



*1 Samuel 1-15:
Connect Group Studies*

Introduction

Israel is in trouble. God kept his promise from Deuteronomy to settle them in the land, but ever since they moved in they've been making a hash of it. Things began well in *Joshua*: they entered the land and drove out (most of) the inhabitants. But very soon the rot of idolatry and immorality set in again. Attacked from without (by surrounding nations) and from within (by indwelling sin), Israel quickly fell into anarchy. God periodically raised up 'judges' to save them from danger, and it worked well for as long as the judge lived, but as soon as he or she died the cycle simply began again. *Judges* closes with one of God's priests pimping out and then butchering his girlfriend, and a civil war. If this part of the Bible were a T.V. mini-series, it would be on HBO, not the Disney Channel. Israel is in trouble.

The root of this trouble is their problem with leadership. *Judges* closes with these words: *'In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit'* (Jdg 21:25, see also 17:6; 18:1; 19:1). If only they could have a king, like all the other nations, everything would be alright, right?

Well, yes. And no. And it's that 'yes and no' that drives the story of *1 Samuel*. *1 Samuel* is the story of Israel as they look for, find, and live with a king; as they move from the intermittent rule of the judges to a permanent monarchy, a long-lasting dynasty in which leadership will be passed on from father to son.

On the one hand, this is fine: God prepared the way for the kingship when he first gave Israel their laws many years before (Dt 17:14-20), and in *1 Samuel* God is very involved in the king-picking process (1 Sa 8:21-22; 9:15-16). But on the other hand, Israel's longing for a king is very troubling: *because they already have a king - God, Yahweh - and their request for a human king is clearly motivated by a rejection of God's kingship (1 Sa 8:7)*. **How is Israel going to have a human king and still serve God as its king?** This is the big question hanging over *1 Samuel*.

At risk of spoiling the ending, the book never answers that question. It ends with the death of Saul and his sons, and David waiting in the wings to take over. From all the positive things we learn about David in *1 Samuel*, we are left with the firm hope that he will be the king who leads the people to serve Yahweh as their true king. But in *1 Samuel*, it is in the hiccups and false starts involved with the rise of a godly king that we see God's plan: to remain as Israel's king, whether they also have a human king or not, and to make his kingship abundantly clear by choosing the most surprising people for important roles. If there is one book of the Bible where God's choice of weird people for big jobs proves he needs *no one* to help him rule, it is *1 Samuel*. For *'The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart'* (1 Sa 16:7).

The big picture

As with all of the Old Testament, understanding *1 Samuel* as Christians means understanding how it contributes to the overall story of the Bible. Working out how a part of the Bible fits into the big picture is called 'biblical theology', and the key to biblical theology is to remember that the whole Bible points towards Jesus (Lk 24:27). In the big picture of the Bible, *1 Samuel* prepares us for two big facts:

1. that God will one day rule his world both directly *and* through a king, because in Jesus we now have a human king who is also divine: '*who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord*' (Rom 1:3-4).
2. that from a merely human perspective, Jesus' kingship seems the most unlikely thing on earth, and yet is the unassailable plan of God: '*For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God*' (1 Co 1:18).

Hints for Reading 1 Samuel

1 Samuel is a true story - a story about real historical events. As with every bit of the Bible, however, the narratives of *1 Samuel* are not just written to entertain us or to record history, but to teach, encourage and challenge us about God. There are a number of ways that a narrative can communicate a message, and here are some of those techniques:

1. *Characters*

The key to a narrative is its characters. They may be positive or negative examples, i.e. teaching us either the right or the wrong way to respond to God. To understand the characters in *1 Samuel* ask questions like: how are they described? What do they say and think? Is their name significant? Are they compared or contrasted with another character in the story?

2. *Plot*

Stories are driven by a tension(s) which gets increasingly intense until the plot's climax, at which point the tension is resolved. Ask yourself: what is the tension in the story? What is its climax? How is the situation resolved?

3. *Direct statements*

Sometimes the writer of a story will draw a direct lesson from it for their readers. This is handy when it happens but is rare in *1 Samuel*. The closest it gets is 'summary statements' after long bits of the story, so look out for them.

Breakup of 1 Samuel

We will be studying *1 Samuel* in 18 sections, but the story breaks up into three, larger sections. Below is a summary of both. NOTE: you will find it very helpful to read the section of *1 Samuel* before you come to the study.

1 Sa 1-7 – Samuel

- 1:1-2:10 (Introduction to Samuel)
- 2:11-36 (The priesthood's failure, leading to the need for Samuel)
- 3:1-4:1a (Samuel's calling)
- 4:1b-7:1 (The ark and the Philistines)
- 7:2-17 (Renewed hope)

1 Sa 8-15 – Samuel and Saul

- 8 (Israel's request for a king)

- 9-10 (Saul appointed king)
- 11-12 (Saul's initial but qualified success)
- 13-14 (The decline of Saul)
- 15 (The rejection of Saul)

1 Sa 16-31 – Saul and David

- 16 (David's call)
- 17 (David's first test: Goliath)
- 18-19 (David in Saul's house)
- 20 (David and Jonathan)
- 21-23 (David on the run – Part 1: David with his back against the wall)
- 24-26 (David on the run – Part 2: the tide turns in David's favour)
- 27-30 (David among the Philistines)
- 31 (The death of Saul and Jonathan)

1 SAMUEL 1:1-2:10

Getting started

Whether it is money, fame or reputation, there are plenty of stories of reversal of fortune. Can you think of any that have been in the news recently?

Observation

Read 1:1-8

1. What do you think is the defining feature of Hannah's life, from her view?

2. How does this affect the relationships between:

Elkanah and Hannah?

Elkanah and Peninnah?

Hannah and Peninnah?

Read 1:9-20

3. What does Hannah pray?

4. What happens when Hannah goes home?

Read 1:21-28

5. What does Hannah do with her son?

Read 2:1-10

6. Use the table below to summarise the main points of Hannah's song:

Verses	Summary
1-2	
3-8a	
8b-10	

1 SAMUEL 2:11-36

Getting started

Scandals involving church leaders always seem to make it onto the front pages of the news. Why do you think these stories have so much public interest?

Observation

Re-read 1:12-16.

1. Who is Eli (1:9)? What 'first impression' does the writer give us of him?

Read Lev 3:1-5 & 1 Sa 2:12-26

2. What are the offences of Eli's sons? What is their root cause?

3. What does Eli do to stop them?

4. How is Samuel compared to Eli's sons in 2:18-26?

Read 2:27-36

5. A 'man of God' comes out of nowhere to bring a message from God to Eli. How would you summarise the main points of this message?

6. What is Eli's chief sin?

7. What is God's promise in 2:34-35?

1 SAMUEL 3:1-4:1a

Getting started

'The word of God is the most important resource the Christian has.' Discuss.

Observation

Read 3:1-4:1a

1. What situation is noted in 3:1?
2. What happens when God tries to speak to Samuel?
3. What message does Samuel receive?
4. What situation is noted in 3:19-4:1a?

Interpretation

5. How does the situation in Israel change from the start to the end of 1 Sa 3? What is significant about this?
6. Why do you think the 'word of God' came so rarely to Israel at the time of 3:1? (See also Am 8:11-12).

7. *Read Jn 1:1, 14 & Heb 1:1-3.* What difference has Jesus made to the way God speaks to us now?

Application

8. One of the greatest ways God can bless a church is when the word of God is heard there clearly and often. How are we doing at this at CRCK? Is the Bible at the centre of our ministries and relationships? How might we be able to make it more so?
9. Even if the Bible is taught clearly and often, God's people can still starve from lack of listening to it (e.g. Is 6:9-10). What defences do you put up to listening to the word of God?
10. What comfort can we draw from the fact that God now speaks to people permanently through Jesus, and has promised to never stop doing so?
11. Pray.

1 SAMUEL 4:1b-7:1

Getting started

Have you ever felt manipulated? How did it happen?

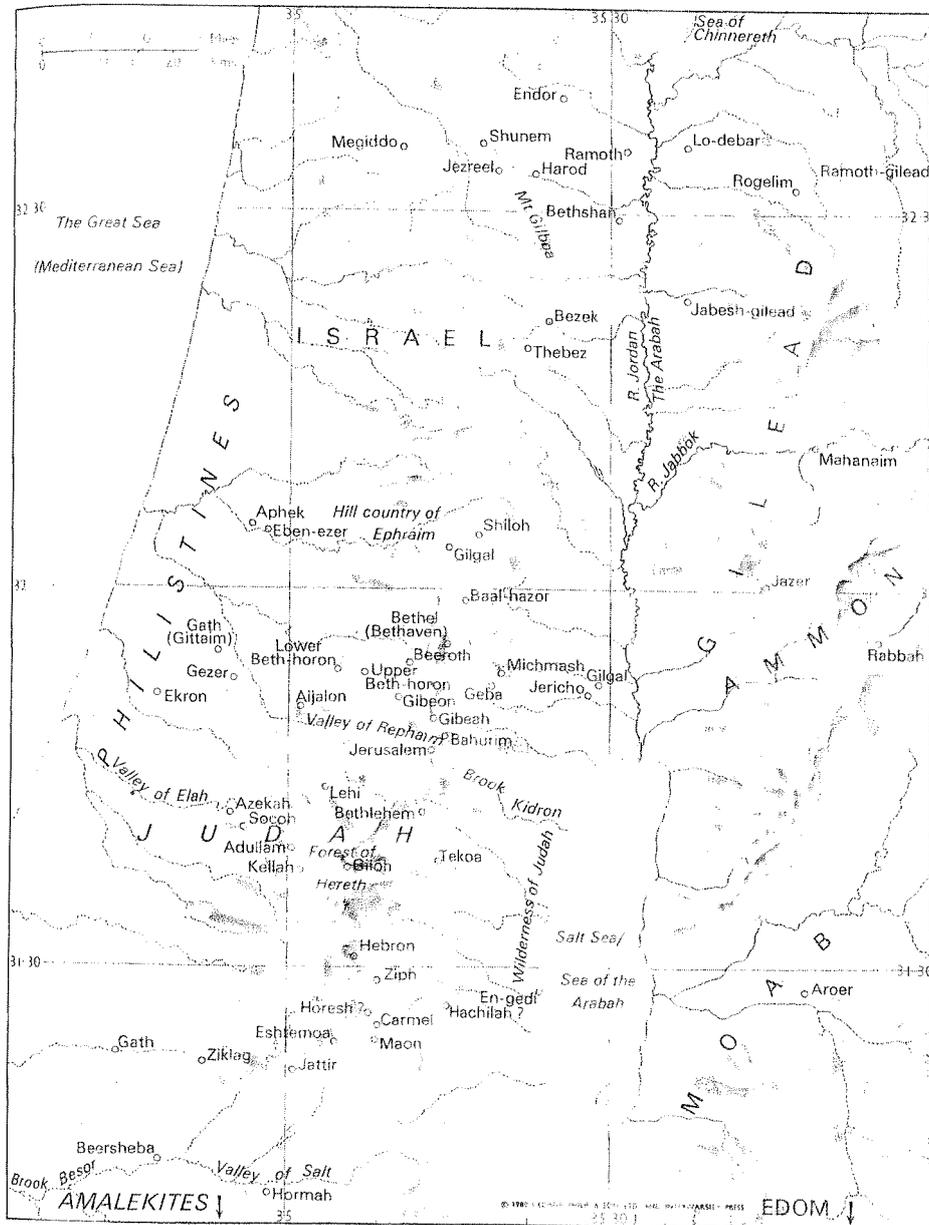
Observation

Read Ex 25:10-22

1. What was the 'ark'? What did it represent?

Break up into three groups and each read one chapter of 4:1b-7:1.

2. On the map, track the progress of the ark and what happens wherever it stops. (Note: no one knows where Ebenezer was, so it is not on the map, but presumably it is near Aphek).



3. Get back into a big group and compare notes.

1 SAMUEL 7:2-17

Getting started

When you've done the wrong thing, which is easier: to try and justify yourself, or repent? Why?

Observation

Read 7:2-6

1. After the series of disasters of chs. 4-6, what does Israel want in 7:2?

2. What conditions does Samuel respond with in 7:3-6?

Read 7:7-10

3. How does the battle at Mizpah compare with the earlier battle near Aphek (4:1-2)?

4. Compare the following verses with each other:

4:2, 3, 10		7:10	
4:3		7:3,8	
4:6		7:7	
4:21		7:12	

What do they tell us about Israel's changed understanding of God?

1 SAMUEL 8

Getting started

Can you remember a time when you gave into peer pressure of some kind? What made it so powerful?

Observation

Read 1 Sa 8

1. What are Samuel's sons like? What does this remind you of from ch.1?
2. What reasons do the Israelites give for wanting a king (8:5-6, 19-20)?
3. How do Samuel and God feel about their request?
4. According to Samuel, what will be the downsides of having a king?
5. What do you think Israel's persistence in 8:19-20 says about them?

Interpretation

6. The judges - who have ruled Israel up until now - are temporary saviours, appointed by God for particular situations but then removed when they're no longer needed. By contrast, a king is a permanent ruler with a dynasty, a line of sons who are expected to faithfully follow in his footsteps. Given this, why is Israel's request a strange response to the behaviour of Samuel and Eli's sons?

1 SAMUEL 11-12

Getting started

When have you been tempted to take credit for something that was clearly God's achievement?

Observation

Read 11

1. Briefly describe the situation between the Ammonites and Jabesh Gilead.
2. How does Saul respond to this first crisis of his kingship? What role does the Spirit play? (See also 10:6, 10). How does this answer the naysayer's question from 10:27?
3. How do people respond to Saul after the battle? To whom does Saul give the credit for the victory?

Read 12

4. How does Samuel respond to the people after the battle?
5. What does Israel need to do to restore faith with Yahweh and make Saul's kingship and Yahweh's kingship work together?

1 SAMUEL 13-14

Getting started

Have you ever made a rash promise and then regretted it later? What happened?

Observation

Read 13-14

1. In the table below, note down everything Jonathan does and everything Saul does and what effect their actions have on Israel.

Jonathan's actions	Effects on Israel	Saul's actions	Effects on Israel

Interpretation

2. Who seems more effective as a leader: Saul or Jonathan? Why?

3. What exactly does Saul do wrong in 13:8-14?

4. What punishment does Saul receive for his sin?

5. What hints are there about God's plans for the future of the monarchy in Israel?

6. *Read Ps 2.* Do you think Saul could identify himself as the 'anointed one' of v. 2?

Application

7. *Read Heb 1:5.* Who does the writer identify as the 'anointed one' whose rule will be forever? How does this affect our view of him?

8. When do you find it most difficult to trust Jesus' commands? How might this passage help increase that trust?

9. Pray.

1 SAMUEL 15

Getting started

In what ways do people try to appear more 'spiritual' than they actually are?

Observation

Read 15

1. What does Yahweh order Saul to do?
2. How does Saul fulfil this order? How does he fail to?
3. What are the consequences of Saul's failure?
4. What similarities and differences do you notice between the events of 1 Sa 15 and 13:5-15? How is Saul's punishment more severe in ch. 15 than it was in ch. 13?

Interpretation

5. What evidence is there that God is still with Saul at the start of ch. 15?
6. Why do you think God gives such harsh instructions to completely wipe out the Ammonites? (For some help with this see Deut 25:17-19).

