

CHAPTER 10: 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel 1 thru 10

The book of 1 Samuel begins at the end of the period of the Judges. We are introduced to a godly woman named Hannah. She is distraught over not being able to have children. One year, while on her annual pilgrimage to worship at the tabernacle in Shiloh, Hannah desperately pours out her heart to God. **She was very upset as she prayed to the Lord, and she was weeping uncontrollably. She made a vow saying, “O Lord of hosts, if You will look with compassion on the suffering of your female servant, remembering me and not forgetting your servant, and give a male child to your servant, then I will dedicate him to the Lord all the days of his life...”** (1 Samuel 1:10-11)

God is gracious to Hannah. She becomes pregnant and gives birth to a son. Hannah calls him Samuel, which means “ministers to the Lord.” A joy-filled Hannah sings a song praising God. She says that God opposes the proud and exalts the humble. He works out His divine purposes in history. One day God will raise up a king to rule His people.

Hannah fulfills her promise to God. When Samuel is three years old, she takes him to the tabernacle and leaves him there in the care of the old priest Eli. Samuel is raised up in the tabernacle serving God. **Now the boy Samuel was growing up and finding favor both with the Lord and with people.** (1 Samuel 2:26)

One night... **The Lord called to Samuel, and he replied, “Here I am!”** (1 Samuel 3:4) Samuel thinks it is the priest Eli who is calling out to him, but it is NOT Eli. This happens two more times. The third time Eli knows that it is the Lord who has been calling Samuel. So he tells him, “If He calls you again say, ‘Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.’” And sure enough...

Then the Lord came and stood nearby, calling as He had previously done, “Samuel! Samuel!” Samuel replied, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening!” (1 Samuel 3:10)

God tells Samuel in a vision that He (God) is about to bring judgment on Eli’s family due to the wickedness of Eli’s two sons; but also because of Eli’s failure as their father and spiritual leader to restrain them. The next day Eli asks Samuel what God had told him and Samuel gives Eli the bad news. He doesn’t hold anything back. Eli’s response is one of simple resignation – “The Lord will do what He pleases.”

Samuel continued to grow, and the Lord was with him. None of his prophecies fell to the ground unfulfilled. All Israel from Dan to Beer Sheba (in other words, from far north to far south) **realized that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the Lord. Samuel revealed the word of the Lord to all Israel.** (1 Samuel 3:19-20 and 4:1) Samuel grows up to be a priest and a prophet. He becomes the last of Israel's judges.

The Philistines gain power and become Israel's greatest threat. In a battle against them the Israelite army is defeated. Over four thousand men from Israel are killed. Rather than pray and ask God for help, the Israelites send for the Ark of the Covenant which is in Shiloh. The ark symbolizes the presence of God among His people. The Israelites think that if the ark is with them in battle, it will ensure victory. But it is arrogant presumption for them to believe they can control God like that. Israel loses the battle.

The Philistines capture the ark and take it home with them to Philistia. During the battle Eli's two sons are killed. A man escapes the battle and returns to Shiloh bearing the grim news.

The man said to Eli, "I am the one who came from the battle lines! Just today I fled from the battle lines!" Eli asked, "How did things go, my son?" The messenger replied, "Israel has fled from the Philistines! The army has suffered a great defeat! Your two sons, Hophni and Phineas are dead! The ark of God has been captured! When he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell backward from his chair beside the gate. He broke his neck and died, for he was old and heavy. He had judged Israel for forty years. (1 Samuel 4:16-18)

And so it is that Samuel's prophecy as revealed to him by God comes true.

The captured ark is carried off to the Philistine city of Ashdod. It's placed in the temple of one of the Philistine gods, Dagon. One evening this idol falls to the ground. They find it the next day lying beside the ark with its head and hands broken off. This happens twice. Then the residents of Ashdod are struck with sores. The Philistines become confused and afraid. They move the ark. But no matter where they move it, the people living nearby are afflicted with sores.

After months of torment, the Philistines decide to rid themselves of the troublesome ark. They put the ark on a cart pulled by two cows and send it back to Israel. The cows walk directly down the path that leads into Israelite territory mooing the whole way. When the ark arrives back home the Israelites receive it with great joy.

However, some of the men of Beth Shemesh attempt to look inside the ark which shows a lack of reverence for the holy things of God. Their action violates God's command to **"not look on the holy things [of God] even for a moment, lest you**

die.” (Numbers 4:20) As a result God strikes down and kills seventy of them! The people of Beth Shemesh send the ark away, 10 miles down the road to Kiriath-jearim. There the ark is placed in the house of Abinadab where it remains for a while.

The events surrounding this story tie right in with Hannah’s song. God is not to be treated like Israel’s prize trophy. God opposes pride, not just among His enemies, but also among His own people. **“Do not keep talking so proudly or let your mouth speak such arrogance, for the Lord is a God who knows, and by Him deeds are weighed.”** (1 Samuel 2:3) If Israel is going to enjoy their covenant blessings, they must remain humble before the Lord their God and show a holy reverence for Him.

After the ark’s return, revival breaks out in Israel. **All the people of Israel longed for the Lord. Samuel said to all the people of Israel, “If you are really turning to the Lord with all your hearts, remove from among you the foreign gods and the images of Ashtoreth. Give your hearts to the Lord and serve only Him. Then He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines.” So the Israelites removed the Baals and the images of Ashtoreth. They served only the Lord.** (1 Samuel 7:2-4)

The people listen to Samuel and follow his advice. And so Samuel is able to lead them in national repentance of sins.

One day the people of God are gathered for worship. The Philistines launch a surprise attack. God intervenes by thundering loudly against the Philistines and Israel routs them. Samuel sets up a stone of remembrance to commemorate Israel’s defeat of the Philistines that day. He names the stone Ebenezer which means, “The Lord has helped us.” For the remaining years that Israel is under Samuel’s leadership, the Philistines do not enter Israel’s borders.

When Samuel grows old he appoints his sons as judges. This has disastrous results. **So all the elders of Israel gathered together and approached Samuel at Ramah. They said to him, “Look, you are old, and your sons don’t follow your ways. So now appoint over us a king to lead us, just like all the other nations have.”** (1 Samuel 8:4-5) Recall that God had told Moses way back in Deuteronomy 17 that one day the people would ask for a king. Well, now they have.

Samuel is not pleased but he seeks God in this matter. **The Lord said to Samuel, “Do everything the people request of you. For it is not you that they have rejected, but it is Me that they have rejected as their King... So now do as they say. But seriously warn them and make them aware of the policies of the king who will rule over them.”** (1 Samuel 8:7, 9) In other words, give them full disclosure.

Samuel tells the elders what they can expect from a human king. And it’s not good. He says they will experience forced labor, have a heavy tax burden placed on them, and

will lose some personal liberties. Their kings will accumulate wealth for themselves and abuse their power.

But the elders are completely un-phased by all this. **But the people refused to heed Samuel's warning. Instead they said, "No! There will be a king over us! We will be like all the other nations. Our king will judge us and lead us and fight our battles."** (1 Samuel 8:19-20)

Can you see what is wrong with their request? First of all God had told the people of Israel in Leviticus and Deuteronomy that they were to be DIFFERENT from all the other nations. Second, GOD HIMSELF has been Israel's King up until now. He has been working through capable human leaders whom He called. Despite the unfaithfulness and rebellion of the Israelite nation, GOD has judged them. GOD has led them. And GOD has fought their battles. The people seem to have forgotten their own history! How is it possible for any human king (no matter how good they are) to be better than the Lord God as King?

The Lord said to Samuel, "Do as they say and install a king over them." Then Samuel said to the men of Israel, Each of you go back to his own city. (1 Samuel 8:22) The people are about to get what they asked for.

This brings us to Saul. He's a young man from the tribe of Benjamin and he certainly looks the part of a king. **There was no one among the Israelites more handsome than he was; he stood head and shoulders above all the people.** (1 Samuel 9:2) Samuel anoints Saul as Israel's first king and the period of Israel's monarchy begins.

For Saul things actually get off to a pretty good start. He proves himself as a worthy military leader by winning many battles. On one occasion the Ammonites lay siege to Jabesh-gilead and messengers send word to Saul asking for help. Saul rallies his army against the Ammonites. In a brilliant tactical move, Saul attacks the Ammonite army early in the morning and sends them scattering.

So all the people went to Gilgal, where they established Saul as king in the Lord's presence. They offered up peace offerings there in the Lord's presence. Saul and all the Israelites were very happy. (1 Samuel 11:15) So then, Saul's reign begins full of promise.

But it doesn't take long before we see that Saul has deep character flaws. He's hot-tempered, jealous, arrogant, dishonest, lacks integrity, and he refuses to admit his own mistakes. These character defects will lead to his downfall. Instead of being known as Israel's heroic king, Saul turns out to be a tragic figure.

Saul makes one big mistake which leads to him being disqualified by God as king. Here's what happens... In preparation for a battle against the Philistines, Samuel tells Saul to wait for him at Gilgal. When he arrives, Samuel will offer sacrifices to God and give Saul instructions as to what to do next – simple enough. **[Saul] waited for seven days, the time period indicated by Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and the army began to abandon Saul. So Saul said, "Bring me the burnt offering and the peace offerings." Then he offered a burnt offering.** (1 Samuel 13:8-9) Saul takes it upon himself to step into the role of priest and offer the burnt offering. This is a direct violation of God's law. According to Leviticus 3 the burnt offerings are to be done by the priests. But Saul decides to do things his way instead of God's way, bottom line actions.

Just when he had finished offering the burnt offering, Samuel appeared on the scene. Saul went out to meet him and to greet him. But Samuel said, "What have you done?" (1 Samuel 13:10-11) Saul explains that when Samuel did not show up his army had begun to abandon him. **"I thought, 'Now the Philistines will come down on me at Gilgal and I have not sought the Lord's favor.' So I felt obligated to offer the burnt offering."** (1 Samuel 13:12) Basically Saul tries to justify his wrong actions.

Then Samuel said to Saul, "You have made a foolish choice! You have not obeyed the commandment that the Lord your God gave you. Had you done that, the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever! But now your kingdom will not continue! The Lord has sought out for Himself a man who is loyal to Him and the Lord has appointed him to be leader over His people, for you have not obeyed what the Lord commanded you." (1 Samuel 13:13-14) This new king will be a man after God's own heart.

There are immediate consequences for Saul's disobedience – Israel is defeated and Saul's army retreats. Thus, Saul's downfall begins.

On another occasion Saul defeats the Amalekites. God commands that Saul put Agag, king of the Amalekites to death. Instead, Saul spares the king. He again disobeys God. As if that was not bad enough, Saul takes some of the spoils of battle that the Lord had banned. **Then the word of the Lord came to Samuel: "I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned away from Me and has not done what I told him to do." Samuel became angry and cried out to the Lord all that night.** (1 Samuel 15:10-11)

When Samuel confronts Saul about this the next morning, Saul is defiant. He refuses to admit any wrongdoing. In fact, he brags about what a great job he's done as king. **Then Samuel said, "Does the Lord take pleasure in burnt offerings and**

sacrifices as much as He does in obedience? Certainly obedience is better than sacrifice; paying attention is better than the fat of rams. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has rejected you as king.” (1 Samuel 15:22-23)

Saul grabs the edge of Samuel’s robe tearing it. He begs Samuel to pardon him. But Samuel refuses. He reiterates God’s final rejection of Saul as king. **“The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day.”** (1 Samuel 15:28) Samuel departs and for the rest of his life he does not speak to Saul.

The tragic saga of King Saul continues for many years; but behind every scene God at work raising up a new and better king for Israel. As it turns out, this new king is a seemingly insignificant shepherd boy named David. Remember, David’s name was mentioned at the end of the book of Ruth.

At first glance David appears to be the least likely candidate to be a king – he’s only a teenager; he’s the youngest son of a shepherding family, and he’s from the village of Bethlehem. But God’s choice of David is not based on his age or family’s status but rather on his character. So, as the story continues Samuel and Saul will still be around, but the focus of the story will be on David.

God tells Samuel where to go to find the next king of Israel. **The Lord said to Samuel, “How long do you intend to mourn for Saul? I have rejected him as king over Israel. Fill your horn with olive oil and go! I am sending you to Jesse in Bethlehem, for I have selected a king for Myself from among his sons.”** (1 Samuel 16:1)

In Bethlehem Samuel discovers David, the youngest of Jesse’s eight sons. As it turns out David is not nearly as physically impressive as Saul. Even compared to own brothers, David is not all that impressive. **But the Lord said to Samuel, “Don’t be impressed by his appearance or his height... God does not view things the way men do. People look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”** (1 Samuel 16:7)

So Jesse had [David] brought in. Now he was ruddy, with attractive eyes and a handsome appearance. The Lord said, “Go and anoint him. This is the one!” So Samuel took the horn full of olive oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers. The Spirit of the Lord rushed upon David from that day onward...(1 Samuel 16:12-13)

While God’s Spirit infuses David, an evil spirit terrorizes King Saul. Saul becomes more mentally disturbed and begins to suffer from depression. David who is a skilled musician is summoned to play music for the troubled king. Of course Saul is completely

unaware that this same David has been secretly anointed as Israel's future king. David's music comforts Saul and so he employs David in his court.

David regularly makes the 13-mile trip back and forth between Saul's home in Gibeah (where he serves in Saul's court) and his own home in Bethlehem (where he continues to tend his father's sheep). Halfway in between, David passes by the walled stronghold of Jerusalem. It is occupied by a pagan Canaanite people group known as the Jebusites. This place will become very important later in the story.

The Philistines again mobilize against Saul and the Israelite army. The Philistine army stands on top of one hill and the Israelite forces on top of another hill. In between the two hills is a broad valley, the Elah Valley, with a brook running through it. The "champion" of the Philistines is a giant named Goliath standing almost 10 feet tall. He emerges daily cursing God and taunting the Israelites. He challenges anyone on Israel's side to a one-on-one battle against him. The army of Israel is deeply distressed and afraid. For six weeks, morning and evening, Goliath appears and issues his challenge. Everyone in Saul's army is terrified of Goliath. Nobody dares to accept his challenge.

One day David visits his brothers on the front lines of the battle. While he's there, Goliath steps forward and bellows out his curses against God and issues his challenge to the army of Israel. Fear grips the hearts of the Israelites. When David witnesses this scene he questions why nobody will stand up against this man. He's informed that King Saul has promised a financial reward and his daughter's hand in marriage to the man who slays the giant. David announces that he will fight against Goliath.

When King Saul hears this he summons David. Saul questions David's youth and inexperience as a soldier. **David replied to Saul, "Your servant has been a shepherd for his father's flock. Whenever a lion or a bear would come and carry off a sheep from the flock, I would go out after it, strike it down, and rescue the sheep from its mouth... Your servant has struck down both the lion and the bear. This uncircumcised Philistine will be just like one of them. For he has defied the armies of the living God!"** David went on to say, **"The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine!"** Then Saul said to David, **"Go! The Lord be with you."** (1 Samuel 17:34-37)

Saul has David fitted in full battle gear. But David opts against wearing the heavy and bulky armor. Instead he takes only his sling and shepherd's pouch. He selects five smooth stones from the brook that runs through the valley and goes out to meet the giant. As David approaches Goliath, the giant is openly offended. He curses David and tries to intimidate him by casting all sorts of insults at him. But it is David who gets the final word.

But David replied to the Philistine, “You are coming against me with a sword and a spear and with a javelin. But I am coming against you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel’s armies, whom you have defied! This very day the Lord will deliver you into my hand! I will strike you down and cut off your head... and all this assembly will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves! For the battle is the Lord’s, and He will deliver you into our hand.” (1 Samuel 17:45-47)

And with that, David strikes Goliath in the forehead with a stone from his sling. Goliath falls to the ground. David immediately takes the giant’s sword and runs it through him. Then he uses the same sword to cut off his head.

When the Philistines see that their champion is dead they take off running with the Israelites in hot pursuit. Saul’s army suddenly feels emboldened and they chase the Philistines all the way back into Philistine territory to the city of Ekron. David emerges that day as a military hero and is rewarded by King Saul for his actions.

David takes the head of Goliath to Jerusalem (1 Samuel 17:54). He places it outside the walled fortress. David is sending a message to the Jebusites inside who are enemies of Israel: “This is what we do to God’s enemies. You’re next!”

Well, David quickly rises to prominence and stands out as one of Saul’s top soldiers. **On every mission on which Saul sent him, David achieved success. So Saul appointed him over the men of war. This pleased not only all the army, but also Saul’s servants.** (1 Samuel 18:5)

One day Saul and his men return home after a victory over the Philistines. Some of the women come out to meet them. They celebrate by dancing, playing music and singing. **The women who were playing the music sang, “Saul has struck down his thousands, but David his tens of thousands!”** (1 Samuel 18:7) When Saul hears this he is filled with anger. **So Saul feared David, because the Lord was with him but had departed from Saul.** (1 Samuel 18:12) Saul also becomes very jealous of David.

As Saul’s jealousy grows, he repeatedly tries to kill David. One time he even threw his javelin at David! But God protects David from Saul’s wrath and each time provides David a way of escape.

Over a period of time Jonathan, Saul’s son, and David become very close friends. Jonathan protects David from his father. In a moving scene David and Jonathan make a pact with each other. Jonathan, the rightful heir to King Saul’s throne, acknowledges David as the future king of Israel. In return David vows to deal kindly with Jonathan’s descendants.

Over the next decade (1 Samuel Chapters 20 to 30) Saul pursues David all over the countryside trying to kill him. David is constantly on the run. Saul's hostile obsession is not because David has done anything wrong. It is the result of Saul's deranged madness and jealousy. As Saul's spiritual condition deteriorates he ramps up his pursuit of David.

In time David builds up an army of loyal soldiers. It's during this terribly stressful period in David's life that we see David's true character emerge. Numerous times David has the opportunity to kill Saul. But each time, David refuses to do so. On one particular night David and his men sneak into Saul's camp and see him lying there on the ground sleeping. When his men insist that David kill Saul, this is David's response: **“Don't kill him! Who can extend his hand against the Lord's chosen one and remain guiltless? David went on to say, “As the Lord lives, the Lord Himself will strike him down. Either his day will come and he will die, or he will go to battle and be swept away. But may the Lord prevent me from extending my hand against the Lord's chosen one!”** (1 Samuel 26:9-11) Rather than take matters into his own hand, David trusts God. He knows that in God's own time, He will raise David up to be king.

Toward the end of Saul's life there are two stories that reflect his deep spiritual decline. In one story David is on the run from Saul and hides out in the small Benjamite town of Nob. The priests of Nob provide food and shelter for David and his men. Before he leaves they give David the sword of Goliath which they had been keeping. When Saul discovers that the priests of Nob aided David, he has all 85 of them put to death.

In another story, Saul is driven by anxiety and fear by mounting Philistine forces. He consults a medium (a witch) at En-dor. This is a clear violation of God's Law in Deuteronomy 18. But Saul has little regard for God or His Law. He disguises his identity. Now the prophet Samuel had recently died so Saul attempts to raise Samuel's dead spirit in a séance. When Samuel's spirit appears he predicts a Philistine victory and the deaths of Saul and his sons. His ominous statement: **“Tomorrow both you and your sons will be with me.”** (1 Samuel 28:19)

And just as Samuel said, the Philistines defeat Israel. Jonathan and two of Saul's other sons are killed. Saul himself is badly wounded in battle. Rather than be captured, Saul commits suicide by falling on his own sword. The Philistines proudly display the dead bodies of Saul and his sons on the city wall of Beth Shan.

When the people of Jabesh-gilead hear about this they travel the 9 miles and under the cover of darkness they remove the bodies from the wall. They give Saul and his sons a proper burial at Jabesh. This brave act repays Saul with kindness for what he had done for them at the beginning of his reign when he rescued them from the Ammonites. The people of Jabesh-gilead never forgot what Saul did for them.

With Saul dead, the stage is now set for David to be Israel's next king. As Hannah's song had declared, "**[The Lord] shatters His adversaries... He will strengthen His king and exalt the power of His anointed one.**" (1 Samuel 2:10)

The book of 2 Samuel opens with a young Amalekite soldier bringing David what he believes is good news – Saul and Jonathan are dead! He claims that he personally killed Saul hoping to receive some kind of reward. He even presents David with Saul's crown as proof of what he had supposedly done. But he has misjudged the situation!

David replied to him, "How is it that you were not afraid to reach out your hand to destroy the Lord's anointed?" (2 Samuel 1:14) David has the Amalekite soldier executed on the spot for daring to harm the Lord's anointed king.

David experiences a season of success and enjoys God's blessing. He is anointed as king over the tribe of Judah. However, Saul's son Ish-bosheth rules over the northern tribes of Israel. A lengthy civil war ensues (2 Samuel Chapters 2 thru 4). Eventually Ish-bosheth is assassinated and this ends the conflict.

All the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron saying, "Look, we are your very flesh and blood! In the past, when Saul was our king, you were the real leader of Israel. The Lord said to you, 'You will shepherd My people Israel; you will rule over Israel.'" (2 Samuel 5:1-2) The people acknowledge that God chose David to be their king. David is designated as the king over a now unified nation of Israel. He is 30 years old when he becomes the king of all Israel.

David's first order of business as Israel's new king is to go take the city of Jerusalem. It is a city that David passed by often during his travels. Jerusalem is a strategically located city and well-fortified, but it is still being held by the Jebusites. David and the unified army of Israel go up against Jerusalem. They drive the Jebusites out of the city and David makes it his capital. David establishes his permanent residence there and calls it the City of David. He has a palace fit for a king built out of cedar and stone.

King David leads the Israelite army in winning many battles (2 Samuel 5, 8 and 10). **He greatly expands Israel's territory in the process. David's power grew steadily, for the Lord God who commands armies was with him.** (2 Samuel 5:10) Israel actually possessed more territory under King David than it has today!

Now that David has made Jerusalem his political capital, he wants to turn it into the nation's religious center as well. He moves forward with plans to bring the Ark of the Covenant up into the city. When last we saw the ark, 50 years before, it was housed at Kiriath-jearim. If you recall it was placed there shortly after the Philistines returned it to Israel while Samuel was still the leader.

The plan is to transport the ark by ox-drawn cart. But while en route, the cart gets jostled. A man named Uzzah inadvertently reaches out and touches the ark. When he does so he is struck dead. David becomes both angry and afraid of God. He decides to leave the ark close by in the house of Obed-edom. For three months God blesses Obed-edom. This prompts David to try moving the ark again. But this time he has the ark transported as the Law requires, which is, carrying it with poles on the shoulders of Levites. David leads the joyful procession up and into the city of Jerusalem shouting and singing the whole way.

David is on a spiritual high. He is so filled with love for the Lord. **The king said to Nathan the prophet, “Look! I am living in a palace made from cedar, while the ark of God sits in the middle of a tent.”** (2 Samuel 7:2) By “tent” David refers to the tabernacle, which is now permanently set up at a worship site in Jerusalem. David’s deep desire and dream is to build a temple, a house for God. But God’s response is basically this – “No, David, actually I am going to build YOU a house.”

God then makes a covenant promise to David. He promises to give David a great name, land for Israel to live in permanently, and rest from their enemies. Then He adds this... **“I will raise up your descendant, one of your own sons, to succeed you, and I will establish his kingdom. He will build a house for My name, and I will make his dynasty permanent... Your house and your kingdom will stand before Me permanently; your dynasty will be permanent.”** (2 Samuel 7:12-13, 16)

This covenant promise is very important. It will be from David’s royal line that a future king will emerge and set up his eternal kingdom. It’s this king that gets connected back to the promise that God made to Abraham in Genesis 12. Through this king and his kingdom God will bless all the nations of the earth.

Can things get any better for David and for Israel? For David personally, he’s the king; he’s living in a nice new palace and in a new capital city; he’s popular, successful, and powerful; he’s a top line guy who has been richly blessed by God. And the nation of Israel, they’re better off in every way than they’ve ever been in their entire history.

And it is right here, right in the middle of all this divine blessing, where something goes terribly wrong...