



Key Passage: 1 Samuel 2:7-8

Key Thought: God raises up the weak, but he humbles the proud¹

The gospel in 1 Samuel:

First Samuel begins with the birth of Samuel the judge & prophet, and it ends with the death of King Saul.

The story begins with the story of Hannah, who desperately wanted a son. Against the backdrop of sneers and jeers, Hannah prayed for God to open her womb, and God granted her prayer with the birth of a son, Samuel. By way of tribute, Hannah offered Samuel back to God, dedicating his life to the service of the Temple (1:1-2:11). The high priest, Eli, had wayward sons; God provided a “second chance” of sorts for Eli to raise Samuel in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (2:12-36). One can’t help but notice parallels between Hannah and Mary, between Samuel and Jesus, especially when you compare the language of 1 Samuel 1-2 and Luke 1-2.

¹ Note, key passages, key thoughts, and hook questions come from Michael Williams, *How To Read the Bible through the Jesus Lens*. Notes come from this book, along with Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Old Testament in Seven Sentences* and H. H. Drake Williams, *Making Sense of the Bible*.

The Lord calls Samuel (chapter 3) and chooses him to judge Israel (chapter 7). God's power and presence is seen in stories about the ark of the covenant (4-6).

The children of Israel transition from the period of judge-rule to kingly rule, and Samuel is used by God to guide the transition. Samuel warns against the dangers of a king, but ultimately God allows them to have a king, provided that the king does not rule like the kings of nations around them (chapter 8). The first king chosen for Israel is Saul—physically imposing but seemed to possess a humility and ability to learn (9-12). However, that early humility gave way to pride, and Samuel is forced to share God's message of warning (13:1-14) and God ultimately rejects Saul as king (chapter 15). Saul begins to show signs of worsening after this announcement, since the Spirit of God departed from Saul (16:14). For example, he makes a rash vow that would have ended in the death of his own son if the people had not intervened (chapter 14). Saul is a tragic figure.

God tells Samuel to anoint David, the shepherd boy, to be the next king (chapter 16). David faces the giant Goliath and defeats him, armed with only 5 smooth stones, and the power of God (chapter 17). The friendship between David and Saul's son Jonathan grows (chapter 18), while Saul's spiritual state weakens and weakens, leading him to jealousy and to try to kill David (18:6-16; chapter 19). Jonathan warns David (chapter 20), who is forced to flee to a cave (21-22); but at the cave of Adullam, all those who were in need of something found strength in David as their leader (chapter 22). David continues to do well, while Saul continues to try to kill him, forcing David to be on the run (chapters 23 & 27). David, showing the mercy of God, spares Saul's life twice (chapters 24 & 26).

Saul, frantic and looking for help, calls upon a witch to summon Samuel (who had died). The irony is strong, since Saul himself had banned seeking after witchcraft! The witchcraft works, and Samuel tells Saul that tragedy is about to befall him and the people (chapter 28). In the final chapter, a wounded Saul lay dying, and he falls on his own sword. His armor-bearer does the same. In addition, his son Jonathan dies in the battle against the Philistines (chapter 31). As Christopher Wright notes, "The Israelites asked for a king to drive out the Philistines. But when their first king dies, they are more under the cruel oppression of the Philistines than ever."² This is how 1 Samuel ends.³

Let's pause and consider the roller-coaster effect that we see in this book (these are taken from Christopher Wright's book). First, Israel sees great leadership. Samuel has great leadership qualities, offering stability as a judge unlike the chaos before him. He

² C. J. H. Wright, p. 90.

³ Michael Williams, *How To Read the Bible through the Jesus Lens* (Zondervan, 2012), p.43.

is a military leader, a prophet, and somewhat of a priest (offering sacrifices, but not at the tent in Shiloh). But he rules so well, it helps usher in the idea for a king! Also, his own house struggles as his children give in to bribery and corruption.⁴

Second, Israel sees a great enemy. The Philistines are the worst. An invading people from the Aegean, they already use iron technology, which means they had superior weapons and chariots. They win battles, steal the Ark of the Covenant (for a season), and leave the Israelites deeply humiliated. This leads the people to think their only hope is in a strong unified leadership. Well—yes, and no. Yes to God, no to kings.

Third, a kingdom is begun which will lead to Christ, but at a cost. The people want a king to be like “the nations around them.” And they want a human king, a sign they have rejected God as their king. God even says “it’s not you; it’s me. They have rejected me as their king.” God gives them what they ask for but offers warnings that come true (1 Sam 8:10-18). But also blessings that will come true.

Fourth, we see human choices and God’s sovereignty at work. We make choices. God responds. God makes decisions and we respond. There is an interplay between God’s sovereign will and our free choices.

Finally, God expects his rules to be followed; but there is an interesting call to the heart of it all. “To obey is better than sacrifice” (1 Sam 15:22). And in the New Testament, Jesus reminds us that God desires mercy over sacrifice. We see the heart of God in all these stories.

The gospel in 2 Samuel:

David mourned the death of his friend, and even had respect for the death of Israel’s king (chapter 1). When chapter 2 opens, David is anointed king over Judah (2:1-7). But those loyal to Saul announced Ish-bosheth as king of Israel, and he reigned for 2 years (2:8-11). Battles rage (2-4), but David grew stronger as the “house of Saul” grew weaker and weaker (3:1). Ultimately, David becomes king over Israel (chapter 5). He reigned for 7 years at Hebron in the land of Judah, but once he captured the fortified mountain city of Jerusalem, he made this his home base, builds a palace there, and reigns for another 33 years. Jerusalem becomes known not only as the city of David, but as the Zion, the city of God. He defeated the Philistines once and for all, finally giving rest as the people rule in their own land as God promised Moses and Joshua. In Chapter 7, David is promised an enduring kingdom (7:11-16). In this chapter, we learn of the “Davidic Covenant,” where a son of David will always reign over his

⁴ Christopher J. H. Wright, p.87.

people, Israel. What a wonderful contrast to the chaos that Israel has experienced ever since they were first formed! Listen to Christopher J. H. Wright:

“It...makes a strong contrast with what goes on before David turns up—the depressing centuries of Israel’s early life in the land of Canaan, the repeated unfaithfulness of the people, the chaos and anarchy of the era of the judges, and especially the tragic failure of the first King.”⁵

There are 4 things we learn from the Davidic Covenant:

- (1) One of David’s descendants will be king over Israel continuously into the future (beginning with Solomon).
- (2) The sons of David—who serve as king over Israel—will be regarded as sons of God (not divinity, but in relationship with God like a father and a son; see Ps 2:7).
- (3) This relationship means reciprocal love, obedience from the king, and punishment for failure to keep covenant. The King is still under the covenant at Sinai. This reinforces that fact—the king is still a subject of God, the king of Israel.
- (4) David’s house and kingdom will be forever. A son of David will rule over God’s people forever.

Luke, the historian, tells the story this way (see Acts 13:17-23). But the last line Luke uses is a quote from 1 Samuel 13:14: that David is “a man after my (God’s) own heart.” What does this mean? “Heart” in the OT refers to the seat of the will—to decisions, not emotions. It is not a declaration that God likes or admires David more than others; it is a statement about the fact that David will carry out God’s intentions for Israel. To make this clear, Luke adds on Isaiah 44:28: “He will do everything I want him to do” (see Acts 13:23).

David shows strength and kindness (8-10), but also shows sinful fool-hardiness (chapters 6 & 11), displaying both sides of David. After his sin with Bathsheba, David is confronted by Nathan the prophet. David prays for forgiveness, but the penalty included the death of a child (chapter 12), and internal rebellion involving his own children. However, David and Bathsheba give birth to Solomon (chapter 12), who will become the heir. The rest of the book shows this constant struggle between David’s “better angels” and “inner demons.” In the final chapter of the book, David chooses to number the fighting men rather than humbly trust in God which results in dire

⁵ Christopher J. H. Wright, p. 73.

consequences for the people. However, when given options, he chooses for the people to suffer in the hands of the Lord—perhaps showing his trust in God.

David is such an interesting figure. A deeply flawed figure. Notice the sins he commits: adultery, deception, planned murder. One of his sons does the same thing. Another son tries to wage war against his father. Good thing the story isn't about David! The hero of the story, of course, is God. Notice 2 Sam 7:8-9. God leads, guides, promotes, and provides. Even through deeply flawed people.

Jesus Christ serves as the ultimate King. He offers humility rather than pride and self-reliance, submitting even to death on a cross (Philippians 2:5-11). As a result, the Father bestowed upon him all authority and rule over everything (Matthew 28:18). Just compare Isaiah 9:6-7; 11:1-4; Jeremiah 23:5-6. Jesus is the “son of David” (Matt 1:1; Rom 1:3; 15:12), and he is the fulfillment of Psalm 2:7: “You are my son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased” (Mk 1:11).

We learn in the Bible that God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6). Our willingness to humble ourselves like Christ leads to this promise: “if we endure, we shall also reign with him” (2 Tim 2:12). We are now heirs with Christ (Rom 8:17), and we can be sure that God will do the lifting/raising if we will surrender humbly to his will (James 4:10; 1 Peter 5:6).

It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking our security and significance will come through our own efforts. Instead, if we trust in him, we find real security and significance. Ironically, it comes through giving up and surrendering that we find lasting peace and ultimate hope.

Hook Questions:⁶

1. What have you bragged about lately? Do you consider humility a weakness or a strength? Do you regard Jesus as weak or powerful? Who are some humble people whom you admire? Is it harder to come up with names for these people than it is for self-promoting people?
2. Does the source of your pride focus on God, or on yourself? Where do you turn first when things get tough? To whom do you give credit when things go well?

⁶ Michael Williams, *How to Read the Bible through the Jesus Lens* (Zondervan, 2012), p.48.