



***Becoming Fully Devoted Followers
by Studying the Followers Before Us***

**WEEK 16
SAMUEL**

APRIL 16-21, 2007

| DAY | <i>THROUGH THE BIBLE</i> | ABBREVIATED STUDY |
|------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Monday | 1 Samuel 1-4; Psalm 76 | 1 Samuel 1:1-28; Psalm 76 |
| Tuesday | 1 Samuel 5-7; Psalm 77 | 1 Samuel 3:1-21; Psalm 77 |
| Wednesday | 1 Samuel 8-13; Psalm 78 | 1 Samuel 7:2-17 Psalm 78 |
| Thursday | 1 Samuel 14-18; Psalm 79 | 1 Samuel 8:1-22; Psalm 79 |
| Friday | 1 Samuel 19-24; Psalm 80 | 1 Samuel 12:1-25; Psalm 80 |

READ

Samuel 1:1-28

Psalms 76

REFLECT

The Books of 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel were written as one book and divided into two books by the authors of the *Septuagint* (the Greek translation of the Old Testament). These two books tell the pivotal story of the Old Testament when the judges and prophets were replaced by kings so that the people could have the same kind of leadership as their surrounding countries. Even though God felt that the people were rejecting His sovereign leadership, He allowed the change and used Samuel as His instrument in selecting and anointing King Saul and King David.

In this first chapter of 1 Samuel we see the story of Hannah, Samuel's mother, her abuse by other members of the family, her prayer and her dedication of Samuel to the Lord. Her rival continued to provoke her in order to irritate her, but her husband Elkanah loved her so much that he gave her special treatment. The Lord had closed her womb so that she could not have children. On this particular year when Hannah was at Shiloh to worship and sacrifice, after the meal she stood up and began to pray.

Hannah prayed that if God would give her a son she would dedicate her son to the Lord for life and would not allow a razor to touch his head. Her prayers were so intense that Eli the priest thought that she was drunk, but she was just praying in her heart and her lips were moving but no sound was coming out. Rather she said she was pouring her heart and soul out to the Lord in anguish and grief. Eli told her "to go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him."

Here is another marvelous story where a godly woman, who was without children, went to the Lord in prayer so that she might carry a child. And, interestingly, this child that is conceived because of the prayer of his mother becomes a child of God that is used in the changing lives of all of Israel. Samuel, the son of Elkanah and Hannah that becomes a major prophet, is used by God to select two kings and serves Israel in the time of transition.

Samuel becomes the prophet and guiding light for Saul, Jonathan and David. It is Samuel who must tell Eli, his priest, of the sins of Eli's sons. Samuel is a part of the recovery of the Ark of the Covenant from the Philistines and the shaping of life in Israel as one country, with a king, instead of a conglomeration of the tribes without central leadership and authority – except when they relied on God.

RESPOND

When you have felt like you have nowhere to turn, there is nothing more you can do and there is no way that you can solve your dilemma, what do you do? Do you go to prayer like Hannah did or do you just flounder around hoping that an answer will come to you so you can move on? Look what Hannah did – she prayed so fearlessly that the priest thought that she was drunk with wine. Would you be willing to pray that hard and trust that God would answer your prayer? Would you be willing to put it all on the line – for God? Hannah did.

PRAY

Gracious and loving God, I pray that You will give me the courage and the conviction of Your love to be willing to trust You completely, to be willing to give it all to You and trust that You will provide the best for me. Give me the comfort to know that You care for me so much that You will not grant the desires of my heart unless they are focused on You, Your will for my life and my desire to do Your will.

- G.E.

READ

Samuel 3:1-21

Psalms 77

REFLECT

Have you ever had trouble sleeping at night, where you go to bed at a reasonable time, but you just cannot relax? You just cannot get the sleep that you know you need? Have you awakened in the middle of the night thinking about different things that you still have to do? Things that are still undone, things that you know must be completed. Have you ever awakened in the middle the night hearing a voice calling you? How would you react to that voice?

Now, most of us have been awakened by a sleepy child or a sleepy spouse and we have responded, not always pleasantly, but we have always done what was right for the moment.

Samuel had a night like that. It appears that he had had a very busy day. He had spent the day with Eli the priest, his teacher, his mentor, his trainer and his spiritual advisor. Samuel was probably accustomed to being called on during the night to help Eli. But this night was different because Samuel was in the temple with the Ark of the Covenant when the Lord called Samuel. Samuel immediately got up and ran to Eli and said, "Here I am, you called me."

But Eli was sound asleep, he awoke and responded, "I did not call you; go back and lie down." Again, the Lord called Samuel. Samuel got up again, ran to Eli who he found asleep, and said, "Here I am, you called me." "My son," Eli said, "I did not call, go back and lie down." Now Samuel did not know the Lord for the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him.

A third time, the Lord called Samuel. Samuel ran to Eli and Eli realized that it was the Lord calling Samuel, so Eli instructed Samuel to go and lie down, and if the Lord called Samuel a fourth time, Samuel was to answer, "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening."

How would you respond, if your name was called in the middle of the night, not once, not twice? Not three times, but four times, would you be willing to stop and say "Lord I am here, send me." Or would you be inclined to think it was a figment of your imagination or some bad food you ate such as Scrooge felt so many years ago?

The Lord spoke to Samuel and told him what was going to happen to Eli and to his family. When morning came, Samuel was faced with a very difficult task. How would you respond if you had been told the fate of another? Eli sensed that Samuel was troubled and pressed him to tell him everything that the Lord had told him. Samuel told Eli and Eli responded "Let him do what is good in his eyes."

RESPOND

Each of us has been awakened one way or another in the middle of the night – how would we react to one of our children or our spouse? Probably with love and understanding. How would we react to a pounding on the door? How would one of us react if a bright light appeared in our bedroom and we heard our name being called? Scared to death? Are we ready to say "Here I am Lord, send me?"

PRAY

Dear Heavenly Father, please give me the wisdom, the comfort, the patience and the peaceful understanding to answer You when You call. Help me to listen for Your call, be ready to answer Your call and be willing to go where You send me. Give me the strength and ability to step out in faith to do Your will – even at the middle of the night.

- G.E.

READ

Samuel 7:2-17

Psalms 78

REFLECT

This is a quiet time for Samuel and for the Israelites. The Ark has been in one place for twenty years, there have been no incursions into the land and there is relative peace. Samuel is clearly becoming the leader of the several communities that he visits on a rotating basis throughout the year. Note that Samuel is called a judge, in addition to being a prophet. Samuel is no longer dependent upon Eli for his leadership among the tribes of Israel – note that there is no nation of Israel at this point in the story.

Some writers suggest that this is the time when God establishes Samuel as the respected leader, the judge of the people, the person the people turned to for answers and the time when God prepares Samuel so the people will accept Samuel as God's representative when the people ask for a king. We do have times in our lives when everything seems to come into place and we can proceed to get those things done that we have been putting off, we can reflect on our lives, we can appreciate our family, our church and our community.

When we have an interlude such as the one Samuel is having in Chapter 7, do we thank God for the quiet time or do we worry about what is about to happen? Do we thank God for the down time, the time to relax, the time to reflect, the time to appreciate what we have, the time to share what we have with others, the time to draw our family closer together and share our love with one another? Or do we dread what is about to happen and worry needlessly?

The Israelites used this time to reconsider their faith and their trust in God and go to Samuel and ask for direction. Samuel tells the people

that if they are serious about returning to God as their sovereign, they must get rid of all the distractions and put away their Baals and Ashtoreths. In this situation Samuel is confronted by the Israelites coming back to God, wanting to be closer, wanting God to be with them and a part of their lives – yet, it was not God that left, it was the Israelites who separated themselves from God.

Note the sequence of events: the people want to repent, Samuel requires that they rid themselves of their distractions, Samuel prepares a sacrifice for the people, the Philistines threaten with an attack and God answers. And when God answers, He answers boldly with thunder and lightening, leaving no doubt that He is with the people as He routs the Philistines.

RESPOND

Where are you in your relationship with God? Have you been neglecting Him, or have you been in regular prayer and spending regular time in the scriptures and study? How about your family; are there members of your family, your church or your community where you need to be reconciled? Are you ready to take the first step and expect God to participate with you so that you can be whole?

PRAY

Gracious and loving God, please be with me as I try to let go of the distractions in my life so that I can focus on You and on the gifts You have given me – the gifts of friendships, family, church and community. Please Lord, help me to focus Your gifts and not be so anxious to do this on my own. Help me to recognize and be comforted to know that You care about me – help me to accept Your love so that I can share Your love with others.

- G.E.

READ

Samuel 8:1-22

Psalms 79

REFLECT

Today we encounter another significant turning point in the history of Israel, a change that has all the elements of political intrigue that we could want or desire, and probably some that we would just as soon not imagine. This chapter starts out with a repeat of history. We will remember that Eli's sons were taking advantage of their station at Shiloh, stealing from the offerings and being inappropriately involved with the women who served at the entrance of the tent of the meeting. They were abusing their responsibilities as priests.

Samuel becomes the prophet and the priest of the people and the elders must confront him with charges that his sons were also abusing their power and authority. However, the elders do not just confront Samuel with the sins of his sons but they use this opportunity to ask for a king, like the other countries have. The elders have converted the sins of Samuel's sons into a request for a new form of governance.

Samuel responds with displeasure, but when Samuel approaches God with the request of the elders for a king, God accepts the request as a rejection of God as their sovereign king. How often do we take a situation and try to turn it into more than it is so that we can get something that we have wanted and now the opportunity has been presented – almost like being given to us on a silver platter. Are we ever guilty of taking a small incident and turning it into a major crisis?

Note how God responds: God tells Samuel to let them have their king, but warn them of the dire consequences of accepting an earthly king instead of their heavenly King. Samuel proceeds to explain the

demands that a king will place on the people – the king will take your sons, he will take your lands, he will have some plowing the fields, some will be making weapons, some will drive the chariots and the king will take the best of everything you have. Do the people listen? No, they refused to listen to Samuel and said “We want a king to lead us, a king to go out before us and a king to lead us into battle.”

How often do we consider something that we want and immediately begin to ignore the consequences of our choices? In this story the people have turned their backs on God, then have rejected Samuel as their judge and prophet and they ask for a king. They want a king even knowing some of the consequences of their request; but they have decided and nothing will change their minds.

The people, and the new king, also ignore God's admonition that the king is to be responsible to God and the prophets just as they have ignored God since leaving Egypt.

RESPOND

Do we ever find ourselves in the same situation – we have made a decision and we are unwilling to change our minds no matter the consequences. Have we ever looked at a situation and feel that it would be better to start over rather than to fix what we have? This is often the case in relationships, even very important long term relationships. We often have a tendency to feel that something new would be better than fixing what we have. The grass is greener on the other side of the fence, even if it is AstroTurf.

PRAY

Gracious and loving God, give me the ability to wait on You, to listen to Your leading and not just talk to You. Give me the patience to know that You care about me and will only lead me to the best.

- G.E.

READ

1 Samuel 12:1-25

Psalms 80

REFLECT

This has been an interesting series of readings for me. The story starts with a woman who is unable to bear children, who faces God with a heart-wrenching prayer that is so moving it causes the priest to think that she is drunk with wine. In her prayer Hannah promises that if God gives her a son she will dedicate him to the Lord's work for life. She does bear a son, Samuel, who becomes a student of Eli, is called by God in the night, saves Israel from the Philistines, is used by God to select and anoint two kings (Saul and David) and yet is not attentive to his own household and his sons abuse their priestly authority.

As we walk with Samuel we can easily see some of our own failings, our own weaknesses and our own ambitions. How often do we read the Bible and find ourselves in the story – relating to the story and seeing our opportunities to be better servants, more thoughtful parents and more appreciative of God's love for us individually.

In this chapter Samuel gives his farewell speech. Early in the speech he sets the stage by asking the people whether or not he has served them well, has he taken any bribes, has he cheated anyone or has he oppressed the people. They assure him that they feel he has been a good and righteous leader.

Then Samuel moves on to what he feels is more important, the story of how faithful God has been to the people of Israel. He starts by saying "I am going to confront you with evidence before the Lord as to all the righteous acts performed by the Lord for you and your fathers." Samuel

then begins the story with Jacob being sent to Egypt, so that Jacob and Moses could become part of God's plan for Israel. Then, conflict by conflict, Samuel explains how God had graciously led the people to safety, how God had defeated the enemies of Israel and how the people of Israel continued to turn their backs on the love of God.

When he finishes, the people ask Samuel to pray for them so that they would not die. Samuel responds in 1 Samuel 12:20 "Do not be afraid, You have done all this evil; yet do not turn from the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart." Samuel goes on in greater detail, but look at the essence of this story "...serve the Lord with all your heart."

Samuel led a great life, yet his answer was to serve the Lord with all of his heart, to listen to God, to seek out God when all seemed lost, and to be a servant to the people of God.

RESPOND

Do we serve the Lord with all we have; do we get on our knees like Hannah and pray for our lives, our sons and daughters, our church, our communities, our country? Are we willing to submit to God so that He can guide us, lead us, direct us, comfort us and strengthen us so that we can be about His work?

PRAY

Loving God, help me to listen to Your leading. Help me to be a servant to Your people. Help me to have a servant's heart so that others will see You in everything I say or do. Help me, Father, to represent You to others so that they might know who You are. I pray that I will have the strength and courage to get on my knees and ask You to guide me. Thank You for Your love, Your faithfulness, Your companionship and Your comfort.

- George Eastman