



Community Group Discussion Guide

1 Samuel Overview

MOTIVATE

Starter Questions:

- ⇒ *What do you know about the book of 1 Samuel? Why is it an important book of the Old Testament?*
- ⇒ *How does the Old Testament concept of kingship relate to our faith today?*

DISCUSS

From Genesis to Esther

The Old Testament consists of 39 books divided into five categories:

- Law (5 books)
- History (12 books)
- Poetry (5 books)
- Major Prophets (5 books)
- Minor Prophets (12 books)

The books of the Law, also called the Torah or the Pentateuch, were written by Moses. In these books we learn about the patriarchs like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as well as Israel's growth into a great nation.

The twelve historical books begin along the banks of the Jordan River and tell the story of God's liberated people occupying the land promised to them. The books are Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. These books center on prominent characters like the prophet Samuel and King David, and focus on five major events affecting the Israelite nation:

1. Conquest and settling of Canaan: **Joshua** and **Judges** tell of God's people as they cross the Jordan and settle in their Promised Land. When the Israelites were obedient to God's law, He helped them conquer their enemies in Canaan. When they were disobedient, they suffered defeat. Early in the nation's history, the tribes were governed by judges. **Ruth** takes place during the rule of the judges and reveals the ancestry of King David, and ultimately Jesus the Messiah.

2. Transition from tribal rule to a monarchy: **1 and 2 Samuel**, **1 Kings**, and **1 Chronicles** tell of Israel's first three kings, Saul, David, and Solomon, as well as introducing scores of people and places covering nearly a century of history. During this period, the nation became increasingly unified and experienced relative peace and prosperity. After removing the crown from Saul, Israel's first king, God bestowed kingship on David and, later, on David's son Solomon.

3. Division of the kingdom: **2 Kings** and **2 Chronicles** record the tragic division of the nation into the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Even though King Solomon built the first temple for God, his tolerance of sin and idolatry led to the split of the once mighty Israel into these two weaker nations. These books show the continuing decline of both kingdoms and their respective kings.

4. Exile: **2 Kings** and **2 Chronicles** record some of the history of the Assyrians conquering of the Northern Kingdom and the Babylonians conquering of the Southern Kingdom. Despite warnings from God's prophets, the disobedient people of both kingdoms refused God's call for repentance. In doing so, they incurred His judgement. As a result, untold numbers of Jews were forced from their land to live as exiles in Babylon. **Esther** tells the story of her rise to prominence during this time of exile.

5. Return to the Promised Land: Ezra and Nehemiah chronicle the return of God's people from foreign captivity to their own land where they rebuilt Jerusalem and the temple. The restoration of Israel and its national sovereignty were short-lived, for, by the time of Jesus, the land was ruled by the Romans.

- ⇒ ***Why is it important for us to have a basic understanding of Israel's history?***
- ⇒ ***Discuss this quote: In the pages of the Bible's historical books, we see God's faithfulness, mercy, and discipline, as well as His promise for a Messiah who would come from the line of King David. God honored this promise in the birth of His Son, Jesus.***

Focus on 1 Samuel

In the Hebrew Bible, 1 and 2 Samuel were originally one book. Both are named for Samuel, the judge and prophet God used to establish the human monarchy in Israel. For 200 years, Israel was ruled by judges. Eli and Samuel were the last of these judges. Samuel anointed the first two kings of Israel, Saul who was a failure and David who began with great success.

The author of 1 Samuel is unknown. Whomever it was, the writer had to have used sources as none of the book's characters could have been an eyewitness to all the events contained in the book. Chronology was not particularly important to biblical historians. The sequence of events was at times moved around in order to make the theological point of the text. Thus, the time of composition was most likely somewhat removed from when the actual events occurred. 1 Samuel is estimated to have been possibly written either:

- Between the end of David's life and some point during Solomon's reign. During this period, no superpower overshadowed Palestine. Led by David, Israel subdued other nations in Canaan. However, the Philistines proved to be a resilient and persistent enemy.
- During Solomon's reign and before the division of Israel into the Northern and Southern Kingdoms (around 950BC).

The audience for 1 Samuel is also not specified but is generally believed to be either:

- Israelites living in their Promised Land during the reigns of David and Solomon, as well as successive generations. The book spoke to Israelites who lived while the monarchy was being established, particularly in light of the fact that the account legitimized God's choice of David.
- Israelites living in the 6th or 5th centuries BC who were concerned about putting their nation back together following Babylonian captivity. They were interested in tracing out the historical roots of theological and political issues that affected their lives.

1 and 2 Samuel are organized around three men and tells their stories successively. Secondary characters are important as they relate to these three major characters.

1. Samuel: Judge and prophet (1 Samuel 1-7): Dedicated to serve God by his mother, Hannah, Samuel's life is distinguished from the failures of the high priest Eli and his sons. The Philistine wars led to the end of Eli's family, but Samuel prevailed over the Philistines and led Israel as one of her greatest judges and prophets.

Samuel was a dedicated servant, but his sons turned away from God and the people rejected his leadership. Despite his warning of the inevitable negative consequences, Samuel facilitated Israel's desired transition from God's direct covenant rule to a political system led by a human king as His representative.

- ⇒ ***Can you recall a story about or a teaching from the life of Samuel?***

2. Saul: Israel's first king (1 Samuel 8-14): God was responsible for shaping Israel's destiny. Israel's disappointment with the priesthood of Eli and the sin of Samuel's sons led the nation to desire a new form of leadership by demanding a king. God granted this desire and Samuel reluctantly anointed Saul as the nation's first king. Saul had a promising beginning, marked by leadership and bravery, although he could never end the conflict with the Philistines. Saul was a talented leader who failed to heed the

word of God and his kingship was taken away by God. In this, God set a plan in motion for David to become Israel's next and greatest king.

⇒ *Can you recall a story about or a teaching from the life of Saul?*

3. David: From shepherd to warrior to king (1 Samuel 15-39): Although Saul is king until the end of 1 Samuel, the narrative shows David's long journey as his coming successor. David's story is told from the viewpoint of Saul's continued failures. Saul's reign was marred by personal problems and the constant threat of Philistine oppression. David demonstrates that those whom God chooses may come as a surprise. David served God wholeheartedly, even in the face of great difficulty. In 1 Samuel he is portrayed as ministering to Saul, killing Goliath, becoming a great warrior, and expressing unwavering loyalty to God, to Saul, and to Saul's son, Jonathan.

⇒ *Can you recall a story about or a teaching from the life of David?*

1 Samuel can be organized in this manner:

- Chapters 1-7: Background for the establishment of kingship in Israel.
- Chapters 8-12: Establishment of kingship in Israel.
- Chapters 13-15: Saul's failures as king.
- Chapters 16-30: David's rise to the throne and his conflict with Saul.
- Chapter 31: The death of King Saul.

⇒ *Based on this organization of the chapters in 1 Samuel, what appears to be a major theme? Why is this important to remember in our study of 1 Samuel?*

Major Themes of 1 Samuel: The books of Samuel comprise the primary texts narrating the rise of Israel's monarchy, the failure of King Saul, and the success of King David. In presenting these historical narratives, several major themes emerge.

1. God's plan for kingship: The books of Samuel are primarily devoted to narrating the beginnings of the new Israelite institution of kingship. God most often assumed the position of King of Israel, and this was not a concept that would be relinquished in the new monarchy. God's kingship over Israel appears in numerous passages of the Old Testament, and certain Royal Psalms celebrate His reign. It is no surprise, then, that the transition from theocracy to monarchy, which is narrated mostly in 1 Samuel, was an agonizing development in the life of Israel.¹

In 1 Samuel 8, tribal elders approached Samuel and asked him to appoint a king to become their new leader. The difficult process of moving from an established form of government to a new organization headed by a king brought disappointment to Samuel. He described for the people what the new form of government would cost them. But they were determined to have a king to provide military protection, so God instructed Samuel to "give them a king."

⇒ *How does God's plan for kingship lead the way for the coming of the King of Kings?*

2. God's sovereign control and leadership: God maintained ultimate control over Israel's history and Israel prospered as long as the people regarded God as their true King. It is clear that He alone must continue to rule Israel, even after a human leader comes to power. God governed in the past through certain religious and political institutions (i.e., priesthood and tabernacle, with the network of judges). Paradoxically, these must all be transformed in the new monarchy, yet, as symbols of God's kingship, they must also remain the same. The priesthood will be resuscitated, the tabernacle relocated and rebuilt as a permanent structure to house the ark of the covenant, and the system of judges reconfigured and absorbed by the monarchy.²

¹ Arnold, B. T. (2003). [1 & 2 Samuel](#) (p. 31-32). Zondervan.

² Arnold, B. T. (2003). [1 & 2 Samuel](#) (p. 34). Zondervan.

The distinctive feature of Israelite kingship was not only that the king was the chosen and anointed one but that the king must accept Yahweh's authority and lead the people in submission to Yahweh's sovereignty. At stake, of course, is the manner in which the human king would use or abuse his God-given power.³ The books of 1 and 2 Samuel are devoted to illustrating—first by negative example (Saul) and then by positive example (David)—who may serve suitably as Yahweh's chosen ruler.⁴ The dangers of kingship and the hope for kingship form the narrative tension for the book.

⇒ *How does God's sovereignty establish the foundation upon which Jesus will lead as King of Kings?*

3. God's covenant faithfulness: The concept of covenant became Israel's most important relational metaphor with God.⁵ Covenants provide a unifying principle for understanding the whole of Scripture. Each covenant forms a new phase in one overarching divine plan. God faithfully kept and continues to keep His promises to Israel. Even when Israel continued in disobedience and faithlessness, God responded with mercy and justice.

The books of Samuel contribute to Israel's concept of "messiah" and place emphasis on the Davidic covenant that God instituted in 2 Samuel 7:1-17; 23:5. In this unconditional covenant, God promised to establish a perpetual kingdom in which one of David's descendants would sit upon the throne of Israel forever. God kept this covenant in spite of David's own sin and the wickedness of subsequent kings descended from David.

⇒ *How is Jesus the ultimate fulfillment of God's covenant with David?*

4. God's anointed: Priests and kings were ceremonially anointed as a sign of official appointment to an office, and as a symbol of God's power upon them. The act contained an element of awe. In 1 Samuel 24:6, David would not harm King Saul because of the anointing the king had received. Israel came to see each succeeding king as God's anointed one, the messiah who would deliver them from their enemies and establish the nation as God's presence on the earth.

The concept of an ideal anointed one is sustained in the 1 Samuel narrative. But at the same time the shortcomings of Saul and David call the whole venture into question. Earlier, Israel's need for a king is first justified and then met by the anointing and reign of King Saul. But his rejected rulership only serves to highlight the need for a righteous and just king. This need seems to be met in king David, but the disappointing flaws in David create a tension in the narrative: the ideal and hope of David versus his failures.⁶

⇒ *How does Jesus prove that He is God's Anointed One?*

5. God's expectation for obedience: The king was an instrument of God's rule and unswerving devotion to Him was an essential characteristic of a godly leader. 1 Samuel 15:22 teaches that God wants His people to follow and obey with a whole heart rather than to maintain superficial commitment based on traditions or ceremony. God is also very clear throughout books like 1 Samuel: obedience to Him brings blessing and possession of the land, disobedience brings judgement and loss of control of the land. As all leaders and the people who follow are flawed, God calls for confession and repentance to be of priority in the relationship humankind has with Him. The books of Samuel have three primary illustrations of this:

a. 1 Samuel 7: In the life of the Israelite community: With Samuel's help, the Israelites came to understand the nature of wholehearted turning to God as both a repudiation of past sins and exclusive devotion to Yahweh. Samuel gathered them at Mizpah for prayer and fasting, and Israel's corporate

³ Arnold, B. T. (2003). [1 & 2 Samuel](#) (p. 37). Zondervan.

⁴ Arnold, B. T. (2003). [1 & 2 Samuel](#) (p. 34). Zondervan.

⁵ Arnold, B. T. (2003). [1 & 2 Samuel](#) (p. 31). Zondervan.

⁶ Arnold, B. T. (2003). [1 & 2 Samuel](#) (p. 36). Zondervan.

confession was succinct and genuine: We have sinned against the LORD. The Lord responded at once with victory and peace, where before there had been only failure and defeat.⁷

b. 1 Samuel 15: In the life of Saul: The second portrait of a confession from Saul teaches by way of contrast. As the first example was genuine and effective, Saul's was insincere and futile. His words and actions were self-serving and self-vindicating. Saul regrets his actions because they leave him vulnerable, not because they were self-destructive and offensive to God.⁸

c. 2 Samuel 12: In the life of David: David's "I have sinned" is not followed by recrimination or self-vindication. His words stand alone, exposed, and vulnerable. David is a broken man. The king who boldly took what was not rightfully his acknowledges his guilt.⁹

- ⇒ ***How did Jesus provide for our obedience as well as our repentance and confession?***
- ⇒ ***Which of these major themes is the most meaningful to you today?***

TRANSFORM

1. Make personal application: 1 Samuel challenges us to live lives of wholehearted obedience to God. Through the examples of individuals like Hannah and David, we learn that God can use both women and men, who may be unappreciated or rejected by others, to do great things for Him—if they have great faith in Him.¹⁰ As part of our New Testament faith, the books of Samuel speak with power to our understanding of the work of Christ in the world and His call for us to obey His command to reach the nations for Him.

- ⇒ ***What is something new you learned today about the book of 1 Samuel?***
- ⇒ ***Why is such in-depth context a vital part of our study of Scripture?***
- ⇒ ***What excites you about this study of 1 Samuel?***

2. Pray: Ask God to prepare our hearts and minds for this study of 1 Samuel. Praise Him for being a God who has always worked in human history and who continues to do so today.

STUDY

Resources used, compiled from, and quoted:

- *The Apologetics Study Bible*, pages 405-406.
- *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, pages 70-71, 356-350, 1409-1412.
- *Holman Illustrated Bible Handbook*, pages 87-94.
- *Holman New Testament Commentary, 1 and 2 Samuel*, pages 1-5.
- *The NIV Application Commentary, 1 and 2 Samuel*, pages 13-43.
- *Shepherd's Notes, 1 and 2 Samuel*, pages 1-4.
- <https://www.gotquestions.org/historical-books-of-the-Bible.html>. Cited on 7.27.24.

⁷ Arnold, B. T. (2003). [1 & 2 Samuel](#) (p. 39). Zondervan.

⁸ Arnold, B. T. (2003). [1 & 2 Samuel](#) (p. 39). Zondervan.

⁹ Arnold, B. T. (2003). [1 & 2 Samuel](#) (p. 40). Zondervan.

¹⁰ Andrews, S. J., & Bergen, R. D. (2009). [1, 2 Samuel](#) (Vol. 6, p. 3). Holman Reference.