

Meadgate Spring 2019 The Early Kings

Session 2 – Samuel (Part 2)

Bible Background - I Samuel Chapters 3:11 through to chapter 8

We ended last session where Samuel has been called by God.

Worth noting:

1 Sam 3:1

"The boy Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli. In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions."

God tells Samuel, in the middle of the night, that:-

"See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears of it tingle.¹² At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family — from beginning to end.¹³ For I told him that I would judge his family for ever because of the sin he knew about; his sons made themselves contemptible, and he failed to restrain them.¹⁴ Therefore, I swore to the house of Eli, 'The guilt of Eli's house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering.'"

1 Sam 3:11-14

If God is going to give you your first prophetic word – this is an awesome one!

Possibly, Samuel gets little sleep at all that night, and begins his day as normally as possible:

1 Sam 3:15

"Samuel lay down until morning and then opened the doors of the house of the Lord. He was afraid to tell Eli the vision,"

But Eli demanded to know what God had said;

1 Sam 3:18-21

"So Samuel told him (Eli) everything, hiding nothing from him. Then Eli said, 'He is the Lord; let him do what is good in his eyes.'"

Eli lacked two critical qualities needed for effective parental discipline;

- **firm resolve, and**
- **corrective action**

When told what God had said, it looks like Eli is fatalistic – recognising that he has failed as a parent, and that God is confirming the judgement directly on him and his family. However, he does accept the validity of the prophecy, recognizing that **Samuel can hear from God.**

But God has stopped speaking to Eli.

Change, Transition and Transformation

Things were about to **Change**, and change is never easy. Samuel did not then realise that he would be the last of Israel's Judges, and a massive figure in the **Transition** of the nation from Tribal leadership to a national monarchy. He would also be an agent of **Transformation**

*"Companies that **change** may survive, but companies that **transform** thrive. Change brings incremental or small-scale adaptations, while transformation brings great improvements that ripple through the future of an organization."*

Nick Cantito

Samuel was to be key in one of the greatest transformations in the nation's history.

The closing verses of 1 Samuel 3 give us some amazing insight into how God started the change, first in Samuel himself.

*"The Lord was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of his words fall to the ground.
²⁰ And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognised that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the Lord.²¹ The Lord continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word."*

1 Sam 3:19-21

Note the strategy of God:

1. God was ***with*** Samuel – we will note later how God's glory will depart from the family line of Eli, but it is **clearly present** here with Samuel.
2. God let "none of his words fall to the ground" – the Message Bible says in 1 Sam 3:19 that **"Samuel's prophetic record was flawless."** An extraordinary comment on Samuel's life and ministry.
3. "From Dan to Beersheba" – a phrase used nine times in Scripture, Dan was the boundary in the far north of the country, whilst Beersheba was the boundary in the south. It's like us saying "From John O'Groats to Land's End" Basically, Samuel was recognised as a prophet the length and breadth of the land.
4. The Lord continued to appear at Shiloh – Shiloh, home of Eli, and where Samuel spent his early years. It was the place of the Tent of Meeting (Tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant). Because of Samuel, God continued to appear there
5. God revealed himself directly to Samuel through His word.

POINTS TO PONDER



- *How aware are you of the presence of God in your life? Would you know if you were far from God?*
- *How carefully do you watch your words?*
- *Has God revealed Himself to you through His Word recently? What impact has it had on you?*

1 Samuel 4 - the final word on Eli's sons

Israel had now become so puffed up with their own self-importance, that when they were at war with the Philistines – (Israel's major enemy in this Book, after a massive defeat at Aphek, where 4000 men were killed,) the commanders pondered why they had been defeated. In 1 Samuel 4 we read that the first place the Philistines attacked Israel was at Ebenezer, whilst the Israelites were camped at Aphek. They sent for the Ark of the Covenant – and failed to recognize its importance. For them, the wooden box, covered with gold, was being used as a **good luck charm**. They should have listened to the Philistines – at least they revered it as a symbol of God's power and holiness!

Hophni and Phinehas (Eli's sons) broke God's commands – by bringing the Ark outside of the Holy of Holies without God's permission.

Although the Philistines initially panicked, it drove them to fight desperately, and again Israel was defeated, the Ark was captured and Hophni and Phinehas were both killed in the battle

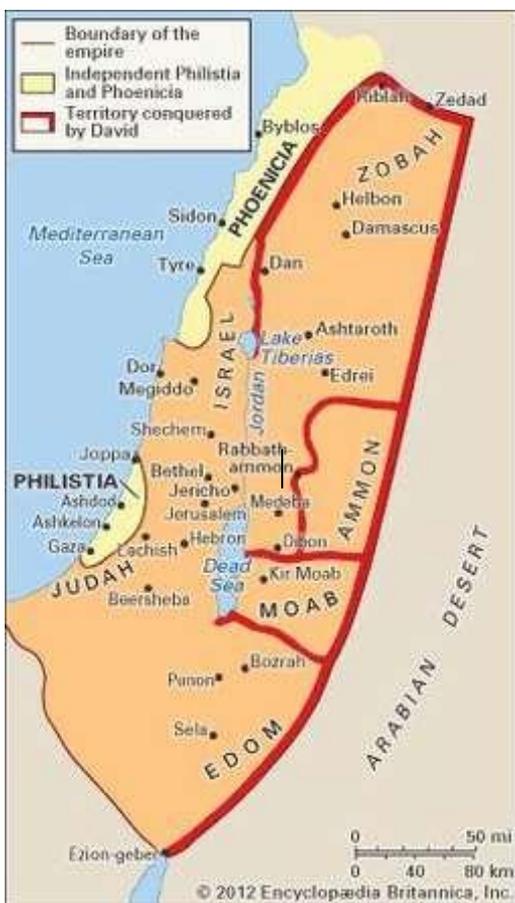
The news was rushed back to Shiloh, and on hearing that the Ark was captured and his sons dead, Eli fell down, broke his neck and died. **Phinehas' wife was pregnant**, and went into immediate labour. She died giving birth, and although the son she bore was fine, she demanded that his name be ***Ichabod*** – which means "The Glory of the Lord has departed" – referring to the Ark.

It was a huge day of grief - her husband, her brother in law and her father all die on the same day, and she then dies just after giving birth.

POINT TO PONDER



- *It is very easy to criticise Israel for not recognizing that “The Glory of the Lord has Departed”.*
- *Have there been dry times in your own life when this may also have been true?*
- *How can we ensure that God’s glory resides within us?*



THE ARK'S TRAVELS



1 Samuel 5

“After the Philistines had captured the ark of God, they took it from Ebenezer to Ashdod.

2 Then they carried the ark into Dagon's temple and set it beside Dagon.

3 When the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the Lord! They took Dagon and put him back in his place.

4 But the following morning when they rose, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the Lord! His head and hands had been broken off and were lying on the threshold; only his body remained.

5 That is why to this day neither the priests of Dagon nor any others who enter Dagon's temple at Ashdod step on the threshold.

6 *The Lord's hand was heavy upon the people of Ashdod and its vicinity; he brought devastation upon them and afflicted them with tumours.*

7 *When the men of Ashdod saw what was happening, they said, "The ark of the god of Israel must not stay here with us, because his hand is heavy upon us and upon Dagon our god."*

8 *So they called together all the rulers of the Philistines and asked them, "What shall we do with the ark of the god of Israel?" They answered, "Have the ark of the god of Israel moved to Gath." So they moved the ark of the God of Israel.*

9 *But after they had moved it, the Lord's hand was against that city, throwing it into a great panic. He afflicted the people of the city, both young and old, with an outbreak of tumours.*

10 *So they sent the ark of God to Ekron. As the ark of God was entering Ekron, the people of Ekron cried out, "They have brought the ark of the god of Israel round to us to kill us and our people."*

11 *So they called together all the rulers of the Philistines and said, "Send the ark of the god of Israel away; let it go back to its own place, or it will kill us and our people." For death had filled the city with panic; God's hand was very heavy upon it.*

12 *Those who did not die were afflicted with tumours, and the outcry of the city went up to heaven."*

Israel loses 30,000 foot soldiers in the battle with the Philistines, a battle they could have won. But the Philistines now have the Ark of the Covenant, something they originally feared:

1 Sam 4:6-7

"When they learned that the ark of the Lord had come into the camp, the Philistines were afraid. "A god has come into the camp,"

So in Chapter 5 there comes this ping-pong movement of the Ark, from Ashdod, to Gath, and to Ekron. These were three of the 5 great cities of the Philistines (the others being Gaza and Ashkelon).

Note that every time the Ark was re-located, there were major problems. When the Ark was set up next to their god Dagon, in the Temple of Dagon, on two consecutive mornings the idol was discovered flat on his face - effectively bowing to the Ark. (This was the same temple where Samson pulled the walls down -Judges 16:23-30)

The Philistine leaders are increasingly panicky about having the Ark of the Covenant in their cities, as more and more of them were afflicted with tumours everywhere it went. After 7 months of this (1 Samuel 6:1), they knew they somehow had to get it back to Shiloh – or at least out of Philistia – but how?

The Philistine called for their own priests and diviners to advise them. They decided to try appeasing the God of Israel with “guilt offerings” – namely images of tumours and rats, made of gold. Such offerings were not acceptable to Yahweh (Leviticus 5:14-6:17, and 7:1-10). It was **their** way of trying to repent, not Yahweh’s.

Later in the book we read:

“But Samuel replied: “Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.”

1 Sam 15:22

1 Samuel 6 tells of how they put the Ark of the Covenant on a cart pulled by cows, together with the gold “guilt offerings”, and simply sent it on its way. They wanted the direction the cows travelled to be a “test” of who had brought all these troubles on them. Their precise instructions, that the cows should have just calved, actually made it obvious that God was in control, for it is unlikely that a nursing cow would abandon her calves. God sent the cows to Israel. However, on arriving at the Israelite town of Beth Shemesh, 70 men were killed by God for looking INTO the Ark (See Numbers 4:20 – expressly forbidden).

Why did God kill these men?

They had made the Ark of the Covenant a media circus, not obeying the Law of God. Only Levites could move the Ark. God would not allow people to come into His presence lightly. **He did not want a cycle of disrespect, disobedience and defeat to start again.** By ignoring such presumption, the whole nation was in danger of ignoring God once more.

The Ark is finally taken safely to Kiriath Jearim, rather than Shiloh, which might have been destroyed by this time, because of the deeds of Eli, Hophni & Phinehas. Samuel’s new home had become Ramah.

1 Samuel Chapter 7

The Ark stayed in Kiriath Jearim for the next 20 years, during which time the Israelites mourned and sought God. Maybe they felt that God had abandoned them, for the ark was essentially hid away (Note that the rest of the Tabernacle furniture must have been saved, for Saul would set the Tabernacle up during his reign – see 1 Sam 21; 1-6).

Samuel, by now fully grown, takes this opportunity to challenge the nation to repent, fully committing to Yahweh, and ridding the nations of idols once more. The nation gathers at

Mizpah to make confession, with fasting, as they repented. Samuel is regarded now as a leader of all Israel, rather than maybe just a localised leader (1 Sam 7:6).

The Philistines hear of the people assembling together, and come up to attack them, much to the consternation of the Israelites. (1 Sam 7:7)

Samuel responds by leading the nation in sacrificing a burnt offering before God. The whole burnt offering here symbolised the totality of the repentance being offered to God. As the Philistines get closer;

“While Samuel was sacrificing the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to engage Israel in battle. But that day the Lord thundered with loud thunder against the Philistines and threw them into such a panic that they were routed before the Israelites.

11 *The men of Israel rushed out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, slaughtering them along the way to a point below Beth Car.*

1 Sam 7:10-11

Samuel takes a stone – probably a large one! – and calls it “Ebenezer” which means “Stone of Help”, and said “Thus far has the Lord helped us.” (1 Sam 7:12) It should not seem strange that the re-dedication of the people took them back to where, 20 years earlier, they had battled with the Philistines and lost (1 Sam 4:1-3). It looks as if God is replacing the memory of that defeat with something much more positive. We are then told that the Philistines did not invade Israelite territory again – at least under Samuel’s leadership.

Ramah

Samuel is now recognized as THE national leader, and as a Judge, for the rest of his life. Unlike other Judges before him, Samuel starts up a 4-city circuit of Judging between **Bethel, Gilgal and Mizpah**, always returning to his home at **Ramah**. Note (1 Sam 7:17) that Samuel sets up his own personal altar to God at his home. It is here indicative of his desire to ensure that he walked the walk, as well as talked the talk, when it came to faithfulness and devotion to God.

POINTS TO PONDER



- *Since becoming a Christian, has God ever asked you to repent?*
- *How does God want us to repent?*
- *How long would it take you to repent, once asked?*

Final Thoughts

1. *Can God count us as faithful?*
2. *What does genuine dedication to God look like?*
3. *Samuel's mentor was Eli – how did Eli shape up as a leader, and as a parent?*
4. *Did Samuel follow the lead of his mentor?*

APPENDIX 1

ISRAELITES VERSUS PHILISTINES

1 Samuel 4:1

The Israelites and Philistines were archenemies and constantly fought. Here are some of their confrontations, found in 1 and 2 Samuel. When the Israelites trusted God for the victory, they always won.

Location of the Battle	Winner	Comments	Reference
Aphek to Ebenezer	Philistines	The Ark was captured and Eli's sons killed	1 Samuel 4:1-11
Mizpah	Israelites	After the Ark was returned, the Philistines planned to attack again, but God confused them. Israel chased the Philistines back to Beth-car	1 Samuel 7:7-14
Geba	Israelites under Jonathan	One detachment of Philistines destroyed	1 Samuel 13:3-4
Gilgal	A standoff	The Israelites lost their nerve and hid	1 Samuel 13:6-17
Micmash	Israelites	Jonathan and his armor bearer said it didn't matter how many enemies there were. If God was with them, they would win. They began the battle, and the army completed it	1 Samuel 13:23– 14:23
Valley of Elah	Israelites	David and Goliath	1 Samuel 17:1-58
?	Israelites	David killed 200 Philistines to earn a wife	1 Samuel 18:17-30
Keilah	Israelites under David	David protected the threshing floors from Philistine looters	1 Samuel 23:1-5
Aphek, Jezreel, to Mount Gilboa	Philistines	Saul and Jonathan killed	1 Samuel 29:1; 31:1-13
Baal-perazim	Israelites	The Philistines tried to capture King David	2 Samuel 5:17-25
Gath	Israelites	There was very little trouble with the Philistines after this defeat	2 Samuel 8:1
?	Israelites	Abishai saved David from a Philistine giant	2 Samuel 21:15-17
Gob	Israelites	Other giants were killed, including Goliath's brother	2 Samuel 21:18-22