

TEACHING PLAN



I SAMUEL, *Chapters 1-19*
LUKE, *Chapters 19 & 14*

JANUARY

21

LIFE GROUPS	TEACHING PLAN	
	FW	<i>Study of 1 Samuel</i>
	JANUARY 10	21

THE BIRTH OF SAMUEL

1 SAMUEL 1:1-28

JANUARY 10, 2021

TEACHING PLAN

PREPARATION

- > Spend the week reading through and studying 1 Samuel 1:1-28. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools (such as a concordance or Bible dictionary) to enhance your preparation.
- > Determine which discussion points and questions will work best with your group.
- > Pray for your pastors, the upcoming group meeting, your teaching, your group members, and their receptivity to the study.

HIGHLIGHTS

TAKEAWAY: HUMBLE PRAYER FOSTERS DEPENDENCE ON GOD AND SUBMISSION TO HIS WILL.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: LIFE TAKES ITS TOLL ON US, AND WE ARE PRONE TO TAKE OUR EYES OFF GOD AND HIS GREAT SUFFICIENCY FOR US.

GOSPEL CONNECTION: THE LORD ANSWERED HANNAH'S PRAYER AND GAVE HER SAMUEL, WHO BECAME THE PROPHET THAT ANOINTED THE GREATEST KING IN ISRAEL'S HISTORY. CENTURIES LATER, THE LORD TOOK AWAY ELIZABETH'S "DISGRACE" WHEN HE GAVE HER A SON WHO BECAME THE PROPHET THAT PREPARED THE WAY FOR KING JESUS.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

Notes:

- Finish the following sentence: “The longest and hardest I’ve ever prayed for something was . . .”
- When you pray long and hard for something, what is your gut reaction: to wonder whether God actually heard you, that His timing is perfect, that He must have another plan, that you’re doing something wrong, or something else? Explain.

The subject of prayer can be overwhelming to think about. Some say prayer is “letting go,” while others believe that it is “holding on.” Should you pray out loud or silently? Can you pray a written prayer, or does it need to be spontaneous? Does God accept prayer from someone who feels despair and resentment? Is a prayer that is prayed in faith guaranteed to get a desired answer, or should it rather be viewed as an encounter with God in which the one praying submits to Him? There are so many questions about prayer. Unfortunately, some people let these unanswered questions keep them from the practice of prayer.

- If you could ask God any question about prayer, what would it be?

Hannah was an Israelite who lived during the time of the judges. She was married to a devout man who loved her and provided for her. Yet, she struggled with a sense of incompleteness in her life because of infertility. In 1 Samuel 1, we find this woman whose humility and sense of desperation led her to a life-changing encounter with the Lord in prayer.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Notes:

.> ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 SAMUEL 1:1-19.

Hannah found herself in a desperate situation: she was childless (1:2). In those days, a woman's primary role in life was bearing children for her husband. Infertility equaled failure in other people's eyes. As if infertility weren't bad enough, Hannah was also taunted by her husband's other wife Peninnah (vv. 4-7). (It's important to note that polygamy was never God's plan for marriage but had become culturally acceptable in Old Testament times.) Hannah's despair over the entire situation led her soul to become bitter, or "deeply hurt" (v. 10).

- How does the list of Elkanah's ancestry (v. 1) underscore Hannah's plight? Why is a child so dear to her?
- What responses did Hannah's childlessness evoke in her? In Elkanah? In Peninnah?
- Would you characterize Hannah's words in verse 11 as a bargain with God or a demonstration of faith? Why?
- How do you tend to respond to God when He seems to say no to your prayers?

Instead of camping in her bitterness and blaming God, Hannah voiced an honest, vulnerable prayer to Him (v. 11). She pleaded with God to give her a son and, in return, she would give him back to God for His service. Without even the promise of becoming pregnant, Hannah dedicated her life and her child's

life to God. Her prayers acknowledged that if she were to have a child, it would be in God's control. Hannah wanted a child not for her needs, but for God's glory. Hannah recognized that God was the giver of life, and despite her apparent lack of ability to conceive, He could give her a child if He so willed it. Hannah's prayer illustrates how her hopelessness brought her to acknowledge the power and control of God.

Notes:

- Read verse 11 again. What stands out to you about the details of Hannah's prayer? What do we learn about her character in this verse?
- What attributes of God does she specifically mention? What did Hannah intend for her son by her vow? What does this reveal about her?
- Why is it significant that Hannah surrendered her future child to lifetime service to God? As a parent, what sacrifices would this require of her? Why would it be worth it?

Hannah's prayer in verse 11 reveals the depth of her character. As she prayed, she captured some of God's attributes, including His greatness and sovereignty. Then she asked God to look upon her sorrow. Finally, she told God that she wasn't asking for a child to benefit her, but for ministry in the temple as a Nazarite (lay priest). She offered her not-yet-conceived child to God for His purposes in the world. Hannah asked for a child not for the benefits it would bring her, but for God's kingdom. As we'll see in the next set of verses, God chose to answer her prayer, and she became the mother of Samuel, the last judge and first prophet in Israel. Samuel bore the responsibility of anointing David as king, and he is listed among the greats of the faith in Hebrews 11:32.

- Hannah asked God to look upon her sorrow, and He did. What does it mean to you that the Creator of the universe cares about you enough to answer your prayers?
- What avenues do we sometimes take instead of taking our heartbreak and desperation to the Lord? Why turn to God first?
- Have someone read verse 18 again. How does this description of Hannah compare to verse 10?

Notes:

As a result of Hannah's honest prayer (v. 11), the encouragement of Eli (v. 17), and her total surrender to God (v. 18), her sorrow and hopelessness became joy and contentment. She didn't have the guarantee that God would answer her prayer, but she hoped in Him anyway. Through our desperate situations, God is teaching us to be utterly dependent on Him, to have hope in the fulfillment of His promises, and to build testimonies of His mercy and love to encourage others who go through similar situations.

> ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 SAMUEL 1:20-28.

God blessed Hannah with a son "after some time." Hannah specifically asked God for a son, and she even dedicated him to God before the prayer was answered. This displayed the confidence Hannah had in God's ability to work a miracle in her life, which is what gave her hope. But as Hannah shows us, confidence in God doesn't mean we're free from the emotions involved in struggle. It does mean, however, that we can live in hope and anticipation of how God will work in us. After Samuel was weaned, Hannah brought him back to Eli the priest to fulfill her promise to God. He was probably around 3 years old at that time. Faithfulness and obedience to God meant Hannah had to give back to Him what she wanted most—her child.

- What can you learn from Hannah's example in these verses?
- How did Hannah view the things God gave her? Is this the same view you have? Why or why not?
- When God intervenes in your life to answer your prayers, do you typically recognize it and praise Him for it? Why or why not?
- Why do you think so many of us "forget" about God once He answers our prayers? What does this tendency reveal about us?
- What does lifelong service to God (v. 28) look like in your life? If you are a parent, is this an honest desire you have for your children?

Notes:

Hannah's confidence in God not only gave her hope in her desperate situation, but also created in her a desire to sacrifice to God. Her prayer was answered, and she gave the answer to her prayer back to God.

- What things or people in your life are most indispensable to you? Can you give them back to God as Hannah did? What would that require of you?
- Think about the gifts you give to God. Do they cost you little or are they true sacrifices? Why is sacrifice important in our relationship with God?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Notes:

- What is the most reassuring part of this story for you? What encouragement can you find in this text for your present circumstances?
- In what situation do you need to boldly ask the Lord for your heart's desire, then wait for Him to respond according to His perfect will and timing?
- What do you find most difficult about letting go and relying on God through prayer?
- Why do difficult times make us aware of our need for God? Share about a time when you've seen this awareness in your life.

PRAY

Thank God for the ways He blesses you even when your circumstances are not what you want them to be. Confess your tendency to fail to trust Him fully. Ask Him to increase your faith, so that you might entrust your whole life to His will.

FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following information:

Notes:

- > Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
 - What do you need to surrender to God today? What would that thing look like if it was used for His glory?

 - What situation are you facing right now that is causing great stress? Write a prayer giving the situation to God. Read the prayer daily to remind yourself of your determination to let God work in and through the situation.

- > A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.

- > The challenge to memorize 1 Samuel 1:27-28.

- > The text for next week's study, so group members can read it in anticipation of next weekend: 1 Samuel 2:1-11.

1 SAMUEL 1:1-28

1:1-3. Israel entered Canaan under the capable leadership of Joshua. At Joshua's death the coastal plain of Canaan had not yet been conquered (Josh. 13:2-6). Before Israel could occupy this region, the Philistines invaded and captured it. The Philistines and Israelites battled for supremacy in Canaan. Unfortunately the Philistines enjoyed numerous military advantages. Foremost was the superiority of their military technology. Hence as the Book of 1 Samuel opens, the shadow of the Philistine menace hangs over Israel.

Notes:

Furthermore, numerous other enemies, such as the Amalekites, also threatened God's covenant people. To defend against these recurring threats, Israel relied on the emergence of charismatic leaders known as judges. An organized government did not exist. The era was a time of economic and political instability for God's people.

1:4-5. Every year Elkanah took his family to worship at Shiloh. Although Solomon did not build the temple at Jerusalem until many years later, a place for worshiping God was earlier established at Shiloh. Eli served as the priest at this sanctuary and was assisted by his sons, Hophni and Phinehas. Although the inspired biblical writer did not identify the exact nature of Elkanah's sacrifice, some Bible commentators suggest it was a communion sacrifice or a fellowship offering. With such offerings, the worshipers would eat part of the animal offered in sacrifice. Elkanah would give portions of the meat to his family members. Because of his love for Hannah, Elkanah gave her a double portion.

1:6-7. Although Hannah already was distressed by her inability to bear children, her rival kept provoking her. The derision continued year after year. Hannah was so upset by Peninnah's taunts that she cried and lost her appetite.

Although Hannah was deeply troubled by her rival's prolonged ridicule of her, she did not lose her faith in God.

She endured hardship and prayed for God to help her in her situation. She regularly went with the others in the family to worship at Shiloh. Hannah persevered in the midst of trying circumstances.

Notes:

1:8. Elkanah attempted to console Hannah, suggesting to her that he was better to her than “ten sons.” The reference to “ten sons” suggests the ten sons born to Jacob during Rachel’s period of barrenness (see Gen. 29:31–30:22). The patriarchal allusion also suggests a parallel between Jacob’s love for Rachel and Elkanah’s for Hannah.

1:9. When Hannah left the family celebration, Eli was sitting on a chair—a sign of authority—at the doorposts of the sanctuary. Though too old to participate in the active leadership of the worship center (see Num. 8:23-26), Eli was still able to sit at the entrance to the “holy place,” much as elders would sit at the city gate in ancient Israel (Deut. 21:19; Josh. 20:4; Ruth 4:2). This position may have permitted him to act simultaneously as a judge (see 1 Sam. 4:18 and Deut. 16:18) and a protector of worship.

According to the text, Eli’s exact location was at the “doorpost of Yahweh’s Holy Place.” This phrase suggests that the Shiloh worship center was a structure of some architectural permanence (see also Judg. 18:31). Other Scriptures suggest that a tent was a central part of the worship site there (Josh. 18:1 and Ps. 78:60). Perhaps the earlier tabernacle set up at Shiloh in Joshua’s day had been supplemented by a building during the days of the judges; alternatively, a smaller ceremonial tent may have housed the ark within the holy of holies.

1:10. Hannah wept and prayed to the Lord “in bitterness of soul,” a phrase used elsewhere to characterize the psychological pain experienced by one who has been deprived of a child through death (see Ruth 1:13; 2 Kings. 4:27; Zech. 12:10) or who is experiencing great personal physical suffering (see Job 3:20 and Isa. 38:15). Relief from this sort of pain is never pictured in the Hebrew Bible as coming from a human being; in each case divine

intervention was the only remedy. Wisely, Hannah also went to the Lord for help.

1:11. Hannah's prayer was specifically addressed to the omnipotent deliverer of those in distress, "the Lord Almighty." Her pain had made her a theologian—no character in Scripture prior to Hannah had ever used this term to address the Lord. In her prayer she implicitly recognized that the Lord alone is the giver of life. She also understood that the proper position of a believer in relation to the Lord is that of absolute subjection; three times she referred to herself as "your servant," a term used elsewhere to describe a female household slave. Furthermore, she recognized that a relationship with the Lord involves giving, not just taking. She made a vow—an act without parallel for women elsewhere in Hebrew narrative but conditionally permissible for a married woman (see Num. 30:6-8)—to "give [him] to the Lord for all the days of his life."

1:12-18. Eli misread Hannah's anguish as drunkenness and scolded her for her apparent disregard of the holy place. Hannah immediately clarified the situation with Eli. The depth of Hannah's anguish and resentment over her situation had come to the surface.

1:19. The tender words **the Lord remembered her** remind the reader that ultimately it is God who brings new life within the womb. In the Old Testament, to "remember" means not simply to think about someone but to act on their behalf.

1:21-23. The passage stresses Elkanah's exemplary piety. He faithfully led his family to participate in annual Torah-prescribed pilgrimage festivals and voluntarily made vows and then fulfilled them (Deut. 23:21). Although the Torah explicitly gave him the right to nullify Hannah's vow regarding Samuel's service in the Shiloh sanctuary, he chose instead to confirm her vow to the Lord, even though it meant losing the firstborn son from his beloved wife's womb. This latter act places him in a category with Abraham, who gave over his son Isaac (Gen. 22). Though

Notes:

Elkanah and the remainder of the family made their annual pilgrimage to Shiloh, Hannah chose to remain at Ramah to care for the infant Samuel. She maintained this practice each year until the boy was weaned, perhaps a total of three years.

Notes:

Hannah indicated that when the child appeared (literally) “before the face of Yahweh,” he would “live there always” (v. 22). The phrase “appear before the face of Yahweh” is found elsewhere only in the Torah (Exod. 34:24) and refers there to annual sacrifice pilgrimage or solemn assembly meetings. Thus Hannah apparently was saying, “When he finally does go on the annual pilgrimage, he will never return home; he will stay at the pilgrimage site as long as he lives.”

Perhaps the most prominent catchphrase in the story of Samuel is “before the Lord.” Samuel was to live “before the Lord” always, and this he actually did (see 7:6; 10:19; 11:15). This presents a stark contrast with the life of Saul, who was “before the Lord” only during his anointing by Samuel. At the same time, this phrase strengthens the comparison of Samuel with Moses, of whom it was said that he spoke “face to face” with the Lord (Exod. 33:11). The “word” Elkanah prayerfully asked the Lord to “make good” (v. 23) cannot be discerned from the text; perhaps it was an otherwise unknown divine promise made to Elkanah and Hannah when they made their vows.

1:24-28. In this passage Hannah is shown actively fulfilling her preconception promise to the Lord. Though the entire family was involved in the journey to bring Samuel to Shiloh, only Hannah was the subject of the key verbs in the passage: she “took” (v. 24) Samuel and a generous offering with her and “brought” him to the sanctuary complex; finally, she “said” the words that committed Samuel to Eli’s care. Significantly, however, Hannah was not the subject of the verbs describing the sacrificial event accompanying Samuel’s entrance into permanent service. Undoubtedly this is because females were not permitted to perform these actions.

LIFE GROUPS	TEACHING PLAN	
	FW	<i>Study of 1 Samuel</i>
	JANUARY 17	21

HANNAH'S SONG

1 SAMUEL 2:1-11

JANUARY 17, 2021

TEACHING PLAN

PREPARATION

- > Spend the week reading through and studying 1 Samuel 2:1-11. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools (such as a concordance or Bible dictionary) to enhance your preparation.
- > Determine which discussion points and questions will work best with your group.
- > Pray for your pastors, the upcoming group meeting, your teaching, your group members, and their receptivity to the study.

HIGHLIGHTS

TAKEAWAY: HUMBLE PRAYER PROMPTS THANKSGIVING TO THE LORD FOR HIS BLESSING AND EXALTS HIM FOR HIS GREAT WORKS.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: WE ARE PRONE TO PRAY IN TIMES OF DESPERATION, AND THEN FAIL TO ACKNOWLEDGE GOD'S GRACE IN OUR LIVES IN TIMES OF JOY.

GOSPEL CONNECTION: BY PROVIDING SALVATION TO ALL PEOPLE THROUGH JESUS CHRIST HIS SON, GOD HAS GIVEN US EVERY REASON TO BE THANKFUL AND EXALT HIM, NO MATTER WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES WE MAY FACE.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

Notes:

- 1 What has brought you the most joy in the past few years? The most grief? What brought relief from your grief?
- 2 When things go wrong, to whom do you immediately turn? What is your initial attitude?
- 3 What about when things go right? To whom do you immediately turn? How do you usually respond (i.e. with surprise, unbelief, gratitude, no big deal, confidence because you knew it would happen, etc.)?
- 4 What kind of attitude does a person need to have to really depend on God in prayer?

Last week we learned that Hannah was desperate for God to intervene in her life and give her a son. Though distraught, she was humble and knew that God was her only answer. This is true for us as well—not only when we are desperate for help, but also when the circumstances of life are not what we want them to be. True dependence on God in prayer manifests itself both in desperate pleas for help and in joyful thankfulness for revealed blessings. When God answered Hannah’s prayer, she did not carry on as usual; rather, her humility demonstrated itself again—this time in thankfulness and exaltation.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Notes:

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 SAMUEL 2:1-11.

- What do you think of Hannah's prayer here? What thoughts or emotions come to mind?

This prayer of Hannah's is not just a prayer; it is also a poem and quite possibly was a song as well. The time and care she took to compose this demonstrates Hannah's deep devotion to the Lord and her gratitude toward Him for answering her prayers.

- Would you say your prayers are usually well thought out, rote, or off the top of your head? Why?
- What form do your prayers usually take (i.e. silent conversations with God in my head and heart, out loud conversations with God, written expressions to God)? How does the thought of writing a poem or song of prayer to God strike you—completely natural or out of your comfort zone? Why?
- What might be a situation that would prompt you to compose a poem or song of prayer to God? Have you ever experienced a time like that in your life?

Hannah was inspired by the Holy Spirit to sing a song of praise to God for who He is and for what He had done for her. The key idea in her prayer song is that God had shown that He is a righteous Judge. He had brought down the proud (Peninnah) and exalted the humble (Hannah). The song contains a celebration of God's salvation (vv. 1-2), a warning to the proud of

God's justice (vv. 3-7), an affirmation of God's faithful care for His people (vv. 8-9), and a petition for God to judge the world and to prosper His anointed king (v. 10). Hannah's prayer song revealed her confidence in God's sovereignty and her thankfulness for everything He had done.

Notes:

- What attributes of God did Hannah specifically highlight in her prayer?
- Why do you think naming these attributes of God was important to Hannah in the midst of her situation?
- In what ways might Hannah's experience have led her to acknowledge God's holiness (v. 2)?
- What experiences have led you to an awareness of God's holiness? How can we acknowledge our awareness of God's holiness?
- What attributes of God are you most grateful for today?
- Why is it important to offer thanks before God when we recognize that He has answered our prayers?
- What is the relationship between humility and gratitude?

- This song of Hannah's also fits the experience of Israel as a nation. Which references expand the application of this song?

Notes:

Hannah's song of praise begins with her personal testimony from her experience with the Lord. Moving from the first person singular pronoun ("I" and "my") in verse 1 to the plural pronoun ("our") in verse 2 indicates that she understood herself as a member of the Lord's covenant community beginning with her own family. That each of the first three lines in verse 2 in Hebrew begins with "There is none" emphasizes Hannah's belief that the Lord is beyond comparison and must be held dear and sovereign in the believer's heart and life. The Lord's holiness, superiority, and stability set Him apart and give Him preeminence. A comparison of Hannah's song to Mary's song (Luke 1:46-55) shows Mary's knowledge of Scripture and her understanding of God's sovereign grace and ultimate power. Hannah's declaration that "there is no rock like our God" is a common Old Testament epithet for God and reflects her confidence that God is faithful and can be relied on for His protection and strength.

- What trends do you notice in the role reversals described in verses 4-8? What has been your greatest role reversal? How did you respond?

- What do you think Hannah's point is in verse 5?

Hannah's prayer in this verse is a word of caution. She warns us that even if we have all that we need, like being full of food or having many sons, if we are not grateful to the Lord it will never be enough. "The woman with many sons pines away" because she does not know or understand the blessings of the Lord.

- Have you ever been in the place Hannah sings about, where you had all you wanted but you weren't full? Why does a lack of gratitude lead to emptiness? Describe a time when your ungratefulness led to you feeling empty.
- How does the practice of prayer help you experience gratefulness in times when you are feeling unfulfilled or empty?
- Hannah was able to find joy and contentment, not just because she had Samuel, but because she loved the Lord. Can you say the same thing about yourself right now? Explain.
- Where in your life do you trust in your own strength instead of God's (vv. 9-10)? Why can it be so challenging for us to depend on God's strength alone?
- What is one step you can take to trust God's strength in a specific situation this week? How can we help each other place our dependency on Him?

Notes:

This inspired song of thanksgiving contains Hannah's last recorded words, offering a picture of her life of faith and commitment to the sovereign Lord of Hosts. It challenges us to submit our lives anew to God as we now know Him through His Son, Jesus Christ the Lord. Hannah's son, Samuel, would be a model of godly character and obedience throughout his entire life, even in the face of uncertain times. Hannah undoubtedly laid the foundation of hope and devotion to God in the life of her son.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Notes:

- Finish the following sentence: My heart rejoices in the Lord because . . .
- Now finish this sentence: There is no one like the Lord because . . .
- How does Hannah's prayer here challenge you in your own prayer life? What about our prayer life as a group? How are we doing at showing gratitude to God and exalting Him as we pray together? How can we do better?
- What is something in your life or in our church that you've been praying for that the Lord so far has not done? How do we thank Him when the answer seems to be "no"?

PRAY

Thank God that there is no one like Him, and no other Rock upon which you can stand in life. Thank Him for His great work of salvation in your life. Thank Him for always hearing your requests and answering your prayers as His children. Commit to be thankful and worship Him always, no matter what circumstances life brings.

FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following information:

Notes:

- > Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
 - What situation are you facing right now that is causing stress? Write a prayer giving the situation to God. Read the prayer daily to remind yourself of your determination to let God work in and through the situation.
 - How would your life be different if you were to pray with gratitude each day? What reasons do you have to do so?

- > A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.

- > The challenge to memorize 1 Samuel 2:1-2.

- > The text for next week's study, so group members can read it in anticipation of next weekend: 1 Samuel 2:12-26.

1 SAMUEL 2:1-11

This section, which contains Hannah's last recorded words and her longest quotation, provides a triumphant climax to the narrator's portrayal of the humble woman's faith. It is often considered to be a deliberate literary complement to 2 Samuel 22. Hannah's monologue is described as a prayer; it is cast as a poetic hymn or psalm of thanksgiving and is considered by many scholars to be among the earliest extant examples of Israelite poetry.

Notes:

Hannah's prayerful song eloquently affirms core concepts of Israelite faith: the Lord is the great judge and overseer of human destinies and a rewarder of those who earnestly seek Him. He is the source of empowerment and victory for those who fear Him, but for all others He is the overpowering authority who dispenses fearful judgment. The prayer's emphasis on the Lord's exaltation of those devalued by others serves not only as a testimony of God's action in Hannah's own life, it also foreshadows the Lord's ways in the lives of Samuel, David, and the nation of Israel. It also foreshadows what the Lord would do in judgment against the house of Eli.

2:1-2. Hannah's prayer begins on an exuberant and highly personal note, employing four first-person references that express unbridled delight in the Lord. Even as Peninnah had taunted Hannah, so now Hannah "boasts" over her enemies because of the Lord's "deliverance." The object of Hannah's delight is neither herself—that she has overcome the disgrace of barrenness—nor her son; instead it is the Lord, who is the source of both her son and her happy circumstance. Borrowing images and confessions from the Torah, Hannah affirms the Lord's supreme holiness and uniqueness (see Exod. 15:11) and calls him the "Rock" (see Deut. 32:4, 15, 18, 30, 31).

2:3-5. In her prayer, which apparently was uttered in a public forum where others could give consideration to her words, Hannah admonished all who would foolishly brag about or exalt themselves. Over them stands the Lord, who is aware of their thoughts and constantly evaluating their "deeds." When warranted, the Lord will act as the great reverser of fortunes in

matters of military force, food, and fertility. He can bring low and He can exalt. Mighty soldiers can be rendered defenseless, while the weak may perform valiantly; those who once had a surplus may be reduced to destitute servitude, while the hungry may cease to be so. Most relevantly for Hannah, a barren woman may, with the Lord's help, bear "seven children"—a number suggestive of completeness—while others who once had large families may end life bereft and mournful.

Notes:

2:6-10. This section, which is linguistically marked as the most important component of the prayer, contains an extended list of contrastive actions the Lord performs in His dealings with humans. The Lord's actions can be extremely positive. Yet the Lord does not perform these actions indiscriminately. As judge of "the ends of the earth" (v. 10), He brings the worst against "those who oppose" Him (v. 10), while bestowing protection, strength, and exaltation "His faithful ones" (v. 9) and "His king"/"His anointed" (v. 10).

Much scholarly discussion has centered around Hannah's use of the terms "king" and "anointed" in her prayer. Many scholars judge these words to be anachronistic, since Israel obviously had no king at the time. However, it is possible that the words are (1) allusions to the office of kingship mentioned in the Torah (see Deut. 17:15), (2) references to local Israelite rulers (see Judg. 9:6), (3) prophetic of the Davidic dynasty (see Gen. 49:10-12), or (4) references to an anticipated, eschatological figure. The close parallels between Hannah's prayer and Mary's song (Luke 1:46-55) suggest that the first-century Christian community considered the entire passage, and especially the phrases "His king" and "His anointed," to be prophetic references to Jesus Christ and His ministry.

2:11. Elkanah and his family returned home. But this time they were missing one important person. Samuel remained at Shiloh to live before the Lord. Hannah gave Samuel to minister "before the Lord," and this is what he did for the rest of his life (see 1 Sam. 2:18,21; 7:6; 10:19; 11:15; 12:3,7; 15:33).

LIFE GROUPS	TEACHING PLAN	
	FW	<i>Study of 1 Samuel</i>
	JANUARY 24	21

ELI'S SONS

1 SAMUEL 2:12-26

JANUARY 24, 2021

TEACHING PLAN

PREPARATION

- > Spend the week reading through and studying 1 Samuel 2:12-26. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools (such as a concordance or Bible dictionary) to enhance your preparation.
- > Determine which discussion points and questions will work best with your group.
- > Pray for your pastors, the upcoming group meeting, your teaching, your group members, and their receptivity to the study.

HIGHLIGHTS

TAKEAWAY: GOD WANTS US TO MAKE SACRIFICES AND USE THE GIFTS HE HAS GIVEN US FOR HIS GLORY AND THE SAKE OF OTHER PEOPLE.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: THE WORLD IS LOOKING FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE GENUINE IN THEIR FAITH, LIVING AND LOVING LIKE JESUS.

GOSPEL CONNECTION: HUMAN PRIESTS FAIL TO LIVE UP TO GOD'S STANDARD OF HOLINESS, BUT WE HAVE A BETTER PRIEST. JESUS' EXAMPLE IS THE ONE WE SHOULD FOLLOW AS WE DILIGENTLY SERVE GOD AND FULFILL THE RESPONSIBILITIES HE HAS GIVEN US.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

Notes:

- 1 If you could have a superpower at work, what would you choose? At home?
- 2 What are some real-world characteristics of everyday heroes?
- 3 Who is someone in your life who you'd say has been an everyday hero to you? Explain.

It's fun to think about things like superhuman strength, the ability to fly, and teleportation. But as we've seen in virtually every superhero movie, special powers can easily be misused for evil instead of for good. Today, we're going to examine a Scripture passage that illustrates this truth. God had given Eli's sons the special power or gift of serving His people as priests. Instead of using their gifts and sacrificing for the sake of other people, they misused the powers they'd been given and squandered the opportunity to honor the Lord through serving others.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> Ask a volunteer to read 1 Samuel 2:12-21.

- What roles and responsibilities were Eli's sons entrusted with (see also Lev. 7:22-36)?

- How were the sons abusing their positions?

Verses 12-17 of chapter 2 tell us that Hophni and Phinehas were “scoundrels.” They “had no regard for the Lord.” This disregard for the Lord can be seen in the way Hophni and Phinehas took advantage of their liturgical office for personal gain. They were abusing their priestly office and “treating the Lord’s offering with contempt.” Leviticus 10:1-11 records the seriousness with which the Lord takes priestly misconduct. A holy God would not allow this to go on without punishment.

Notes:

- Compare the description of Eli’s sons with the description of Samuel. For help, look at a few other Bible translations.
- Is it fair to expect Eli’s sons to be godly men? Explain.
- What responsibility, if any, do you believe we have to one another in the raising of godly children? Explain.

The NLT describes Eli’s sons this way: “scoundrels who had no respect for the Lord or for their duties as priests.” At the very same time, God was raising up Samuel. In their duties as priests, Eli’s sons—Hophni and Phineas—took more than they gave. They were stealing from the sacrifices of others. They should have been sacrificing themselves, but they were not. But Samuel did give sacrificially. God was raising up an everyday hero.

- In this account, who was in need of a hero? Why?

- Work is one place where people are in need of everyday heroes. Why do people so often look for the easy way out at work?

Notes:

- What about you? Would you say you're looking to turn your daily grind into God's eternal glory? Why or why not?
- What would it look like for you to sacrifice and use your gifts for the good of other people at work? What's hard about that for you?

> Ask a volunteer to read 1 Samuel 2:22-26.

These verses show us that the violation of God's sacred trust by Hophni and Phinehas did not stop with liturgical sins. The brothers added moral sins to their catalog of priestly misconduct. Eli's sons were sleeping with the women who served at the entrance to the tabernacle. It is difficult to say who these women were. They may have been volunteers doing menial chores (Ex. 38:8) or cultic prostitutes like those found at pagan shrines (see Hos. 4:14). If they were cultic prostitutes, then Hophni and Phinehas were guilty of filling the land with "depravity" (Lev. 19:29).

- What are some reasons to explain why, under Eli's leadership, Samuel grew up to serve the Lord honorably while Hophni and Phineas (Eli's sons) were so dishonorable?
- Why do you think Eli didn't do anything to his sons? How do we see laziness in this interaction?

- As a father and the high priest, Eli was doubly responsible for how his sons were acting. What does laziness toward our God-given responsibilities communicate to God?

Notes:

Eli tried to confront his sons and reason with them, but with little effort. Unfortunately, Hophni and Phinehas would not listen to their father. Since they committed capital offenses (Lev. 7:25; 22:9), they could only expect the death penalty to be brought against them. The divine judgment against Hophni and Phinehas was the direct result of their decision to reject God. They had hardened their hearts against God and rejected the pleas of their father. They persisted in sins that were abominable to the Lord. This means that their disregard for God was so complete that God's judgment was inevitable.

- When you think about your life, what are some of the God-given responsibilities you have? What things has God trusted you with, and what does He expect you to do with these things?
- What are some indicators that you might be demonstrating laziness toward those responsibilities?

Any of us may fail. The good news is that God is willing to forgive us when we are sincere and repentant (1 John 1:9). What we do for God and how we do it matters. Like Samuel, we are to grow in stature and in favor with the Lord by serving Him faithfully, respectfully, and reverently. If we fail in the sacred trust God has given to us, He will find faithful servants to carry out His will.

- Agree or disagree: For the health of the church and sake of the gospel, we need everyday heroes at home. Explain your answer.

- Why is it sometimes harder to use your gifts and make sacrifices for the sake of others at home than in other places?

Notes:

The ultimate goal is for our kids to become independently dependent. We need to maintain enough authority to hold them accountable and maintain enough influence to speak into their lives for the purpose of removing them from our authority and allowing them to yield themselves to Christ's authority.

- Is it enough to simply have our kids at church? Is that being a parental hero? Explain.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Notes:

- Would you say you are using the gifts God has given you in the way He intends for you to? Why or why not?
- How does knowing you were chosen by God to be a part of this body of believers affect the way you view the church and your involvement in it? How does it affect the way you view your work?
- What sacrifices can you make at work to serve others in a way that honors the Lord?
- Is there a way you should be demonstrating and communicating sacrifice at home that you're not currently doing? What changes need to take place for you to serve your family members in a way that better honors the Lord?

PRAY

Thank Jesus for His ultimate sacrifice on your behalf, being the Hero you needed to save you from your sin. Ask Him to show you ways you can sacrifice at work and home this week to use the gifts He has given you to meet needs and point people to Him.

FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following information:

Notes:

- > Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
 - Did something God revealed to you through this week's study unearth a commitment you need to make and be held accountable to? If so, what is that commitment?
 - What is the one thing you now know you're supposed to do before we meet again?

- > A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.

- > The challenge to memorize 1 Samuel 2:21.

- > The text for next week's study, so group members can read it in anticipation of next weekend: 1 Samuel 3:1–4:1.

1 SAMUEL 2:12-26

2:12. This verse consists of two complementary evaluative comments: Eli's sons were "worthless" (lit., "sons of Belial"); they "did not know" the Lord. The words cast an ominous pall over the passage and prepare the reader for the sequence of disasters that unfold in chap. 4. The verbless clause in v. 12—literally, "the sons of Eli, the sons of Belial"—serves as a sort of double entendre: besides indicating the perverse character of Eli's sons, the construction has the effect of equating Eli with Belial. Indeed, Eli was a Belial because he failed to give due respect to God and therefore threatened the sanctity of the Lord's name in the community of faith.

Notes:

Hophni, Phinehas, and Samuel were skillfully portrayed by the writer as being similar in the sense that at the beginning of the story none of them knew the Lord (cf. 2:12; 3:7). Yet at the same time, differences and contrasts were also being established. While Hophni and Phinehas were despising the Lord, Samuel was serving Him.

2:13-14. The priestly practices customary at Shiloh in matters of sacrifice are unlike those mentioned anywhere else in the Old Testament and clearly differ from those prescribed in the Torah (cf. Lev 10:14-15; Num 18:18). The writer described the strange traditions of the Shiloh priests in detail to clarify the need to destroy the Elide line and remove the central Israelite worship site from Shiloh.

2:15-17. These verses focus on the climactic flaw in the priestly practices at Shiloh: Hophni and Phinehas were taking the priestly share of the fellowship offerings "before the fat was burned"—that is, before the Lord had been given His portion (cf. Lev 3:3-5; 7:30). Furthermore, the priests were consuming fat from the sacrificial animals, an act explicitly prohibited in the Torah (cf. Lev 7:22-26). In addition, they used the threat of violence to get their way. This blasphemous expression of self-interest and disregard for the law was a sin that "was very great

in the sight of the LORD” (v. 17; cf. Lev 7:25). Even the laypersons, who acceded to the wrongful demands placed on them, were more pious than the priests and their servants in that they tried to get the priests to give the Lord His portion first.

Notes:

Samuel’s precocious childhood, one marked inwardly by his unique relationship with the Lord and outwardly by his priestly attire and his presence at Shiloh, contrasted sharply with that of Hophni and Phinehas. The final portrait of Elkanah’s family, which is also presented in this section, contrasted just as vividly with the destiny of Eli’s family. Elkanah’s family was depicted in acts of exemplary piety; Eli’s family will be depicted in acts of disgusting sacrilege. Elkanah’s family received a blessing and fruitful multiplication; Eli’s would receive a curse and desolation. The family portraits are studies in Torah blessings and curses (cf. Lev 26; Deut 28).

2:22-25. Eli’s first recorded rebuke of his sons’ misconduct came when he was “very old.” The writer may be implying that Eli neglected his parental responsibilities earlier in life (cf. Deut 6:7; 21:18-21). Eli reprimanded them because he “kept hearing all that his sons were doing to all Israel.” To the previously reported offenses (cf. vv. 12–17) a new charge was added—they were having sexual relations with “the women who were serving at the entrance to the tent of meeting.” Perhaps these women were Nazarites involved in volunteer service at the worship site (cf. Num 6:2; Exod 38:8); alternatively they may have been cultic prostitutes. However, they were being treated as though they were pagan shrine prostitutes (cf. Hos 4:14).

Eli the judge used the imagery of a legal dispute in warning his sons. In a case pitting two people against each other, God could work either through His revealed law or through circumstances to exonerate the person charged with wrongdoing. However, if a person were pitted against the Lord in court, the human could expect only condemnation. Hophni and Phinehas, having committed

capital offenses (cf. Lev 7:25; 22:9), could expect the Lord to bring the death penalty upon them.

The phrase “it was the will of the LORD” (v. 25) also can be translated “the LORD was pleased.” Although it would be misleading to say that the Lord takes pleasure in killing people (cf. Ezek 18:32; 33:11; 2 Pet 3:9), it is certainly true that He delights in bringing justice to the world order. Justice is a central trait in God’s character (cf. Exod 34:7; 2 Chr 12:6), and the implementation of divine justice always brings satisfaction.

2:26. The phrase “grew in stature and in favor with the Lord and with men” is strikingly similar to the description of Jesus as a child (Lk 2:52).

Notes:

LIFE GROUPS	TEACHING PLAN	
	FW	<i>Study of 1 Samuel</i>
	JANUARY 31	21

THE LORD CALLS SAMUEL

1 SAMUEL 3:1–4:1

JANUARY 31, 2021

TEACHING PLAN

PREPARATION

- > Spend the week reading through and studying 1 Samuel 3:1–4:1. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools (such as a concordance or Bible dictionary) to enhance your preparation.
- > Determine which discussion points and questions will work best with your group.
- > Pray for your pastors, the upcoming group meeting, your teaching, your group members, and their receptivity to the study.

HIGHLIGHTS

TAKEAWAY: OBEDIENCE TO GOD IS NOT AS COMPLICATED AS WE TEND TO MAKE IT. IN THE END, WE NEED TO LISTEN TO GOD AND DO WHAT HE SAYS.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: SOMETIMES WE ARE HESITANT TO SEEK THE COUNSEL OF OTHERS BECAUSE WE ARE PRESSED FOR TIME OR BECAUSE WE KNOW WE PROBABLY WON'T LIKE THE COUNSEL WE WILL GET.

GOSPEL CONNECTION: JESUS ALWAYS MADE TIME TO SEEK GOD AND SUBMIT TO HIS WILL, NOT MERELY FOR COUNSEL, BUT BECAUSE HE DELIGHTED TO BE WITH GOD AND DO HIS WILL (JOHN 8:29).

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

Notes:

- 1 If you could go back and give one piece of advice to your teenage self, what would you say? Why?
- 2 How do you think your life would be different if you had known that?
- 3 How do you think the teenage version of yourself would have responded?

Hindsight is 20/20. We've all made mistakes that, if we could, we would love to go back and do differently. The problem is that even if we could, most of our past selves wouldn't listen. We have trouble with that a lot of the time—simply listening to someone who knows what he or she is talking about and then acting accordingly. But as we will see in today's discussion, obedience to God might not be as complicated as we tend to make it. In the end, we need to listen to God and do what He says.

- 4 When you spend time with God, do you spend more time talking or listening? Why?
- 5 What things in our lives distract us from hearing the voice of God?

We live in a noisy culture. Whether it's the TV, our cell phones, music in the background, or even billboards on the side of the road, we are constantly being bombarded with voices. Most of those voices are telling us to do something. If we want to listen to God and do what He says, we must first put ourselves in the right surroundings.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Notes:

> Have a volunteer read 1 Samuel 3:1-9.

- What do you know about Samuel as a result of last week's lesson or your previous study of the Bible?

As a young Levite, Samuel served the Lord as an apprentice under Eli's guidance. His mother, Hannah, was barren and had prayed for a son, promising God that she would give him back to God for ministry (see 1 Sam. 1:10-11). God answered Hannah's prayer, and she kept her promise. Samuel joined Eli the priest in the ministry of the temple. According to Jewish tradition, Samuel was 12 years old when his temple work began, which we read about in 1 Samuel 3:1.

- What do we learn about the spiritual climate of Samuel's day in verse 1?

- Why do you think the Lord called to Samuel the boy instead of Eli the priest?

Verse 1 tells us that "the word of the Lord was rare and prophetic visions were not widespread." At that time, prophets were the primary way God spoke to His people. The absence of genuine prophetic preaching describes the poor spiritual climate in this period (see Judg. 10:6). People refused to conform to God's standards. Negligent people were not prepared to hear from a holy God. But God called Samuel to be His prophet.

- Why didn't Samuel recognize God's voice?

- Why are Christians today often unable to tell if God is speaking to them?

Notes:

While resting near the ark, Samuel heard the Lord call to him. The boy had never heard the voice of God before, and he mistook it for Eli's and rushed to help the aging priest. God took the initiative here, as He always does. Samuel's prophetic ministry came in response to God's selecting and recruiting him for this task; Samuel did not choose this vocation based on personal preference. However, he did not recognize God's voice. Instead, he assumed he heard Eli and responded to the priest.

The Lord uses many ways today to call His people to new opportunities of service. Sometimes He confronts them with a need. Sometimes God may give an individual a deep passion for a ministry or a burden for something. When God acts unexpectedly in people's lives, He often calls them to serve in a particular way; but they may not grasp it immediately. As people seek clarity, the Holy Spirit will guide them to God's specific will.

- What do Samuel's actions in these verses reveal about his alertness to hearing from God?

- How did Samuel's surroundings help him hear from God?

- If you decided to absolutely commit yourself to hearing from God on a daily basis, what distractions would you need to limit or eliminate?

The main reason we don't hear the voice of God is not because He's not speaking; it's because we're not listening. But putting ourselves in the right surroundings to listen isn't just about time and place; it's about our relationships. One of the reasons we do life together, investing in each other, is so that we can help each other hear and recognize the voice of God. Once we hear the voice of God, that voice requires a response of surrender.

Notes:

- Who has been an Eli to you in your life—someone that has helped you hear the voice of God more clearly?
- Are you investing your life right now to be an Eli for someone else? If not, why not?

> Have a volunteer read 1 Samuel 3:10-11.

- Verse 10 is the pivotal verse of this passage. What did Eli tell Samuel to do, and how does this help us understand what we must do if we want to hear from God?
- How does Samuel's response to the voice of God indicate his surrender to the will of God?

Having grasped that the Lord had spoken to Samuel, Eli gave specific directions for responding should God speak again. First he instructed Samuel to return to his normal activity. If he heard the voice again, he was immediately to enter into conversation with God. Eli specified what Samuel should say. Each part of the reply would convey definite purposes. "Speak" would invite God to continue His revelation. "Lord" indicated Samuel knew to whom he was speaking. "For your servant is listening" would affirm his willingness to obey God completely. Samuel followed Eli's instructions precisely. When God spoke, Samuel submitted to Him. Without waiting to learn what God wanted, he committed himself to obedience and service.

- When you pray, is it usually with an attitude of “Speak Lord, your servant listens,” or “Listen Lord, for your servant speaks”? What is the difference between these two approaches to prayer?

Notes:

- Read Psalm 46:10. Why do you think God values silence, or being still before Him? What do we communicate to God through our silence?
- On the other hand, what do we communicate to God when we spend most or all of our prayer time listening to ourselves speak?

While Samuel previously had opened the doors to the sanctuary and thus opened up the way to the worship of God, he would do a similar task in his role as a prophet. Samuel would open up doors to God’s truth by declaring God’s word to the people. His first assignment as a prophet concerned the dreadful message Eli had received previously (2:27-36).

> Have a volunteer read 1 Samuel 3:12–4:1a.

- Did God give Samuel an easy message to deliver? What, in your own words, did God tell Samuel to do?
- Why was God angry at Eli?
- How had Eli previously responded when God spoke to Him (v. 13)? Compare that with how Eli responded when God spoke through Samuel.

Samuel had been afraid to tell Eli what God had revealed to him. When Eli insisted on a full account, Samuel told the priest all the Lord said. Eli then made the appropriate response to divine revelation. He accepted the new prophet's message without protest.

Notes:

- Why do you think God often chooses to speak to us through community?
- What benefits have you experienced being a part of a community where God's truth is taught and shared?

God has created us to live in community with others, and one of the benefits of that community is the ability to speak His truth into each other's lives. We often hear from God best when people who we know and love affirm things He is teaching us, point out sin in our lives, or challenge and encourage us to take next steps in our faith journeys.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

- What's your next step today to make sure you are putting yourself in the right surroundings to hear the voice of God?
- Is it easy or difficult for you to hear from God? Explain. How would you counsel someone who says they can't remember the last time they heard God speaking to them?
- Is there something you have been hearing from God and not doing? How can this group help you in that?

PRAY

Before you speak in prayer, spend at least a minute in silence just listening to the Lord. Pray that your group would put themselves in a position to continue to hear God's voice and then do what He says.

Notes:

FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following information:

- > Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
 - What are the things you've sensed God saying to you this week as you've been more careful to listen?
 - How do you need to respond to what God has said?

- > A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.

- > The challenge to memorize 1 Samuel 3:10.

- > The text for next week's study, so group members can read it in anticipation of next weekend: 1 Samuel 7:3-17.

1 SAMUEL 3:1-4:1

3:1-3. Samuel, as a youthful Levite, was providing service to the Lord under Eli's tutelage. In the days of Eli, prophetic revelations in the form of visions and divine words had been "rare" (v. 1; lit., "precious"), a circumstance that can be linked to divine displeasure (see 14:37; 28:6) and helps explain why society was so degenerate at that time (see Prov. 29:18; Amos 8:11). Background details provided here are laden with symbolism relevant to the events that follow; Eli's eyes—and by extension his spiritual insight—were "so weak that he could barely see" (v. 2). The mention of "the lamp of God" (v. 3) still burning in the midst of Shiloh's darkness provided not only a temporal setting—the predawn hours (see Ex. 27:21)—but also a symbol of Samuel's presence in that spiritually benighted worship center. Samuel lying down in the Lord's temple, "where the ark of God was," positions the youth not only spatially but also spiritually; he was of all Israelites closest to the Lord's throne (see 4:4; Num. 7:89).

3:4-14. While Samuel was fulfilling the Torah obligations to tend the lamp of God (see Lev. 24:3; Num. 18:23), the Lord called the youth and delivered a message of judgment to him. In a form paralleling Abraham, Jacob, and Moses' obedient responses to divine calls (Gen. 22:1, 11; 31:11; Ex. 3:4), Samuel responded, "Here I am" (v. 4). Because he did not initially know the Lord, however, Samuel at first went to Eli for further instructions (vv. 5-6, 8). Eli twice turned Samuel away (vv. 5-6), perhaps because Eli essentially was blind to the possibility of the Lord's revealing Himself in a personal manner. Eventually, however, the elderly priest came to understand that the Lord was calling the youth and advised him to respond submissively.

On the climactic fourth approach to Samuel, the Lord called the boy's name twice and also "stood." The repetition of the personal name is reminiscent of the divine call to Abraham at Mount Moriah (see Gen. 22:1,11) and the one to Moses at the burning bush (see Ex. 3:4). The similarity suggests that this moment was as important in Samuel's life and for all Israel as the parallel moments were in the lives of the earlier heroes of the faith. Samuel obediently identified himself as the Lord's "servant" (v. 10; 1:11) and urged the Lord to speak.

Notes:

The Lord's terrifying revelation was in fact a confirmatory repetition of the judgment against the house of Eli given by the unnamed prophet (2:30-36). Though prophetic messages could be conditional—warnings of possible consequences resulting from continued disobedience (see Jonah 3:4)—in the case of the words spoken against the house of Eli they were certain. Every promised outcome—"from beginning to end" (v. 12)—would become reality. And Eli, as the family patriarch, would bear the brunt of the blame because "he knew about" (v. 13) his sons' "contemptible" sins but "failed to restrain them" (Deut. 21:18-21). Eli's conscious failure to enforce divine law in his own family amounted to a high-handed (i.e., deliberate) sin; as such it could "never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering" (v. 14; see Num. 15:30-31). Furthermore, the magnitude and form of God's judgment would be so shocking that it would cause "the ears of everyone who hears it to tingle"—that is, to give rise to great fear and dismay (see 2 Kings 21:12; Jer. 19:3).

Notes:

3:15-18. With the coming of morning, Samuel "opened the doors of the house of the Lord." The description of a dawn marked by the prophet's reopening the way into the Lord's presence is an obvious double entendre: on the one hand, Samuel was merely performing his daily duty as a temple servant; on the other hand, he was ushering in a new era of spiritual consciousness in Israel.

But Samuel did not enter into his role as the Lord's spokesman without hesitation (v. 15). Eli's fatherly reassurances and stern admonition provided the encouragement the lad needed to perform his duty. The interaction between Eli and Samuel in verses 17-18 conveys an idealized model of prophetic activity in society: the addressee encourages the prophet to speak the full revelation, the prophet does so, and the addressee accepts it willingly. In these verses both the seriousness of the prophetic responsibility and a model of its proper discharge are presented. Samuel's alert, expectant reception of the divine message (v. 10b) and his full disclosure of the Lord's revelation (vv. 17-18a) in spite of personal misgivings (v. 15) are the proper responses of a prophet to a revelatory divine visitation.

3:19. The power of God's call on Samuel's life is shown in the faithfulness of God's presence with his ministry. God did not

leave Samuel alone to fulfill his calling by himself. Samuel did not need to get by on his wits or good looks.

Verse 19 says two important things. First, as Samuel grew up, God was with him. It also states that God let none of his words fall to the ground. What exactly does this mean?

Notes:

Obviously, the phrase refers to Samuel's prophetic ministry. Whatever Samuel proclaimed as a word from the Lord came to pass. But don't get the idea that this suggests Samuel could predict anything he wanted to and God was obligated to make it happen. The sentence really means that Samuel learned the first lesson of his call very well. That is, Samuel learned to say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening" (v. 9).

Samuel did not use his call for fame or personal gain (cp. 1 Sam. 12:3-4). He did not try to twist God's commands to suit himself or his friends. He listened and spoke as God spoke to him. He had the courage to be faithful to the message of God, no matter what. And because he did, God blessed his ministry and confirmed his prophecies. Samuel's words were trustworthy because they were the Lord's words (Bergen, 88).

3:20-21. Since Samuel was faithful to listen to the Lord and obey him, his reputation as a prophet spread throughout the land. Like Moses before him (Num. 12:7), Samuel was now considered a prophet of the Lord in all Israel. The famine of hearing the word of Lord (Amos 8:11) was over. No longer was the word rare or uncommon. The Lord continued to reveal himself to Samuel at Shiloh. Samuel had truly learned to say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."

4:1 The Philistines migrated to the Judean coastline during the twelfth century b.c. and began threatening Israel during the days of the judges (chaps. 13-16). The Israelites camped at Ebenezer about 20 miles west of Shiloh, while the Philistines camped at Aphek across the plain to the west. Israel's enemies had pushed far north from their home along Israel's southern coastline and now threatened the central territory.