after year (1:3). Every Israelite male was required to attend festivals at the central sanctuary three times a year (see Deuteronomy 16:16-17). Elkanah probably brought his wives to the Feast of Tabernacles, when the nation celebrated God's blessing on the year's fertility of crops and herds (see Deuteronomy 16:13-15). This would have been an especially sad time for a barren woman.

The LORD Almighty (1:3). "The LORD of hosts" in KJV and NASB. "Hosts" are armies of men or angels (the word is also used of the sun, moon, and stars). The books of Samuel emphasize that the Lord is the commander of both the armies of Israel and the armies of heaven.

LORD's House (1:9). Solomon did not build a permanent structure for the Lord's worship

For Further Study: Barrenness was a common source of grief to women in the ancient East. Read about the feelings and actions of other barren women in Genesis 16:1-16, 18:10-15, and 30:1-24. Why did God permit the barrenness in each case, and how was it overcome?

Optional Application: In prayer, Hannah showed her willingness to consecrate to the Lord something very precious to her. How does this desire affect your own prayer life?

For Thought and Discussion: At least six other children in the Bible are conceived by special acts of God: Isaac, Jacob and Esau, Samson, John the Baptist, and Jesus. What might be significant about this pattern?

For Further Study:

The book of Ruth gives a glimpse of everyday life a few decades before Samuel’s birth. What can you learn in the book of Ruth about the role of women and children in Israel’s history?

For Thought and Discussion:

What does it mean to call God a “Rock” (see 2:2)?

For Further Study:

Compare 1 Samuel 2:1-10 with the song of Mary in Luke 1:46-55. What is similar about the causes and contents of each song? How might Hannah’s song have influenced Mary’s?

Optional Application:

How would you describe what it means personally for you to be able to say with Hannah, “My heart rejoices in the LORD” (1 Samuel 2:1)?

until about a century later (see 1 Kings 6:1). Before this, the tabernacle—an elaborate royal tent—served as the nation’s sanctuary. After Israel settled in Canaan, the tabernacle was apparently erected at Shiloh more or less permanently until the time of David. In these circumstances, it may have become “part of a larger, more permanent building complex to which the term ‘temple’ could legitimately be applied.”² (Notice the mention of sleeping quarters and doors in 3:2,15.)

No razor (1:11). In dedicating her future son to the Lord, Hannah placed him under a Nazirite vow (like Samson in Judges 13:2-5). This vow was a way of expressing one’s devotion or gratitude to the Lord, but it normally involved only a limited period of time rather than one’s whole life (see Numbers 6:1-21; Acts 21:20-26).

Weaned (1:22). It was normal to nurse children for three years or more, since animal’s milk could

Note how songs of praise frame the beginning and end of the books of Samuel—here in 1 Samuel 2:1-10, and in 2 Samuel 22:1-51. Together these passages express the theology of the work in song form.

not be refrigerated for children to drink.³

6. What are the most important truths about God that Hannah declares in her prayer in 2:1-10? What are the most important truths about mankind that she declares in this prayer?

7. How would you describe Hannah's character and personality as revealed in chapters 1 and 2? What were her deepest desires?

8. Summarize the major events of Samuel's childhood as narrated in 1:21-28, 2:11, and 3:1-19.

Eli and Samuel (1 Samuel 2:12-3:21)

9. a. What are the most important facts revealed about Eli and his sons in 2:12-36? What is revealed about God in this passage?

- b. To what degree might Eli have been responsible for his sons' conduct (see 2:22-25; 3:13)?

Optional

Application: In the truths that Hannah declares in her prayer in 2:1-10, what do you most want to praise God for and give Him thanks for?

For Thought and Discussion:

Who do you think the author wishes to emphasize as the most important person in the opening two chapters in 1 Samuel? How does he underscore this person's significance?

Optional

Application: How did Hannah demonstrate faith in entrusting her only son to be raised by a man with Eli's record as a father? How can you show similar faith in something God wants you to do?

For Thought and Discussion:

What can the cases of Hannah's and Eli's sons teach us about a parent's responsibility for the spiritual nurture of children? (See also Samuel's own parenting example in 8:1-5.)

Practice of the priests (2:13). It was right to have a way to get a fair portion of fellowship offerings for the priests (see Leviticus 7:28-36), but 1 Samuel 2:15-16 shows an abuse of a fair practice. The Law specified boiled meat for the

For Thought and Discussion: On what did Samuel's success as a prophet and leader of Israel depend, according to 1 Samuel 2:19-21? How is this relevant to leaders today? How is it relevant to you?

Optional Application: How can you show yourself to be as ready as Samuel was to receive God's word?

priests (see Numbers 6:19-20). Roasting was not forbidden, but it was unreasonable for Eli's sons to refuse boiled meat (see 1 Samuel 2:15). Furthermore, the Law required that the Lord's portion be burned first before the priests got their share, but Eli's sons wanted their first (see 1 Samuel 2:15-16). Finally, they were threatening force (see 1 Samuel 2:16), but the gift to them was supposed to be voluntary.

10. Why do you think the story of how kingship in Israel was established begins with the birth and dedication of Samuel and the curse upon Eli's house?

Man of God (2:27). A way of referring to a prophet.

Ancestor's family (2:27). The descendants of Aaron.

I will raise up for myself a faithful priest (2:35).

“While the statement in 3:20 that Samuel was ‘established’ as a prophet of the Lord suggests Samuel may have been the fulfillment of this prediction, the clearer fulfillment comes in the person of Zadok, who served as high priest alongside Abiathar under David (2 Samuel 8:17) and came to later preeminence under Solomon (1 Kings 2:35).”⁴

11. In 2:27-36, how would you summarize the message of the man of God to Eli?

12. Consider the night and following morning described in 3:1-18, and summarize and outline what Eli and Samuel experienced. What is revealed about God in this passage?

For Thought and Discussion: How do you think God wanted Eli to respond to His warnings in 2:27-36 and 3:11-14?

The lamp of God (3:3). This golden lampstand stood in the Holy Place of the tabernacle. The priests were to never let the lamp go out before morning (see Leviticus 24:1-4).

13. How is Samuel's spiritual character and growth described in 3:1-21?

14. Samuel "did not yet know the LORD" (3:7). To "know" someone in Hebrew signified intimate, direct relationship. After his experiences in chapter 3, in what sense did Samuel "know" the Lord in a way that he hadn't before?

15. How does God's revelation to Samuel in 3:11-14 compare to what He had already revealed to Eli through the man of God in 2:27-36?

For Further Study:

Samuel was “attested as a prophet of the LORD” (1 Samuel 3:20). How is the prophet Samuel associated with Moses in Psalm 99:6 and Jeremiah 15:1?

For Thought and Discussion:

Samuel’s name sounds like the Hebrew for “heard of God.” How is this relevant to Samuel’s ministry in Israel?

From Dan to Beersheba (3:20). A way of referring to the whole land of Israel and its people. Dan was in the far north and Beersheba in the far south.

16. What is most significant in the statements made about Samuel in 3:19-21?

Samuel was attested as a prophet of the LORD (3:20). Samuel the prophet became “the person God used to establish kingship in Israel. Samuel not only anointed both Saul and David, Israel’s first two kings, but he also gave definition to the new order of God’s rule over Israel that began with the incorporation of kingship into its structure. Samuel’s importance as God’s representative in this period of Israel’s history is close to that of Moses (see Psalm 99:6; Jeremiah 15:1) since he, more than any other person, provided for covenant continuity in the transition from the rule of the judges to that of the monarchy.”⁵

The Ark — Captured, Then Returned

(1 Samuel 4–6)

17. a. In 1 Samuel 4:1-11, what made it possible for the Philistines to capture the ark of God, and how did they do it?

b. What explanation can be found in Deuteronomy 28:15,25 for Israel’s defeat by the Philistines in 4:2?

For Thought and Discussion: Israel often experienced military defeats in times of spiritual decay. In the Christian life, what is the correlation between our unfaithfulness to God and the experience of hardships in life? What has been your experience in this?

Philistines (4:1). These traditional enemies of Israel are thought to have settled on the southern coastal plain of the Promised Land between 1500 and 1200 BC. Their five major cities (Ashdod, Gaza, Gath, Ashkelon, and Ekron) formed a strong political-military coalition. They were also technologically superior to Israel (see 1 Samuel 13:19-22). Their political, military, and technological strength made them a continuing threat to the Hebrew tribes.

The ark of the Lord's covenant (4:3). A box or chest, on the top of which were the figures of two angels (see Exodus 25:10-22). The ark contained the stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were inscribed, along with certain other objects from the time of Israel's wilderness wanderings. It was considered the most sacred of all of the tabernacle's furnishings and symbolized God's presence in the midst of His people. The use of the ark in the overthrow of Jericho (see Joshua 6:2-21) may have encouraged Israel to try to employ it against the Philistines. The Israelites' decision to carry the ark into battle reflected a pagan belief that a god was identified with the symbol of his presence, and that his help could automatically be secured by manipulating his symbol.⁶

For Further Study: Observe how God's glory departs from Israel in Ezekiel 10:3-11:25 and the reasons mentioned there. How does the situation in Ezekiel compare to that in 1 Samuel 4?

18. a. How did the Philistines react to the news that the ark was coming into battle (see 4:5-9)?

For Thought and Discussion: From the initial perspective of the Philistines, what was proved by their capture of the ark? But from God's perspective, what was demonstrated by the ark's capture?

b. What did they apparently know about the God of Israel? How do you think their victory over Israel affected their opinion about the Lord?

19. In 4:12-18, how did Eli's death come about?

20. In the description in 4:19-22, what is the significance of Eli's daughter-in-law's experience?

21. From chapters 5 and 6, summarize what happened in the Philistines' experience with the ark of God and the circumstances of how they sent it back to Israel.

22. What parallels do you see between the events involving the ark while it was among the Philistines (in chapter 5) and those that occurred when it was being returned to Israel (see 6:19-7:1)?

Dagon (5:2). Probably the grain god and principle deity of the middle Euphrates region (upriver from Babylon). Dagon's worship spread to Canaan, and he became the chief god of the Philistines (see Judges 16:21,23,26; 1 Chronicles 10:10). In Canaanite mythology, Dagon was the son (or brother) of El and the father of Baal.⁷

To this day (5:5). The time when 1 and 2 Samuel were written.

23. How could the Philistines tell that the ark's return to Israel was sovereignly directed by the Lord (see 6:1-12)?

Beth Shemesh (6:9,12-13). A town of Judah near the Philistine border.

24. From all that happened in relation to the ark both in Philistia and in Israel, what new understanding would the people have gained of what the ark represented?

"A key theme of the ark narratives (1 Samuel 4-7) is that God refuses to be manipulated. Carrying the ark into battle

For Thought and Discussion: What kind of attitude on the part of the Philistines toward the God of Israel is suggested in chapters 4-6?

For Further Study: Reflect on Samuel's call to the people (in 7:3) to return to the Lord with all their hearts. How does this compare with what you see in these passages: Deuteronomy 6:4-5; 11:1,13,22; 19:9; 30:6,16,20; Joshua 22:5; 23:11?

For Thought and Discussion: The books of 1 and 2 Samuel stress the importance of the chosen leader in the lives of God's people. In what ways do you see this emphasis in the rest of Scripture?

For Thought and Discussion: From a biblical perspective, what are the most important factors in having a correct attitude toward human leaders, both political and religious?

does not guarantee an Israelite victory (see 4:3-11), placing the ark in a Philistine temple does not ensure divine blessing (see 5:1-6:12), and looking into the ark brings death (see 6:19; see also 2 Samuel 6:6-7).⁸

Samuel's Leadership (1 Samuel 7)

25. In your own words, how would you describe the spiritual state of Israel as indicated in 7:2 and the reasons for it?

Baals and Ashtoreths (7:4). Baal and Ashtoreth were the most important male and female Canaanite gods. The word *baal* literally meant “lord,” “master,” “owner,” or “husband,” but the term came to be applied to the deity who supposedly presided over thunder and rain, and so determined the fertility of the soil. Ashtoreth (also called Ashtaroth, Astarte, and Ishtar), was the goddess of war, love, and fertility. The worship of both Baal and Ashtoreth included immoral practices such as ritual sex and other magical rites to attain fertility. The Lord’s prophets spared no effort to combat worship of these idols. (See, for example, the battle over rain and fire power in 1 Kings 17:1-18:46.) The plural terms “Baals and Ashtoreths” probably referred to the stone pillars and wooden poles used to represent the deities in their shrines.

Mizpah (7:5). A town in Benjamin, about 7.5 miles north of Jerusalem.

26. In 7:6, how did the Israelites show their determination to seek the Lord only?

27. How would you compare the Israelites' attitude in 7:7-8 with their earlier words in 4:3?

Drew water and poured it out before the LORD (7:6). The meaning of this ceremony is uncertain. In 2 Samuel 23:13-17, it seemed for David to be an offering to the Lord as well as a symbol of the blood of men who had risked their lives to do him a kindness. Here in 7:6, the Israelites may have been expressing sorrow, humility, and repentance for their desperate condition (compare 1 Samuel 1:15; Psalm 62:8; Lamentations 2:19).

Leader (7:6). Traditionally, “judge.” This was Israel’s highest political office after the time of Joshua and before the inauguration of the monarchy. A judge had judicial and military authority over whole tribes or even the entire nation. Unlike kingship, the office of judge was not hereditary. Rather, each judge was chosen and empowered by God. However, their divine appointment did not normally make them priests or give them the right to serve as spiritual leaders or as mediators between God and His people. Samuel exercised religious as well as judicial authority for these reasons: His mother had consecrated him to God’s service; he was probably of a priestly family; he grew up with Eli the priest; and he was gifted as a prophet as well as a judge.

For Thought and Discussion: What lessons for our lives today can we draw from the fact that the Lord sometimes miraculously intervenes on behalf of His people (as in 7:7-11)?

Optional Application: Look again at what the people urged Samuel to do in 7:8. In what situations in your life is this something you need to do, on behalf of others or for your own sake?

For Thought and Discussion: What do chapters 5-7 suggest about the extent to which God’s honor depends on the obedience of His people?

28. How did God convince Israel to accept and appreciate Samuel's leadership (7:7-17)? What do you think the Lord's actions in verse 10 were meant to teach Israel?

Lesson Overview

29. What would you select as the key verse or passage in 1 Samuel 1–7—one that best captures or reflects the dynamics of what these chapters are all about?

30. List any lingering questions you have about 1 Samuel 1–7.

For the Group

In your first meeting, it may be helpful to turn to the front of this book and review together the “How to Use This Guide” section.

You may want to focus part of your discussion for lesson 1 on the following overall key themes for 1 Samuel. How do you see these themes developing in chapters 1–7? And what other recurring themes have you noticed?

- Divine providence—God's sovereign oversight of human and national destiny
- The destructive effects of sin
- Obedience to God
- The kingdom of God
- Leadership
- Defining success and failure

The following numbered questions in lesson 1 may stimulate your best and most helpful discussion: 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 24, 25, 28, 29, and 30.

Look also at the questions in the margin under the heading “For Thought and Discussion.”

1. *NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1985), on 1 Samuel 1:1.
2. *NIV Study Bible*, on 1 Samuel 1:9.
3. *NIV Study Bible*, on 1 Samuel 1:22.
4. *New Geneva Study Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), on 1 Samuel 2:35.
5. *NIV Study Bible*, introduction to 1 Samuel: “Title.”
6. *NIV Study Bible*, on 1 Samuel 4:3.
7. Geoffrey Bromiley, ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), s.v. “Dagon”; *NIV Study Bible*, on 1 Samuel 5:2.
8. Ronald F. Youngblood, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelien, vol. 3, *1-2 Samuel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 561.