

Starved for God's Greatness: *An Introduction to 1 Samuel* Judges 2:6-23

"In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."

Introduction: We live in an amazing time. We can travel across the country in mere hours, a venture that my grandparents traversed in weeks. We can have immediate communication with loved ones around the world, seeing their face in real time, having up to the second knowledge of what is going on in their life. Gone are the days when a letter would have to travel on a ship to get to its destination a month later. Instead of lugging encyclopedia Britannica's around, we have instant access to a treasure trove of information. With the invention of *search engines* like Google we can look up information on a given subject and have more than we could ever read at our finger tips in fractions of seconds. No longer do we have to sift through files and reference books at the library since we can search more from the comfort of our homes and handheld devices.

But for all the advances in being able to search, every single person today still longs to find the same exact thing. We are all looking for meaning, purpose, fulfillment, and satisfaction. We try to make sense of this world, and either live out a passive reality or try to proactively scratch our way out of circumstances, but we all end up in the same place. Each generation will try their hand at this search, looking into **philosophy, drugs, and "free" sex**, thinking they have found the secret. But at the end of this is like looking for gold on Oak Island, a little swath of land off of Nova Scotia that has had treasure hunters pour millions of dollars and even lose their lives searching for a legendary gold stash that has never actually been seen or found. Today we look around at the *insanity* of this search, where there is no end to depravity or immorality, but people are *making up evil*, not content with "natural" sexual immorality, but now are mutilating themselves and their children to try to find elusive happiness. We can stand back and ask, "What is going on?", but the simple answer is: *we know exactly what is happening around us, we should not be shocked, and should respond with compassion, seeing it all with a lens of opportunity rather than judgment.*

In all the searching, we see the continual ploy of our enemy. He has systematically broken down the structure of the home, celebrated rebellion against the Lord ('you were made this way???' 'you surely don't have to stay that way!'), and normalized the approval of evil. All of this being is framed as a search for meaning and happiness. What God has always intended for our good, for our joy, and for the deepest meaning and purpose of worshipping Him, our enemy and world turns into an expression of high handed rebellion against God Himself. And this has lead to untold, unmitigated, and unstoppable misery, anxiety, anger, and hopelessness.

This is why we are preaching through **1 Samuel**. Now, more than ever, we need to recapture the greatness of God and to show people the glory of God, the goodness of Jesus Christ, and the hope of salvation. John Piper said it this way, *"People are starving for the greatness of God. But most of them would not give this diagnosis of their troubled lives. The majesty of God is an unknown cure. There are far more popular prescriptions on the market, but the benefit of any other remedy is brief and shallow. Preaching that does not have the aroma of God's greatness may entertain for a season, but it will not touch the hidden cry of the soul: "Show me thy glory!"*¹

Why do we preach, and why would we preach the Old Testament?

¹ John Piper, *"The Supremacy of God in Preaching"*, p. 9

If you are new to our church, it's good to know not only what you are in for, but why we do what we do. The whole of our worship together is aimed at the glory of God through the person and work of Jesus Christ through the guidance of the Holy Spirit through the faithful proclamation of the Word of God. In our search for the answers for life and hope for our souls, the last thing you need is hear life coaching from me or any of our pastors/elders. Sure, these are good men with wisdom, but none of us have in ourselves answers to what you need the most. **Alistair Begg** put it this way:

*"(We preach so) that God's Word will be doing God's work by God's Spirit in God's people through the words of a **frail, fallen, passing spokesman**. And in light of that, I then take for myself the words of Newton to his congregation in the 18th century. He said to them, as I say to you, **'To your Bibles I appeal. I entreat, I charge you receive nothing upon my word, any further than I can prove it from the Word of God; and bring every preacher and every sermon...you hear to that same standard.'**"*

We take preaching seriously because we take God's Word seriously, knowing that it is God's Word that is sufficient to change us, and carries the authority of the Spirit to transform us from the inside out. You will see different men preach, especially this summer, and that is an extraordinarily good thing. Each person preaching God's Word is frail, fallen, and passing, and we simply work hard to present the Word clearly, passionately, and truthfully. In fact, all that we do in worship is bathed in God's Word, from kid's ministry to singing, since God's Word is powerful, not people or programs.

*But isn't the Old Testament, like, old? How is that relevant to my life? How is THAT applicable to my family, job, and what's going on in our culture? Great questions (that you may or may not have asked). We remember that the WHOLE of Scripture is inspired by God, revealed to us, and useful for all of life. **2 Timothy 3:14-16** says it this way: "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, **which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus**. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for **teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness**, that the man of God **may be complete, equipped** for every good work."*

Now these sacred writings certainly point to the whole canon of Scripture, including the New Testament, but they directly point to the Old! Not only does the Old Testament help us teach, reprove, correct, and train in righteousness, but they are given to make us wise for salvation by faith in Christ Jesus. In other words, the Old Testament points us to Christ by showing us who God is, what He demands, how we fall short, and how we need Someone else to take our place! The whole of Scripture is one overarching story of redemption, God's story of bringing back sinful, rebellious, and wicked people back to Himself with the pointer always shining on the person and work of Jesus. This is why **Romans 15:4** says, "For whatever was written in **former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of Scriptures we might have hope.**" The Old Testament is bedrock, it helps us endure and to hope in the promises of God through the fulfillment of Jesus Christ. Whenever a church or individual jettisons the Old Testament, they will inevitably jettison the Biblical Jesus and falsify the gospel.

So we will preach the Old Testament, because it is intensely relevant and displays the greatness of God. James Stewart, the Scottish preacher, said the aims of all genuine preaching is "to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God." In

other words, **God is the goal of preaching, God is the ground of preaching --- and all the means in between are given by the Spirit of God.**"²

What is 1 Samuel about?

1 and 2 Samuel explain the historical events around 1050 B.C., and give an account of the rise of the **united monarchy**, a time of unparalleled success and influence for the nation of Israel, to the beginnings of its demise. It is given to us in *narrative form*, which makes it unique from our study in Ephesians. Ephesians was an *epistle*, a letter written from the Apostle Paul to a specific church with clear commands and objectives. With OT narrative, we will not see a bunch of commands that we can apply directly or definitions of certain words. What we will see is what happened, how God moved in history to accomplish His will, how obedience by faith bred joy, and how disobedience and rebellion led to misery and mental anguish. More importantly we will see how this narrative moved history specifically toward the coming of Messiah, and how the people in the time Samuel were looking for a king, and God delivered a King of Kings centuries later, the One that gives us life today by faith in Jesus.

1 Samuel tells the story of **3 main leaders**: Samuel, a prophet of God's grace, in chapters 1-7; Saul, a king in God's place, in chapters 8-14; and finally David, a man after God's own heart, in chapters 15-31 (and all of 2 Samuel). Each section has a summary section (7:15-17; 14:47-52; 2 Sam. 8:15-17), telling of the scope and time that each man had leadership responsibility. There are many principles to glean and lessons to learn from each, but each played a pivotal role in God moving history along to the birth and presentation of Jesus Christ as king.

But to get a true understanding of the setting of 1 Samuel, and thus a picture of the similarities between our place in history and what took place over 3000 years ago, we turn to **Judges 2:6-23** for context. Why start in Judges? 1 Samuel starts off with a bang, dropping right into the story of Hannah and Samuel without a lead in, which makes for great story telling but leaves the reader searching for surrounding material. If we remember our OT history timeline, we'll remember that God fulfilled His promise to Abraham partially (Gen. 12:1-3) by bringing the people of Israel into the land of Canaan. We remember that to Abraham and Sarah was given Isaac, even after her barren years. Isaac had Jacob and Esau, and out of Jacob came 12 sons, who would inherit 12 distinct plots in the land of promise. However, Israel first spent 400 years enslaved in Egypt, where God brought them up and out under the leadership of Moses, wandering in the Wilderness for 40 years until all the adults who left Egypt had died. Then under the courageous leadership of Joshua, the wandering people took permanent residence in a land that they had heard about and had never seen. The objective was clear: ***trust the Lord, take the land full of fortified cities and armies, wipe them all out and set up a kingdom to worship the Lord only, becoming a light to all the nations around of the goodness and glory of the One true God!*** God would give them dwellings they had not built, vineyards they did not plant, and where they would lack for nothing (Deut. 8:9-10). God is a good God delighting in giving good gifts to His kids, and Israel was the recipient of this goodness, even though they deserved none of it (Deut. 7:6-11).

As long as Israel believed the Lord and acted obediently in that belief, things went well, exactly as God had promised. But Israel is just like we are today: *they struggled to trust the Lord completely and continually took matters into their own hands*. Under the leadership of Joshua, the people thrived, but we are always one generation away from apostasy:

² Piper, p. 20

*“When Joshua dismissed the people, the people of Israel went each to his inheritance to take possession of the land. **And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen the great work that the Lord had done for Israel.**” Judges 2:6-7*

But this high point did not last long. The point of Israel entering the land was NOT so they'd enjoy the LAND, but worship the GOD who brought them into the land. God gives us gifts to enjoy Him, not to neglect Him. God did not say wipe out the inhabitants of the land because He's mean, but because He wanted the whole heart of His people. But after the death of Joshua and his elders, the people reverted: *“And there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel.”* (Judges 2:10) Rebellion against the Lord can be overt and high handed, or it can be a death by a thousand cuts, slowly diminishing until faith and trust vanish entirely. Look in the rest of this chapter to see the spiritual condition of the people at the beginning of 1 Samuel:

- **Half-hearted obedience kills** (Judges 1:21, 27, 29, 30-33) – The people took the land, but not completely, NOT driving out the inhabitants of the land completely. Lethargy to God's commands leads to half-hearted commitment to Him, which He hates. This is why the Psalmist asked for an UNDIVIDED heart (Psalm 86:11)
- **Forgetfulness is the enemy of faith** (Judges 2:10) – God had intentionally had the people set up Memorial Stones (Joshua 4) so that when children would ask what God had done when they crossed the Jordan River, they could tell of the greatness of their mighty God. We will see in 1 Samuel that it is the highest priority of parents to teach their children a full picture of the glory of God. When we forget about God, either actively or passively, we are on the path of destruction.
- **Cannot hold onto God and sin simultaneously** (2:11-12) – The people kept the FORM of godliness – they still had past vestiges of ceremonies and memorials, but they **ABANDONED God** and did evil in the sight of the LORD to serve Baals. There is a completely wrong and deceptive thinking that we can somehow have God and please Him while holding onto our sin or living like the world around us.
- **Comparison fed the wrong desire** (2:12-13) – Because they left influences around them, they continually wanted to BE LIKE THE WORLD AROUND THEM. They served their gods. They adopted their practices. They *whored after and bowed down to worship idols!* (2:17). **Why is the world around us so alluring?** Whether its social media today or those living next door, lifestyles are presented as luxurious, worry free, and happy. We look at families on social media thinking that whatever this family is doing must be working because they are fit, happy, have plenty of money and kids who want to be with them. I want that! Behind the scenes it can all be falling apart, but the appearance is pristine. The reality is this: we know that living life apart from God CANNOT BREED WHAT WE ACTUALLY CRAVE. It will all end up in misery and pain. Israel believed the lie, as does everyone who seeks ultimate meaning, happiness, and joy apart from God in Christ.
- **Disobedience led to cyclical evil and man-centered living** – If you take anything away from the study this morning, remember this: the further away that we get from an active trust in the sovereign goodness of God, the further away we are from the solution to our sin and angst, the more misery, hopelessness, and mental anxiety we will find. There is a growing number of cases of mental health issues among young people and old alike, and any solution that does not drive people back to a glorious, sovereign, caring, loving, and embracing God will merely bandage a mortal wound or add infection to it. God is the answer...not a cheap and easy one, but the ultimate one.

What was the pattern of the people in the book of Judges? *“The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD”* (2:11, 3:7, 3:12, 4:1, 6:1, 8:34; 10:6; 13:1). What did God do? Took pity on the people and raised up Judges (2:18), and when the Judge died, the people reverted, and round and round they went. Judges points out that there was no king in the day (Judges 18:1, 19:1), but there is an even more telling phrase in 17:6 and the last verse of the whole book, 21:25: ***In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.***” If that is not a summation of the culture in Israel at the start of 1 Samuel, and OUR OWN CULTURE, I don’t know what is. The true reality was Israel DID have a king, God Himself, but the people rejected Him and set a course to on their own. This meant that it could only lead to a lack of rest (Deut. 12:8) and foolishness (Prov. 12:15 – ***The way of the fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to counsel.***)

What will we learn in 1 Samuel

There is a great temptation to moralize the OT, seeing the whole on one plain of what to do or not to do. Or others only see representative language, a view that sees everything pointing directly to a spiritual lesson. We will try to stay away from both poles. But what DO we want to learn?

- **God’s Greatness in Working Out His Will** – “Our God is in the heavens; He does all that He pleases” (Ps. 115:3). God is always working out His will, which ultimately brings Him glory, but He does it in His timing and way, including providing kings for His people (Deut. 17:14-20). God is in control of all things, from timing, fertility, and poverty. He always does what is best and always functions according to His nature. In 1 Samuel we will see God’s greatness on display as He fulfilled His promises to Israel and positioned them for greatness in the world. We want to be able to see and wonder at who He is, to feed our starving minds and hearts with the greatness of God.
- **Blessings that come in trusting God in all things** – The more we trust in God’s sovereign hand, His goodness and the fact that He’s doing all things for our good, the more we will be at rest, find contentment, and have joy. When we fight against God’s will or think that He has forgotten us or withholds from us, joy will be fleeting. The solution to our great angst is a more complete, full, and whole-hearted commitment to trust in Him. When we do things in faithful obedience and yielded dependence, blessings will be seen and felt.
- **The promise and fulfillment of Christ our King is the solution** – But why is 1 Samuel so great? In the search for a King, we get to see the fulfillment of that longing. Saul was a king the people wanted but who fell miserably short. David was the king after God’s own heart, but he himself fell short of the standard, though Israel experienced the height of power under his leadership. No, these kings pointed to a greater King, one that crested the Mount of Olives on Palm Sunday, ready to be received by His people as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Jesus is the ultimate King that all others pointed to, and we see God fulfill His promises throughout 1 Samuel. Without a King, people always do what is right in their own eyes, leading to misery. But we have a King who not only gives us life but is Himself our greatest treasure and joy. Christ is the answer and solution to our greatest problem and the found treasure of our greatest search.