

# Samuel and Saul

Toward the end of the judges era, Hannah, the wife of Elkanah, was unable to have children. She was distressed over this, so she prayed to God and promised that if God gave her a son, she would give him back to the Lord. Eli, the priest, thought she was drunk, but she told him that she had poured out her soul before God.

God listened to Hannah and gave her a son named Samuel. She kept her vow and gave him back to the Lord, bringing him to Eli and praising God for what He had done for her. As a boy, Samuel ministered before the Lord. He would wear a linen ephod that his mother made for him every year. During these days, visions were infrequent, but one night, God called Samuel. Samuel thought it was Eli calling, so he ran to see what Eli wanted. After three times, Eli figured out that it was God, so he told Samuel how to answer. When God called again, Samuel responded, "Speak, for your servant is listening" (3:10).

God told Samuel what was going to happen to Eli and his house because of Eli's wicked sons. Samuel did not want to tell all of this to Eli, but Eli insisted that Samuel not hide anything from him. Samuel told Eli what God said, to which Eli responded, "It is the LORD; let Him do what seems good to Him." Thus did Samuel grow up serving the Lord, and everyone in Israel came to know



that Samuel was a prophet of God. They knew that Samuel spoke the word of God to them, and he would become the last judge of Israel.

## **Samuel and Saul: 1 Samuel 8-12**

As Samuel aged, the people became concerned about a future leader. They did not trust Samuel's sons, so they demanded that a king, like the nations around them had, be appointed. Samuel was displeased about this, and he prayed to God. The Lord told Samuel to listen to the people, for it was not Samuel that they had rejected, but God Himself as their King. God would grant them a king, but Samuel was to warn the people of the problems that would come as a result.

The first king to be chosen was Saul, from the tribe of Benjamin. He was a "choice and handsome man," and he was "taller than any of the people." He seemed to be the perfect choice for a king. At first, Saul appeared to be a humble man, intent on doing what was right. This was going to change quickly, however. Because of the sins that Saul subsequently committed, his dynasty was not going to be established.

Israel was thrilled to have a king. On the day they made Saul king, they offered up sacrifices of peace offerings to God and they all "rejoiced greatly." To the children of

Israel, it seemed like a great day. Samuel addressed the people again, making it clear that he had walked uprightly with God and before the people. He then reminded them of their past, how God had brought them out of Egypt and settled them in the land. Yet they had forgotten God, so He allowed them to be punished. Samuel reminded them that they needed to be faithful to God if they will continue to prosper, especially now that they had a king. If they did not abandon God any more from that point, God would not abandon them. "But if you still do wickedly, both you and your king will be swept away," he warned.

### **King Saul: 1 Samuel 13-15**

King Saul began his reign with the support of the people, but he soon departed from the ways of God. He was a great warrior, but his presumptions about serving God caused him much trouble. The Philistines were pressing on Israel, and the people were starting to scatter. Saul was waiting in Gilgal for Samuel to come and offer sacrifice. Since Samuel didn't come right away, Saul decided to offer the sacrifice himself. Samuel told Saul that this was foolish, against the commands of God. As a result, his kingdom would not endure; his dynasty would end with his death.

As a warrior, Saul was successful. He fought his enemies with courage. "He acted valiantly," and delivered Israel from those who would plunder them. It was his disobedience to God that would be his downfall. This disobedience is again exemplified in 1 Samuel 15 when God told Saul to strike the wicked Amalekites. Saul did defeat the Amalekites, but he did not fully obey God. He captured the king alive and spared the best of the animals, destroying only that which was "despised

and worthless." God told Samuel how Saul had turned from following His commands. When Samuel confronted Saul, Saul made an excuse for his disobedience: they were kept alive for service to God. Samuel's response, "to obey is better than sacrifice," shows that God wants obedience first. Sacrifice is nothing if it's not according to His will. Because of Saul's disobedience, he would be rejected from being king. He began as "little" in his own eyes. He ended as one who did evil in the sight of God.

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