



Community Group Discussion Guide

October 13, 2024

1 Samuel 12: 1-25 | Samuel's Farewell Address

MOTIVATE

- ⇒ **Starter Question: Have you ever been caught in unseasonal weather or experienced a natural phenomenon? How did that experience make you feel?**

DISCUSS

In 1 Samuel 12:1-25, Samuel used the public assembly at Gilgal as an occasion to address all of Israel for the last time in his life. Samuel's farewell address marked the end of his office as judge and officially transitioned Israel to a monarchy. Samuel continued to play a pivotal role in Israel's history, but he utilized this moment to refocus the people on God's covenant as they entered this new era. (See [1 Samuel Overview](#) for additional information.)

The chapter begins with Samuel proving his faithfulness as a leader before the people and God, which he then contrasted with the nation's historical and current unfaithfulness. He gave them a clear picture of what it would look like if they followed God or if they continued to turn away from Him. Samuel then called on God to display His power through a miraculous and overpowering thunderstorm, which drew the nation to repentance. Samuel reminded them that they were God's people and that He would keep His covenant with them, but he left them with a stern warning to continue upholding their side of the covenant as well.

Samuel's speeches in 1 Samuel 8 and 12 serve as bookends to the end of the judges and the beginning of the monarchy. There are several speeches from important figures in the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Samuel, and Kings that serve as transitions from one era to the next. Through these speeches we see the pattern of the renewal of the Mosaic covenant. Each time Israel broke the covenant through their disobedience, or entered into a new endeavor, God reestablished the covenant with them and promised to never leave them. Ultimately Samuel's speech was another reminder of God's mercy toward His people despite their sin.

- ⇒ **How do the patterns of Israel's behavior in the Old Testament mirror our own today?**
 ⇒ **Why is reflection on their behavior and God's response important for us?**

1 Samuel 12:1-5: And Samuel said to all Israel, "Behold, I have obeyed your voice in all that you have said to me and have made a king over you. **2** And now, behold, the king walks before you, and I am old and gray; and behold, my sons are with you. I have walked before you from my youth until this day. **3** Here I am; testify against me before the LORD and before his anointed. Whose ox have I taken? Or whose donkey have I taken? Or whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed? Or from whose hand have I taken a bribe to blind my eyes with it? Testify against me and I will restore it to you." **4** They said, "You have not defrauded us or oppressed us or taken anything from any man's hand." **5** And he said to them, "The LORD is witness against you, and his anointed is witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand." And they said, "He is witness."

Samuel's service to God and the people began when he was a child (1 Samuel 1:24-28), but in his place the newly reaffirmed Saul would lead. "The king walks before you" implied that Saul was already in office. Samuel acknowledged his old age and admitted his son's failures as judges again. The phrase "with you" instead of "over you" denotes they had been removed from office. Samuel stated, "I have walked before you," indicating that circumstances had changed and he would no longer be their appointed leader.

- ⇒ **Put yourselves in the shoes of the characters of these verses. What emotions might you be feeling as Samuel, Saul, or the people? What thoughts, fears, or hopes might you have about the transition of leadership?**

Before the leadership officially transitioned to Saul as king, Samuel contrasted his leadership to that of the kings of surrounding nations. In 1 Samuel 8, Samuel had described how a king would seize everything the people held dear by using the word “take” six times. Here, Samuel used the word “take” three times to declare his integrity. Through questions, Samuel asserted that he never took an ox or a donkey--the most valuable possessions of a farmer. He declared that, unlike his sons, he did not take bribes to ignore evil or suffering around him. To defraud means to cheat someone out of something that is rightfully theirs, while oppress implies using authority to take advantage of others.

The people affirmed Samuel’s innocence, but Samuel wanted to ensure that no blame could be placed on his shoulders, so he called upon God and Saul as his witnesses. The people acknowledged the witnesses and expressed their agreement with Samuel’s statements. As God’s divinely appointed judge, Samuel had upheld the office faithfully, which gave him the authority for the next words he spoke to the nation.

- ⇒ **Samuel’s example of faithful leadership should cause us to reflect on our own integrity and that of our leaders. Although we might not have a king who “takes” from us in America, what are examples of how leaders take, defraud, or oppress their followers?**
- ⇒ **Imagine you are standing before the church like Samuel did before the people. Would you walk away with the same affirmation of integrity?**

1 Samuel 12:6-12: And Samuel said to the people, “The LORD is witness, who appointed Moses and Aaron and brought your fathers up out of the land of Egypt. **7** Now therefore stand still that I may plead with you before the LORD concerning all the righteous deeds of the LORD that he performed for you and for your fathers. **8** When Jacob went into Egypt, and the Egyptians oppressed them, then your fathers cried out to the LORD and the LORD sent Moses and Aaron, who brought your fathers out of Egypt and made them dwell in this place. **9** But they forgot the LORD their God. And he sold them into the hand of Sisera, commander of the army of Hazor, and into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand of the king of Moab. And they fought against them. **10** And they cried out to the LORD and said, ‘We have sinned, because we have forsaken the LORD and have served the Baals and the Ashtaroth. But now deliver us out of the hand of our enemies, that we may serve you.’ **11** And the LORD sent Jerubbaal and Barak and Jephthah and Samuel and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side, and you lived in safety. **12** And when you saw that Nahash the king of the Ammonites came against you, you said to me, ‘No, but a king shall reign over us,’ when the LORD your God was your king.”

Samuel set out to prove that the people had broken God’s covenant by asking for a king in spite of His Kingship in their lives. These verses read like a closing argument of a court case. “Stand still that I may plead” was a legal phrase which commanded them to respectfully hear the case Samuel was building. “Plead” is an uncommon form of the verb “to judge,” which is legal language that further supported Samuel’s authority.

Samuel began his argument by recounting Israel’s history. He identified God as the One who appointed Moses and Aaron. He reminded the people that it was God’s direction and deliverance from Egypt that built the nation and gave Him a covenantal claim on the Israelites. Samuel continued with the pattern of the people forgetting God, then crying out to Him, and God responding through a divinely appointed deliverer. Samuel cited other patriarchs and judges that God established as the people continued their pattern.

Samuel came to the crux of his argument by stating that this time, the people saw an enemy and instead of crying out to God they demanded a worldly leader to deliver them. Their history proved that the people had no valid reason to not trust the Lord, yet they rejected His divine protection and past intervention. This demonstrated how little the nation understood their privilege as God’s chosen people.

- ⇒ **How does Israel’s history mentioned here prove God’s presence and protection?**
- ⇒ **What makes the Israelites request for a king particularly offensive to God?**

1 Samuel 12:13-15: And now behold the king whom you have chosen, for whom you have asked; behold, the LORD has set a king over you. **14** If you will fear the LORD and serve him and obey his voice and not rebel against the commandment of the LORD, and if both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the LORD your God, it will be well. **15** But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then the hand of the LORD will be against you and your king.

Samuel continued his case by using two phrases that at first seem contradictory. He used the phrase “for whom you have asked” to indicate the people had asked for a king. This was coincidentally reinforced by Saul’s very name which sounds like the Hebrew phrase, sha’ul, meaning, “asked for.” Samuel was making it clear that the responsibility of the change in leadership lay with the people.

However, this change did not happen without divine permission, as Samuel proved by stating the LORD “set a king” over the people. The Israelites had grown tired of the leaders God provided, just like their ancestors grew tired of manna in the wilderness (Numbers 11:4-6), so the LORD gave them over to their desires. Their impatience and lack of faith in the God’s chosen leaders caused them to break their promise to follow God alone, thus sealing Samuel’s argument that they were responsible for breaking the covenant.

The people wanted a king like the Canaanites, but what they failed to realize was that with God as their true King, they could never fully have a monarchy like the surrounding nations. Having a king did not exempt the people from the Mosaic covenant, nor did it exempt the king. Therefore, everyone needed to submit to the LORD’s rule.

Samuel reminded the people that if they feared and obeyed God they would be blessed, but if they disobeyed Him they would be cursed. To fear God means submission and awe (Hebrews 12:28). The Israelites, and believers today, must actively choose to love, worship, serve, and fear God. Fear of God protects us against pride and disobedience, as the more we grow closer to Him the more we love and revere Him.

- ⇒ **If Samuel were to speak to us today, what is it that Christians have “asked for” that the Lord has given over into our hands?**
- ⇒ **What do you think of when you hear the command to fear God? Is this a hard concept to grasp?**
- ⇒ **Why is fear of God vital to your relationship with Him?**

1 Samuel 12:16-18 Now therefore stand still and see this great thing that the LORD will do before your eyes. **17** Is it not wheat harvest today? I will call upon the LORD, that he may send thunder and rain. And you shall know and see that your wickedness is great, which you have done in the sight of the LORD, in asking for yourselves a king.” **18** So Samuel called upon the LORD, and the LORD sent thunder and rain that day, and all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel.

Samuel concluded his case by calling on God’s authority and power to prove his point through an unexpected storm. Samuel knew that neither a logical argument nor a hard-hitting history lesson was enough to persuade the people that they had sinned against God by asking for a king.

Samuel’s speech happened during the wheat harvest season, sometime during late May to early June which was an extremely dry period. Israel had two rainy seasons, one beginning in late October and the other beginning in March and extending until early May. In most years, rains rarely occurred outside of these times.

Moisture, especially a big storm with thunder, would have been contrary to the rhythms of nature during this season. Because of the time of year that it came, extreme rain had the potential to damage the crops. The strength of the storm, the unnaturalness of the timing, and the fear of destruction proved God’s displeasure with the people and opened their eyes to how they had offended Him.

- ⇒ **There are several examples in Scripture of people needing more and more evidence of God’s power. Can you think of an example?**

- ⇒ **Why are we prone to need more proof than what God has already provided us?**
- ⇒ **What proof of God’s presence and power have you seen in your life?**

1 Samuel 12:19-25 And all the people said to Samuel, “Pray for your servants to the LORD your God, that we may not die, for we have added to all our sins this evil, to ask for ourselves a king.” **20** And Samuel said to the people, “Do not be afraid; you have done all this evil. Yet do not turn aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart. **21** And do not turn aside after empty things that cannot profit or deliver, for they are empty. **22** For the LORD will not forsake his people, for his great name’s sake, because it has pleased the LORD to make you a people for himself. **23** Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you, and I will instruct you in the good and the right way. **24** Only fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart. For consider what great things he has done for you. **25** But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king.

The people realized both the precariousness of their situation and the privileged position Samuel was in. The phrase, “the LORD your God,” shows that they saw Samuel as their mediator. They asked him to intercede on their behalf and to specifically ask God to spare them from further punishment. Samuel agreed with their new assessment of themselves and quickly reminded them to turn to God instead of away from Him.

Rather than fleeing for fear of judgment, they needed to be restored to God with renewed dedication and devotion. Returning to God and obeying the covenant would renew their blessings and more importantly their relationship with the LORD. Samuel strongly warned them not to turn aside after “empty things,” referring to idols. The Hebrew word used here for “empty” is *tohu*, which can also be translated as “nothing” or “worthless.” Idols, false gods, and even kings were not going to deliver the people. They would return null and void, fulfill no promise, nor bring any blessing.

Samuel reminded the people that God’s honor was entwined with their covenant. God could not and would not break His commitment to His people, so they could confidently rely on God to provide, protect, and bless them. Samuel then introduced his new role by committing to continue interceding and instructing the people. The phrase “far be it from me” can be translated “I vow” and shows Samuel was so committed to the people that he would consider it a sin to not serve them. His final instruction was to serve the LORD faithfully with all of their hearts, followed by a solemn warning of what will happen if they do not.

- ⇒ **When confronted with your sin, are you prone to run away from God or run to Him?**
- ⇒ **What “empty things” are you prone to turn to instead of God?**

TRANSFORM

1. Make personal application: Samuel’s address to the people has several practical applications, such as leaders keeping their integrity, running to God after we have sinned, and praying on behalf of others. But ultimately this passage testifies to the grace of God. Samuel’s speech is a “second chance” for this generation. God graciously forgave them and allowed them to return to Him. He reconfigured their disobedience into a redemptive plan, transforming their sin into a new avenue of grace (Genesis 50:15-20).

- ⇒ **Give an example of a time you substituted God with an empty idol. Once your sin was exposed, how did you respond?**
- ⇒ **How has God redeemed your sin and reconfigured it into something good? Why is this evidence of His grace?**
- ⇒ **It would have been enough for God to just forgive us, but instead He gives us good things when we only deserve His wrath. What are some good things (spiritual and physical) that God has blessed you with?**

2. Pray: Praise God for His continued faithfulness and grace in your life in spite of your sin. Confess any patterns of sin or empty idols you have and ask Him to forgive you. Thank God for the grace He has shown you. Ask the Lord to reignite your love for Him so that you actively choose to worship and serve Him with your whole heart.

STUDY

Resources used, compiled from, and quoted:

- Christian Standard Study Bible (2017), pages 426-427.
- English Standard Version Study Bible (2008), pages 572-574.
- ESV Expository Commentary: 1 Samuel-2 Chronicles (2019), pages 131-138.
- Holman Old Testament Commentary I & II Samuel (2009), pages 88-92.
- NIV Application Commentary I & II Samuel (2021), pages 187-194.
- New International Version Life Application Study Bible (1997) pages 454-455.