

Goals

The choices we make in life can have far-reaching effects on our future and even future generations. It is important therefore to carefully consider all our decisions. God had direct sovereign rule over the Israelites, but they chose to be ruled by a king instead. As it turns out, and as the prophet Samuel forewarned them, they went through much suffering under kings who were wicked. With some kings, the whole nation was even brought to idol-worshiping before the sight of God.

In these lessons, the students will study the works and lives of some prophets and kings. An overarching pattern can be seen: Those who obey God prosper. Whenever the people turn away from God, they put their own lives and security in jeopardy. From the lives of the good kings who failed (like David) and the deeds of the evil kings, the students should understand the importance of a consistent life of enduring in God's words.

unit
2**Teacher Devotional**

The Israelites did not only turn away from God to commit sins. Often, they failed to realize that God was their source of help when they were in trouble. They would turn to foreign kings for military help, and paid allegiance to them. Or, worse, they turned to foreign gods who could not help them at all. The lesson to us is that we must first recognize who is the real source of help for us. Recognition itself is not enough, for we must go one step forward to apply this recognition to the way we lead our lives. When we are in need, do we readily turn to God for help? Or, are we like men of little faith, trying all ways and means in vain before we realize God is willing and ever-ready to help us?

God is Our Help in Times of Need

"The LORD is my strength and my shield; My heart trusted in Him, and I am helped; Therefore my heart greatly rejoices, And with my song I will praise Him." (Ps 28:7)

Lesson 5

The Book of 1 Samuel

Listed Scriptures

1 Samuel

Lesson Aim

- 1) That the students may understand the meaning and importance of complete obedience to God
- 2) That the students may understand the need to rely on God and to seek His will in all things

Memory Verse

"Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams." (1 Sam 15:22)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

1 Samuel

B I B L E B A C K G R O U N D



The two books of Samuel are actually one book in the original Hebrew text. The division into two books first appeared in the Greek translation (the Septuagint) and then in the Latin Vulgate. Since then, subsequent translations have had these as two separate books. The reason the books are named after Samuel is likely due to his being the main character in the narratives.

The contents of the two books can be briefly summarized as follows:

- 1 Sam 1–15: Samuel and Saul
- 1 Sam 16–31: Saul and David
- 2 Sam 1–8: David's rise to power
- 2 Sam 9–20: David's reign
- 2 Sam 21–24: various narratives, psalms and lists

The Philistines

They were a group of Aegean origin (Mediterranean area). They were one of the “Sea Peoples” recorded in history who ravaged the eastern Mediterranean world subsequent to the collapse of the Mycenaean civilization at the end of the Late Bronze Age. Attempting to land in Egypt, they were stopped in a great land and sea battle by Rameses III (1190 B.C.), after which they settled on the southwestern coastal strip of Canaan. In Canaan, they established a confederation of five states. The pentapolis consisted of Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gaza (coastal), Ekron and Gath (inland). Their expansion inland brought them into conflict with the Israelites (mentioned in 1 Samuel). While Saul was not able to prevail against the Philistines, David finally put an end to their expansion.

W A R M U P



In our walk of faith, we’ve heard so very often about obedience to God and trust in God. What exactly does it mean to obey God and to trust in God? Other than giving definitions, can you think of biblical characters who obeyed and trusted in God wholeheartedly? Under what kinds of circumstances did they obey and trust? How were they rewarded?

In today’s lesson, we’ll be taking a look at characters from the book of 1 Samuel; some of them obeyed and trusted in God while some blatantly turned away from doing God’s teachings. Learning about what these people did serves as a good mirror for us to examine our own relationships with God.

B I B L E S T U D Y



1 Samuel

The two books of Samuel are actually one book in the original Hebrew text. For 1 Samuel, the authorship of chapters 1 to 24 is often traced to Samuel. The rest of the book could have been written by Nathan the prophet and Gad the seer (cf. 1 Chron 29:29). The book of 1 Samuel chronicles the events in the lives of some characters that are familiar to us – Eli, Hannah, Samuel, Saul and David.

A . Hannah, an Exemplar of Prayer with Faith

In the era that Hannah lived, a woman who could not have any children had to bear a social stigma as one not blessed by God. It was no wonder that Hannah was not a happy person in spite of the love of a doting husband. However, she knew to turn to the right source of help in her state of unhappiness and dissatisfaction – she turned to God in prayer.

Hannah’s prayer was not recorded as a long psalm or long discourse with God. The Bible records her prayer all in one verse (1:11). She simply asked God to look upon her affliction. Her prayer is one that is in accordance to what the Lord Jesus taught about prayer in Matthew 6:7, 8, “and when you pray, do not use vain repetitions . . . for your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask of Him.”

After Hannah prayed, she got up and “ate and her face was no longer sad” (1:18). This is the true essence of a prayer of faith. When one prays with faith, one does not wait for the request to materialize before feeling relieved of the burden. This is because one completely gives one’s burdens to God and moves on with a heart of obedience that God has the final say in what the outcome of the petition is. God did not only grant Hannah a son, Samuel, as she requested; God granted her three more sons and two daughters (2:21). Nothing is impossible for God. We just have to entrust and submit ourselves to His will.

B . The Downfall of Eli and His Sons

Eli was a priest as well as a judge of Israel. Most ironically, he was not able to preserve his own faith, nor the faith of his two sons, leading ultimately to a tragic end for all three. There are good reasons for the downfall of this priestly family, including:

- a. Eli neglected to teach his sons in the way of the Lord (2:12, cf. Prov 22:6). As sons of a priest and judge, the sons of Eli actually did not know God. That clearly is the failure on Eli’s part to teach them in the right way.
- b. Eli was lax in disciplining his sons when they did wrong (3:13). When he heard reports of how his sons ate the food meant for offerings and slept with women at the temple gates (possibly temple prostitutes – “cultic prostitution” was characteristic of Canaanite religions and that could have infiltrated into the lives of the Israelites), he did not restrain them.

C. Samuel- Faithful to God and to Man

Samuel's name means "asked of God"; he was granted to Hannah when she prayed to God for a son. Because Hannah made a vow to offer up her son to God, Samuel was brought to the temple at a very young age. He grew up learning all the ways of service to God in the temple. All his life, Samuel was faithful to God, so much so that at the end of his life, he could boldly say that he had been faithful in all his dealings with the Israelites (read 1 Sam 12:1-5). During the days when Samuel was judge and priest over Israel, he led the people in faith and God was with him. Some of the major events during his time included (a) the defeat of the Philistines through prayer and (b) the establishment of kingship in Israel.

- a. The Philistines were defeated through prayer (7:1-13)
The Philistines were among the strongest of the Canaanite tribes. They were a constant threat to the peace and stability of the lives of the Israelites, coming at them with their strong attacks. On one occasion, the Israelites lost heart upon hearing news of the attack (7:7). They immediately asked Samuel to pray to God for His deliverance (v. 8). From here, we can see that Samuel was indeed a stabilizing force in the lives of the Israelites, interceding for them always. Through Samuel's prayer, God's deliverance came, in the form of a loud thunder that confused the Philistines. Thus the Israelites were able to defeat them.
- b. Israel asked for a king (Ch 8)
Israel saw that other nations had kings who could be seen physically. The Israelites, on the other hand, had a God who could not be seen with the physical eye. A universal human weakness is that human beings find it easier to believe in something that can be seen. On top of that, the two sons of Samuel did not seem to be able to succeed Samuel as godly leaders (v. 5). Hence, the Israelites asked to have a king. They wanted to be just like all the other nations. Such a request obviously did not please God. As God told Samuel, it was God that they had rejected, not Samuel, and God allowed the Israelites to have their way (vv. 7-9). Although God granted them their request, it should not be equated with the idea that God approved of such a request or that God was pleased. This should be a good reminder to us that when a prayer request has been granted, it does not necessarily mean the request was right or pleasing in God's eyes. (Compare with the Israelites' asking for meat in the wilderness. Read Num 11:4-6, 31-35.) We should also pray to God to reveal His will to us and to help us to submit to His will, like Jesus Christ did in the Garden of Gethsemane.

D. Saul- His Rise and His Fall

When the Israelites insisted on having a king to rule over them, God instructed Samuel to pick out from among the people a young man named Saul (9:16). Saul was an excellent youth among his peers. Physically, he was tall and strong (10:23). He was surprised to be chosen as king (9:21), implying his humility. When he first started out, some people taunted him and despised his ability, but he held his peace, indicating a controlled and calm spirit within (10:27).

Unfortunately, Saul did not continue in his virtues. A very good litmus test of one's true character occurs when one is in a position of power and has to deal with pressing issues. Through many events, Saul failed to maintain his integrity and ultimately, God's presence and favor departed from him. This is a good reminder that the end of a man is more important than his beginning. Here are some instances that led to his downfall:

- a. Superseded his own authority and offered sacrifices (13:13, 14)
The Israelites and the Philistines had another battle. Saul and his men were gathered at Gilgal. Samuel instructed him to wait for seven days. Before the seven days were up, the Israelite camp was losing morale. Saul began to get anxious. In this state of mind, he decided to not wait for Samuel to arrive to sacrifice to God. He decided that he would do the offering himself, which was against God's commandment. For that, he lost God's approval.
- b. Unreasonably put the Israelites under oath (14)
During a time of war, Saul placed his men under oath, saying, "Cursed is the man who eats any food until evening, before I have taken vengeance on my enemies" (14:24). He instituted such a command without stopping to think if that was in accordance to the will of God. He was unaware that his own son, Jonathan, had eaten of some honey. Moreover, the people were so hungry that they rushed in to eat of the spoil of their conquest, eating the animals with the blood. One foolish and rash decision by Saul led to the transgression of many people.
- c. Disregarded God's command and took of the spoils of the conquest (15)
In the battle against the Amalekites, God specifically stated that they should annihilate all the people as well as the animals of the Amalekites. Unfortunately, Saul has his own kind of wisdom once again. He spared King Agag and also took of the spoils. As with previous incidents, Saul was able

to come up with a good excuse for doing what he did. This time, he claimed that the animals were for offering to God. Samuel's reply was that "to obey is better than sacrifice and to heed than the fat of rams" (v. 22). Saul's good excuses were probably good enough for himself, but not for God. God rejected him as king.

After being rejected by God, Saul continued to go on a downward spiral. Instead of showing any penitence, he persisted in his evil track. He was jealous of David, and tried multiple times to kill him. The evil spirit had entered his unrepentant heart. Towards the end of his life, Saul even consulted a sorceress, which was certainly against God's teachings (1 Sam 28). He died tragically in battle, an example of one who failed to cherish the grace of God and repeatedly went against God's teachings (1 Sam 31).

E. David- His Tumultuous Rise to Kingship

When Samuel saw that Saul had time and again disregarded the instructions of God and gone his own way, he told Saul that God had given the kingdom into the hand of someone else who was "after His own heart" (1 Sam 13:14).

In the Bible, David is about the only character who had such a description conferred upon him – after God's heart. This is an accolade that truly befits David, for all his life, he sought after God. Even when he committed sin, he did not try to justify himself, but sought God's forgiveness with true penitence. David is a good contrast to the character of Saul.

David's battle against Goliath is probably among the best known stories we have about David. It was in this battle that David became publicly known to the rest of the Israelites. He showed himself to be one who relied on God totally. It was not that he did not understand the power of Goliath. He did. However, he saw the battle not as a human one but rather, as a battle against God (17:26). Hence, he was very sure when he said, "The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine" (17:37).

After his victory over Goliath, David did not become king right away, in spite of his having been anointed by Samuel earlier. The famous adulation by the women of Israel that "Saul has slain his thousands and David his ten thousands" (1 Sam 18:7) led to an unquenchable jealousy in Saul, who sought to kill David.

The rest of 1 Samuel is dominated by narratives about David's life as a fugitive from Saul's pursuit. They can be summarized as follows:

- a. Nob – he was given the holy bread from the table of the showbread in the temple to stave off hunger (21)
- b. Achish – he had to feign madness before the king of Gath to preserve his life (21)
- c. Adullam – he hid himself in a cave. Many came and pledged allegiance to him (22)
- d. Keilah – he had to flee from Keilah because Saul sought to kill all the men there unless they turned David in (23)
- e. Ziph, Maon, En Gedi – these were among the places that David fled to but could not hide himself for long (23)
- f. En Gedi – David had an opportunity to kill Saul but he refrained from harming the Lord's anointed (24)
- g. Carmel – at Carmel, David sought help from Nabal but was turned down. It was the wise Abigail who came to the rescue and prevented bloodshed between David's men and Nabal's men (25)
- h. Wilderness of Ziph – David had a second opportunity to kill Saul but he spared him again (26)
- i. Achish – David went to Achish again, and pretended to be an ally of the King of the Philistines (27, 29)
- j. Ziklag – the Amalekites attacked David's camp and destroyed the city, taking away the children and wives, including those of David. David managed to fight back and recover all that belonged to him and his men (30)

After a long series of trials and difficulties, David became king of the Israelites. It was as if the long years of being a fugitive was meant as a training period for him. He proved that in hard times, he was able to hold fast to God's commandments and always relied on God. Because of this, David was one of the great men of faith in the Bible.

Teaching Tips

A recent article in Manna, Issue 36, p. 3 – 6, gives a good comparison between Saul and David. All students are encouraged to read that article as supplementary reading in addition to this lesson.

C H E C K F O R U N D E R S T A N D I N G



1 In what ways is the prayer of Hannah considered an exemplary prayer of faith?

2 What were some of the sins committed by the sons of Eli? How do you think Eli could have prevented or restrained them from their irreverence?

3 What were some of the strengths of Samuel as one dedicated to the service of God?

4 What were the weaknesses of Saul?

5 Recount some of the incidents in the life of David in which he showed himself to be a faithful and obedient servant of God.

L I F E A P P L I C A T I O N



Fighting Off Sin

Part A- We have studied about the downfall of the sons of Eli and Saul. These people could not claim that they committed sin out of ignorance. In fact, Saul committed sin in spite of his knowledge of God's commandment. Saul knew that he did wrong, but he always thought of excuses to justify what he did. It is necessary, therefore, to be watchful at all times. There are often telltale signs that warn us of sin. We have to be sensitive to them.

Let us take a look at some Bible verses that encourage us to fend off sin. For each of them, write down one practical application that works for you in your life. You may then share your thoughts with the rest of your classmates.

1. "Test all things; hold fast what is good." (1 Thess 5:21)

How I would apply it in my life

The Bible teaches us to examine all things carefully. Today, we are bombarded by ideas and standards of behavior from the media, from our peers at

school and many other possible sources. Not all of them are in accordance with the teachings of the Bible. What are some ideas or codes of behavior that you think you should examine carefully and guard against? (Students fill in the blank here.)

2. "Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You." (Ps 119:11)

How I would apply it in my life

We are not fighting a physical battle. Our enemy, the devil, prowls around like a lion ready to devour us. We cannot but be equipped with God's armor. How can we fortify ourselves with the word of God? (Students fill in the blank here.)

3. "Therefore, let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." (1 Cor 10:12)

How I would apply it in my life

We have often heard that pride goes before a fall. Pride blinds one to one's own weaknesses. One needs to be extra careful when one is successful. What are the situations that may cause you to feel confident or proud of yourself? (Students fill in the blank here.)

4. "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burden and so fulfill the law of Christ." (Gal 6:1, 2)

How I would apply it in my life

The Bible teaches us to watch out for one another. Who are the people in your life that you feel you should keep a lookout for? Are there people who are keeping a lookout for you? Do you fall into the devil's trap of isolating yourself? What are some ways to encourage brothers and sisters to stay strong as one body with members taking care of one another? (Read Eccl 4:9-12) (Students fill in the blank here.)

5. "Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, and revive me in Your way." (Ps 119:37)

How I would apply it in my life

Many times, sin creeps into our lives very slowly. It may start off as something that catches our attention. Slowly, it grows on us and we become more and more attached to it and ultimately, we forget and lose sight of the teachings of the Bible. What are some things that are considered "worthless" (or even harmful) that we should turn our eyes and attention away from? (Students fill in the blank here.)

Part B- Below is a piece of writing penned for a sister who was going to go abroad for further studies. The writer of the passage wanted to remind and forewarn the sister that there may be many things out there in the world that can steer us away from God's teachings and from understanding what really counts in life. Read the passage to the class (it is not in the student workbook) and discuss what things may potentially draw us away from what is really important as Christians:

The Secret of My Success

Now there was a certain wise man who habitually dispensed advice though he did live in a cave in a very inaccessible mountain. And a certain merchant went through much hardship and in spite of his potbelly, clambered up the mountain and asked the wise man, "O great guru, what is the secret of success?" To which, the sage murmured, "Work hard and take the narrow one-way path of total dedication." The merchant happily went on his way and dedicated himself to his business, and the merchant made the Fortune's billionaire list.

Likewise, a struggling student groped his way through the thickets that flourished on the mountain side, and torn and bleeding, asked of the wise man, "O great guru, what is the secret of success?" To which the old man intoned from within the cover of his dhoti, "Concentrate and flee all distractions from the way of knowledge." The student nodded with understanding and he came down from the mountain and immediately concentrated on his chosen field of study; and the student won the Nobel Prize.

A Christian stumbled upon the cave one day and spending some days with the wise man, was suitably impressed with his knowledge. He asked the wise man, "What is the secret of success?" To which, the wise man smiled magnanimously and offered, "Be moderate in religion and live tolerantly among men." The Christian shook with emotion and felt a sense of enlightenment; and the Christian made no enemies in his lifetime and did not progress in his faith either.

Now it came about that the merchant, the student and the Christian all died and were buried. And, in Hades, they lifted their eyes, being in torment, and saw the guru from afar. And they cried out and said, "O great guru, why are we all here? We are in agony in this flame." But the guru approached and removed his turban, revealing two just visible horns emerging from thick matted hairs, and said, "That is the secret of my success."



"Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxieties. And see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Ps 139:23, 24). May we all learn to always pray like the psalmist, to constantly check ourselves and see if there are hidden sins inside of us, that we may not continue in our sins which lead to destruction.