

A Study of 1st Samuel

Study Guide

Introduction

The primary commentary and resource used for the basis of this study is the *Concordia Commentary* on **1 Samuel** by Andrew Steinmann, M. Div, Ph.D. He is a former Lutheran Pastor and recognized Old Testament Scholar and author. Other resources are *The Lutheran Study Bible*, a multitude of non-Lutheran resources within *PC Study Bible* software, and some commentary by Dr. Timothy Keller of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City.

A brief Biblical Timeline to provide context of Samuel. Note that the approximate time at the start of **1 Samuel** is 1090 B.C.

Excerpts from Dr. Steinmann's introduction to **1 Samuel** in the Concordia Commentary

The fifty-five chapters of this single Hebrew book (1 and 2 Samuel in English Bibles) trace Israel's transition from a tribal confederacy designed to live under God's rule to a monarchy established and supported by God...

*Like many of the historical books of the OT, Samuel does not name its author. Clearly the writer composed his narrative based on historical sources. While some of them may have been oral, written records played a major part as indicated, for instance, by the various lists of David's officials...Perhaps books by the prophets Samuel, Gad, and Nathan were also employed. Though the book is named after Samuel, he could hardly be its author since all of the events related after **1 Sam 25:1** take place after his death.*

Note: As we go through 1 Samuel, we will look at clues within the book that give indication of the time of its authorship.

The book of Samuel is so large that it is difficult to speak of only a few other theological themes that characterize it. However, several stand out among the many that found within this work.

Prosperity and success come only from God

Prophecy (i.e. the role of prophecy)

The Spirit of Yahweh

***Samuel** contains more text-critical problems than perhaps any other book of the OT. The LXX appears at times to have followed a different Hebrew text for the basis of its translation, and the writer of **Chronicles**, who incorporated large sections of **Samuel** into his work, also seems to have had a text that in some places had different readings than the current MT of **Samuel**...*

*The ancient manuscripts from Qumran [The Dead Sea Scrolls] appear to confirm that there were Hebrew manuscript traditions for **Samuel**.*

Note: As we go through 1 Samuel, we will look at some of these translational/textual difficulties and address their significance or lack thereof.

Let's read **1 Samuel 1:1 – 20**.

Compare verse 1 to **1 Chronicles 6:16, 22 – 28** understanding that Zophai in **1 Chronicles** is Zuph in **1 Samuel**. Considering that Samuel would be born of Elkanah and become a prophet and priest to Israel, what is the significance of his lineage?

In what is Hannah counting on for her happiness and how is that working out?

In what is Peninnah counting on for her happiness and how is that working out?

On what does Elkanah want Hannah to base her happiness and how is that working out?

How does this same pattern play out in our lives and how do we know it is not working?

If someone said that the Bible endorses polygamy with Elkanah being a good example, how would you respond?

It appears that Hannah is bargaining with God in her prayer. Is that a proper characterization? Why or why not?

What is the significance of Hannah promising that no razor will touch her son's head? See **Numbers 6:1 – 5**.

What is the significance of her change in attitude upon hearing the blessing from Eli?

Upon what is Hannah now basing her happiness?

Read **1 Samuel 1:21 – 28**.

Relative to Elkanah, what is the significance of verse 23?

From your commentaries, approximately how old was Samuel when he was left with Eli?

Considering his young age, how does that confirm Hannah's and Elkanah's faithfulness ?

To whom is the last sentence of verse applying?

“Liberal scholars” have challenged whether **1 Samuel 2:1 – 11** was truly spoken by Hannah. As we read it look for internal evidence from Hannah's prayer (Poem) that points toward Hannah.

What internal evidence do you see to support Hannah's authorship?

Regarding Hannah's Prayer, Dr. Steinmann in Concordia Commentary comments:

Hannah's prayer is one of four significant poems in the book of Samuel. The other three are David's Song of the Bow (2 Samuel 1:17 – 27), his song of deliverance (2 Samuel 22, Psalm 18), and his last words (2 Samuel 23:1 – 7). All four occur at important junctures in the narrative. Hannah's prayer prefaces the ministry of

Samuel...All of these poems are united by one concept: anointing. (1 Samuel 2:10)...They signal that anointed kings (“christs) are important throughout the book. Samuel is the anointer of kings – both Saul...and David...Saul is the first person in Scripture to be called “anointed one” “his [Yahweh’s] anointed one”...The Hebrew becomes the title “Messiah”, or in Greek...”Christ”...Hannah’s prayer prepares the reader for this as she is moved not only to pray in thanksgiving for the gift of a son, but also to prophesy of God’s work that begins with prophetic ministry of her son and culminates in Jesus, the great Anointed One.

What themes, principles, or characteristics about God and do you identify in Hannah’s Prayer?

How do we apply Hannah’s prayer to our own lives?

What is the significance that this poem was written by a woman and what other Biblical examples can you think of?

Something to do on your own is to compare Hannah’s prayer to **Psalm 18, Psalm 24, and Psalm 30**. Those psalms are psalms of David indicating that Hannah’s prayer was in existence and available to David.

Let’s read **1 Samuel 2:12 – 21**.

Compare verse 11 with verse 12 and verse 17 with verse 18. What is the author of **Samuel** doing here and what groundwork is he laying?

Dr. Steinmann notes the following about verse 12:

The author depicts Eli’s sons as “good for nothing men” (2:12)...Ironically, Samuel’s mother, Hannah, had felt Eli falsely accused her of being a “good for

nothing woman” (1:16). It seems that Eli could not distinguish good from evil, even when they were right under his nose.

What “*sin of the young men was very great in the sight of the Lord*” (ESV)?

Regarding Samuel’s linen ephod and robe, Dr. Steinmann comments:

While linen was also used for priestly undergarments, the ephod was an outer garment worn on the priest’s chest when conducting or assisting divine worship...The new “robe” Hannah brought Samuel each year may have been a vestment worn under the ephod...Thus, Samuel is depicted here as a Levite serving before Yahweh at an unusually young age. (The footnote for this quote states that the service of Levites normally did not occur until age 25).

What image/emotions are being portrayed about Hannah in these verses?

What does it say about God’s plan for both Hannah and Israel that after Samuel was born, God blessed her with fertility?

Let’s read **1 Samuel 2:22 – 26**.

How did Eli fail God and the people in his role as high priest?

How did Eli fail his two sons?

What is Eli saying to his sons in verse 25 and how does that relate to **Hebrews 6:4 – 6**?

What is the meaning of the last sentence of verse 25 or would you explain it?

Considering that Eli essentially raised Samuel, why did Samuel turn out to be faithful and Eli's sons did not?

What comfort is this to faithful parents who have children who are not faithful?

Let's read **1 Samuel 2:27 – 36**.

Of note is that we are not told the name of the "man of God". At the same time, throughout the Bible, we are told the names of many people who have little or no impact on the actual story of the Bible. What comfort is there to us in that the "man of God" is not identified by name?

In your own words what is the general message to Eli in these passages? What is being prophesied?

What do we learn about Eli in verse 29 that indicates his passive complicity in his sons' violation of the sacrificial laws that we read about in verses 15 – 17? See also **1 Samuel 4:18**.

How will Eli know that this prophecy is true?

Who is the "faithful priest" in verse 35?

Let's Read 1 Samuel 3

What is meant in verse 1 by **“And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision.”** (ESV) and how does that compare to our time?

Regarding this account of the Call of Samuel, Dr. Steinmann notes:

Samuel had seemingly replaced the high priest Eli, since he is in the presence of God's ark and is tending to God's lamp. The was to burn continually, and it was the responsibility of the high priest and other priests to attend to it...However, the blind Eli cannot tend to the lamp...So it fell to the young Levite Samuel to keep watch over the lamp...Since only the high priest could enter the tabernacle's Most Holy Place, we can only assume that Samuel was lying in the Holy Place where the lamp was.

Compare verse 7 to **1 Samuel 2:12**. Considering it is the same Hebrew word for “know”, how do you explain the difference in meaning or application between Samuel and the sons of Eli?

What is the significance of verse 14?

What does Eli's response in verse 18 say about his faith?

What comfort is there for us in this?

Let's read 1 Samuel 4:1 – 11.

In verse 3, the elders of Israel ask, **“Why has the Lord defeated us today before the Philistines?”** (ESV). How is the analysis of their defeat correct?

How does their solution show their lack of “knowing God” and what was the real reason for their defeat?

In what way are they treating the Ark of God?

How did the Philistines overcome their initial fear of the presence of the Ark?

Let’s read **1 Samuel 4:12 – 22**.

Why are we told again that Eli could not see?

How do you explain Eli’s reaction to report of the defeat and his sons’ death vs his reaction to the capture of the Ark?

Compare verses 12, 19 – 20 to **Genesis 35:16 – 19**. Considering who brought the news to the people of Shiloh and Eli, what is the irony here?

Why would the midwives for Rachel and the wife of Phinehas say, “Do not be afraid, you have borne a son”?

Let’s read **1 Samuel 5:1 – 5**.

What do your commentaries say about the idol, Dagon?

Even though the term “paganism” was not in use during this time period, the Philistines practiced a form of paganism. One commentator describes paganism as “worshipping what works”. Therefore, if you were a farmer you might worship the god of rain, or the god of a particular crop. Dagon is a good example since he was the god of grain. He was

worshipped because he was thought to bring good crops and thus appears to Philistines to “work” to prevent starvation. How do we and society easily slip into paganism?

How would you differentiate or describe our God, the Triune God, as being different from paganism?

What is the significance that Dagon’s head and hands were cut off from the idol on the second night?

Read **1 Samuel 5:6** through **1 Samuel 6:5**.

What is God’s purpose in destroying the Dagon idol as it relates to His relationship with the Philistines and did He accomplish that purpose?

What purpose(s) or goal(s) was (were) achieved relative to the Philistines?

What purpose(s) or goal(s) was (were) achieved relative to the Israelites and us as well?

When you hear that the Philistine priests and diviners told the Philistines to make five golden tumors and five golden rats, what insight does this give us as to the nature of the plague that afflicted the Philistines?

Considering what rats eat, what message is God sending the Philistines about Dagon? What message is being sent to us about our “pagan gods”?

Let’s read **1 Samuel 6:6 – 12.**

What is the point of the Philistine priests and diviners referencing the Egyptians and Pharaoh?

What is the strategy and thinking of how their method to return the Ark?

Read **1 Samuel 6:13 – 7:2.**

What is the point of verses 17 – 18; Why mention the tumors and mice again?

Why were the seventy men of Beth-shemesh struck dead? What did they do?

What does it say about the men of Kiriath-jearim to come and get the Ark and watch over it for 20 years?

One commentator has pointed out that in these accounts about the Ark, anyone who drew near to God (i.e. the Ark) was harmed. What warning is there for us and yet what comfort do we have as well?

1 Samuel 7:3 picks up 20 years later after the Ark was brought to Keriath-jearim and is approximately 1068 B.C. according to Dr. Steinmann. The previous verse 2 mentions that the Israelites “lamented” (ESV) during that 20 years. With that background in mind let’s read **1 Samuel 7:3 – 17**.

What spiritually had been going on in Israel during that 20 year time?

What were the consequences of the Israelites lack of fidelity to the Lord and how did God turn that into a positive?

What are ways that the same thing can happen to us?

What general summary of the commandments is alluded to in verse 3?

What do your commentaries say about the ritual that Samuel performed of drawing out the water and pouring it out “before the Lord” (ESV)?

In verse 12 Samuel sets up a stone and calls it Ebenezer. However, **Samuel 4:1** which occurs about 20 years earlier states that the Israelites encamped at Ebenezer in preparation for the battle in which the Ark was captured. What does this tell us about the timing and writing of the **Book of Samuel**?

What difference do we see in the hearts and attitude of the people in **1 Samuel 7** vs **1 Samuel 4**?

Dr. Steinmann states that Josephus (writing in the 1st Century A.D.) indicates that the time Samuel served as a Judge of the people after the Lord defeated the Philistines was about 12 years. What lesson(s) is (are) there for us in verses 13 – 14?

This is a natural break point in **1 Samuel**. Let's pause for a moment and reflect on the first seven chapters and what God is telling us. A quick summary of the story so far is:

1. Hannah's plight of being childless and her prayer/song.
2. The birth of Samuel and his being dedicated as a child to the Lord's service.
3. Eli and his evil sons and the rebuke of Eli by the man of God
4. The call of Samuel
5. The Ark is captured by the Philistines
6. The idol of Dagon being struck down by God in the presence of the Ark
7. The return of the Ark to the Israelites and a lapse of 20 years
8. The Israelites return to the Lord under the judgeship of Samuel

What are the main lessons to us as believers so far?

How/where do the first seven chapters point us to Christ?

Let's read **1 Samuel 8:1 – 9**.

In what way does Samuel bear at least some of the blame for the people's request for a king?

What lesson(s) is (are) there for us in selecting people for leadership and in voting?

Why is Samuel so upset over the people wanting a king?

God seems to be somewhat ambivalent to the request for a king. What point is God making to Samuel?

How do **Genesis 17:3 – 6** and **17:15 – 16** relate to what is happening in **Samuel**?

What does it tell us about the way of the Lord when God tells Samuel to agree with their request for King? What is the lesson for us?

Read **1 Samuel 8:10 – 22**.

What is the point of Samuel giving the people all of God's warnings about having a king appointed over them?

Samuel gives the people seven warnings or examples of the things that a King will do to them. How does the last one differ from the previous six and what is the significance of that warning given the history of the Israelites?

Why does Samuel tell them to go home? What does that indicate?

Read **1 Samuel 9:1 – 16**.

What characteristics of how the story of Saul starts out read like a mystery novel?

What is the significance of verse 6 in describing the man of God? See **Deuteronomy 18:20 – 22**.

A skeptic could twist those verses. How would you respond?

Note the interesting parenthetical comment in verse 9. What does this say about the historical accuracy of the text?

Why is God saying to Samuel to anoint Saul as God’s chosen “prince over my people” rather than king? What is the inference/point here?

What is the “cry” that God is referring to in verse 16?

Let’s read **1 Samuel 9:17 – 27**.

The ESV uses the word “restrain” in verse 17 rather than “rule” as in the NIV. What meaning is being intended here? See also **Judges 17:6**?

What is the warning/application for us as our society becomes more chaotic and what should be our response?

What is the significance of the first sentence of verse 20 relative to Samuel?

What is the meaning of the two questions posed to by Samuel in the last part of verse 20?

What does verse 21 say about the character of Saul at this time?

How could verse 21 also be a foreboding of bad things to come for Saul?

Let's read **1 Samuel 10:1 – 8**.

Why does Samuel anoint Saul in private?

What is the significance of Saul being offered and taking the bread from the men going to Bethel?

What is Samuel suggesting to Saul in verse 7?

Now read **1 Samuel 10:9 – 16**.

What does it mean that God gave Saul “another heart”?

How does this compare to us?

What is the significance that Saul prophesied among the other prophets and the people's reaction to Saul?

What didn't Saul do at Gilgal and what is the significant that he didn't he tell his uncle that Samuel had been anointed King?

Let's compare Saul's reaction and actions to being "called" to be king to a few other men in the Bible. What are the similarities and differences between Saul and the following:

Noah (**Genesis 6:9, 13 – 14, 22**) _____

Abraham (**Genesis 12:1 – 4**) _____

Moses (**Exodus 3:1 – 6, 10 – 12, 4:1, 4:10 – 15**) _____

Gideon (**Judges 6:11 – 23, 36 – 40**) _____

In the above accounts, we are told that God only became angry with Moses, what does this say about God and our relationship to God?

Moses, Gideon, and Saul are all given signs so that they can have confidence in what God (Samuel in Saul's case) is telling them. What does this say about God?

Is it appropriate for us to ask God for a sign? If so, when? If not, why not?

Read **1 Samuel 10:17 – 27** where Saul is proclaimed King of Israel by Samuel. Dr. Steinmann estimates this is in 1049 B.C. Note that Samuel had to gather the people at Mizpah because Saul did not go to Gilgal as instructed and wait for Samuel. Also, remember that Mizpah was where God recently delivered the Israelites from the Philistines as we read earlier in Chapter 7.