

Norwood's Notes: Brief Summaries of Bible Stories

These "notes" are intended to provide a general overview of the basic stories of the Bible in the hope of building greater biblical knowledge and encouraging Bible reading and study. For more information, visit www.UjimaChurch.org

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14 - Highlights from 1 Samuel 1-10, "Samuel and Saul"

A man named Elkanah had two wives, "Hannah" and "Peninnah." Elkanah showed special care and affection for Hannah, who had no children, and who was mistreated by Peninnah, who had children. Each year the family would travel to make sacrifices to the Lord where the tabernacle was kept at a place called "Shiloh." One year, after the ceremony, Hannah was deeply distressed and praying to the Lord, weeping bitterly. She asked the Lord to give her a son and she vowed to give him back to the Lord all the days of his life. Hannah prayed deeply within her heart as her lips moved while no words could be heard. The high priest, Eli, presumed that she must be drunk and chastised her. But, Hannah replied that she had no strong drink, but was merely pouring her heart out before the Lord. Eli blessed her and asked that the Lord would grant her petition. And, in due time, as God worked his plan, Hannah became pregnant and bore a son and called his name "Samuel" (1 Sam 1). Hannah kept her vow, taking little Samuel to the high priest Eli so he could be in the service of the Lord. Each year, Hannah would make Samuel a little robe and take it to him as the family came to worship the Lord. The Lord was merciful, and granted her three more sons and two daughters, as Samuel grew strong in the presence of the Lord (1 Sam 2).

Little Samuel was in the Tabernacle where the ark of the covenant, which was made in the days of Moses, was kept. It was very rare to hear a word from the Lord or even receive a vision in those days. But, Samuel heard the Lord calling him. Thinking it was Eli speaking, he ran to the priest (1 Sam 3). This happened two more times, and Eli realized that perhaps the boy was hearing the voice of God. Eli told Samuel that if he heard the voice again he was to say, "Speak, for your servant hears." When Samuel heard the Lord again, he obediently repeated the words Eli gave him, and the Lord spoke to him, telling him that Eli's priestly house was about to be punished because Eli's own sons, each of whom served as priests, were worthless and corrupt. They dishonored the Lord, mishandled the offerings, and even disrespected the tabernacle. Eli's own sin was that he had not punished them. When Samuel reluctantly told Eli the Lord's words, it was a warning Eli had already been given by a man of God before, telling him that his wicked sons would both die on the same day, and the priesthood would be turned over to a faithful and obedient priest that the Lord would raise up.

One day, Israel's old enemy, the Philistines, rose up against the Israelites, killing many of them in battle. The Israelites asked that the ark of God be brought to encourage the warriors who fought against the Philistines. But, the Lord was not with them and the Philistines defeated them, captured the ark, and killed Eli's two wicked sons. When word was brought to Eli about the tremendous loss, he fell backwards, broke his neck and died. Eli had judged Israel 40 years (1 Sam 4).

However, the Philistines' taste of victory was to be short-lived. They brought the captured ark into the temple of their false god "Dagon." Each morning, they found the idol of Dagon fallen before the ark. Great sickness fell upon the Philistines and they were covered in tumors. They realized that the God of Israel was punishing them (1 Sam 5). They reasoned that they should return the ark of the covenant to Israel with a guilt offering of gold. They placed the ark on a cart pulled by two milk cows. Without anyone to guide them, the cows took the ark back to the people of Israel (1 Sam 6).

Years passed and Samuel had grown strong in the power of God. He summoned the people to put away the foreign gods and to serve the Lord with their whole hearts if they wanted to be delivered from the oppressive hand of the Philistines. Samuel judged the people of Israel at a place called "Mizpah," but when the Philistines heard that the people had gathered there, they drew near to attack. Samuel called the people to worship and pray and cry out to the Lord for deliverance. The Lord caused thunder to throw the Philistines into confusion giving them into the hand of the Israelite warriors and restoring many of the cities the Philistines had captured (1 Sam 7).

Samuel grew old and made his sons judges to assist him. But his sons did not walk after the ways of their father, but were corrupt. Israel's elders complained about Samuel's sons. They told the prophet Samuel that they wanted a king like the nations around them. This displeased Samuel, who went to the Lord in prayer over the matter. The Lord told Samuel, "... they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them" (1 Sam 8:7). God told Samuel to do as they asked, but to issue warnings to the people about how it would be to have a king rule over them. In spite of the warnings, the people still wanted a king.

The Lord told Samuel that a man would come to him that was to be anointed as king. The next day, a man of the tribe of Benjamin named "Saul," was searching for his father's lost donkeys and decided to go to the prophet Samuel for his insight (1 Sam 9). After prophesying that the donkeys had already been found, Samuel surprised Saul with a great feast, seating him at the head of the table. The next morning, Samuel took Saul to the outskirts of the city and anointed him with oil and declared to him that he had been chosen by God to be the king of Israel (1 Sam 10). Samuel told Saul that this would be confirmed by signs as he returned home. As Saul departed, God gave him a "new heart."