



1 Samuel

Following The Shepherd King In An Age Of Personal Freedom

Life Group Discussion / Week One

INTRODUCTION TO 1 SAMUEL

We live in an age when personal freedom is perhaps our culture's highest value.

You're not the boss of me.

Don't impose your views on me.

What gives you the right to tell me what to do?

Or, to put it another way, when the history of our age is written, it could be summed up as a time when "everyone did as they saw fit." Those words could be the anthem of our time. In fact, they are actually the closing words of the book of Judges. This attitude is not new.

In the Hebrew bible, unlike in our English bibles, the order of the books means that 1 Samuel follows judges. So the last thing you read before the opening of the book of Samuel in the Hebrew Bible is the last verse of Judges: "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit."

In many ways, the story told in 1 and 2 Samuel is the solution to this problem.

The days when Israel had no king were days of moral anarchy. They are ugly and brutal. This is what life is like when there is no king and everyone does as they see fit.

But the solution is more ambiguous. It is true that Israel had not king; but fundamentally, that was because they refused to acknowledge God as their king. The Lord was to be Israel's king. The real problem was not the lack of a king, but a lack of obedience to God as king.

This ambiguity continues into the book of Samuel. We will see Israel asking for a king, and we will see God regarding that as a rejection of his rule. We will see the rule of the first king, Saul, and wonder whether Israel having a king is much of an improvement on Israel having no king. Even the rise of King David in the second half of 1 Samuel and his rule in 2 Samuel prove a mixed blessing.

So 1 Samuel leaves us looking beyond this history of ancient Israel. Israel's kings were anointed with oil, so they were known as "the anointed one" — "messiah" in Hebrew, or "christ" in Greek. As we see the disastrous reign of Saul the king Israel asked for, and as we see the flawed reign of David, the king God blessed his people with, we are being pointed towards the Christ, the one man who rules God's people in the way God wants. God himself promised David that one of his sons would reign over God's people forever. And so the history of the first Christs leaves us longing for the rule of the ultimate Christ.

As we study 1 Samuel together, we will see Jesus Christ. And seeing him in and through 1 Samuel will enable us to see him with fresh color and texture, and see afresh what it means for us to follow him as King in an age that worships personal freedom.

READ

1 Samuel 1:1-20

SHARE

Is there anything you need to pray about in order to pursue feeling at peace about it? *(Share this now and leave time at the end of the discussion to pray for members in your group. Keep this opening sharing to about 10 minutes).*

STUDY & APPLY

1. How does God show himself sovereign over Hannah's suffering?
2. Whatever medical causes for Hannah's barrenness, ultimately it was God who had closed her womb. There are 3 responses to this suffering: Mock God (like Peninnah), Pity self and others (like Elkanah), or be driven to pray (like Hannah). Whose response are you most likely to follow when you wrestle with grief or struggle?
3. God seems to know something about brokenness and grief that we do not know, because it is always in these moments he does his most powerful work in his people. Our deepest despairs may well be a prelude to God's mighty work. How can we become more aware of God's working through the difficult circumstances of our lives?
4. How does Hannah's praying encourage you in your own?
5. Is there anything you do not ask for in praying because, deep down, you think the Lord cannot or will not give it? Could Hannah's example prompt you to start praying for it regularly and boldly?
6. Prayers of faith are created by a deep sense of our need and deep sense of God's care for us. How does a greater understanding of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus deepen our sense of both our need and God's care?

PRAY

Close your discussion praying earnestly, empathetically, and boldly for one another.