

1 SAMUEL

A KING AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART

A 13-LESSON STUDY

REFORMED EXPOSITORY
BIBLE STUDY

JON NIELSON

and **RICHARD D. PHILLIPS**

1 SAMUEL

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SERIES INTRODUCTION

Studying the Bible will change your life. This is the consistent witness of Scripture and the experience of people all over the world, in every period of church history.

King David said, “The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes” (Ps. 19:7–8). So anyone who wants to be wiser and happier, and who wants to feel more alive, with a clearer perception of spiritual reality, should study the Scriptures.

Whether we study the Bible alone or with other Christians, it will change us from the inside out. The Reformed Expository Bible Studies provide tools for biblical transformation. Written as a companion to the Reformed Expository Commentary, this series of short books for personal or group study is designed to help people study the Bible for themselves, understand its message, and then apply its truths to daily life.

Each Bible study is introduced by a pastor-scholar who has written a full-length expository commentary on the same book of the Bible. The individual chapters start with the summary of a Bible passage, explaining **The Big Picture** of this portion of God’s Word. Then the questions in **Getting Started** introduce one or two of the passage’s main themes in ways that connect to life experience. These questions may be especially helpful for group leaders in generating lively conversation.

Understanding the Bible’s message starts with seeing what is actually there, which is where **Observing the Text** comes in. Then the Bible study provides a longer and more in-depth set of questions entitled **Understanding the Text**. These questions carefully guide students through the entire passage, verse by verse or section by section.

It is important not to read a Bible passage in isolation, but to see it in the wider context of Scripture. So each Bible study includes two **Bible Connections** questions that invite readers to investigate passages from other places in Scripture—passages that add important background, offer valuable contrasts or comparisons, and especially connect the main passage to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

The next section is one of the most distinctive features of the Reformed Expository Bible Studies. The authors believe that the Bible teaches important doctrines of the Christian faith, and that reading biblical literature is enhanced when we know something about its underlying theology. The questions in **Theology Connections** identify some of these doctrines by bringing the Bible passage into conversation with creeds and confessions from the Reformed tradition, as well as with learned theologians of the church.

Our aim in all of this is to help ordinary Christians apply biblical truth to daily life. **Applying the Text** uses open-ended questions to get people thinking about sins that need to be confessed, attitudes that need to change, and areas of new obedience that need to come alive by the power and influence of the Holy Spirit. Finally, each study ends with a **Prayer Prompt** that invites Bible students to respond to what they are learning with petitions for God's help and words of praise and gratitude.

You will notice boxed quotations throughout the Bible study. These quotations come from one of the volumes in the Reformed Expository Commentary. Although the Bible study can stand alone and includes everything you need for a life-changing encounter with a book of the Bible, it is also intended to serve as a companion to a full commentary on the same biblical book. Reading the full commentary is especially useful for teachers who want to help their students answer the questions in the Bible study at a deeper level, as well as for students who wish to further enrich their own biblical understanding.

The people who worked together to produce this series of Bible studies have prayed that they will engage you more intimately with Scripture, producing the kind of spiritual transformation that only the Bible can bring.

Philip Graham Ryken
Coeditor of the Reformed Expository Commentary series

INTRODUCING 1 SAMUEL

First Samuel introduces one of the most romantic and heroic figures in all of Scripture: David, the man of faith. Yet the book is about so much more than the life of David. It would be better to say that the **main purpose** of the books of Samuel is to provide a key guide to one of God's great redemptive acts in history: establishing his covenant with David to erect the eternal throne on which his Son and David's heir, Jesus Christ, now sits. After the dramatic events of Israel's exodus and the conquest of the land of Canaan under Joshua, God's next step was to establish the Davidic kingship as a type of the true kingdom that would come through Christ. The book of Judges, which bridges the gap between Joshua and Samuel, informs us that it was because "there was no king in Israel" that "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judg. 21:25). A true leader was needed who would elevate God's people out of the mire of their sin. Next, the book of Ruth directs our thoughts to Bethlehem, from which redemption will come, and concludes with the birth of David's near ancestor—Obed, the father of Jesse (see Ruth 4:17). The questions that Judges and Ruth raise—Where is the true king? What will come out of this gracious union between Ruth and Boaz?—are answered in the narrative of 1 Samuel.

Because 1 Samuel covers a crucial time of historical transition, David is hardly the only fascinating and important person we meet in this book. Indeed, 1 Samuel's eponymous prophet and judge is one of the most important figures in all of Scripture. Samuel's importance is signaled by the circumstances of his birth and by the experiences of the spiritually bountiful Hannah, a woman whose feminine piety foreshadows that of Jesus's young mother, Mary. Samuel personally bridges the era of the judges and the coming era of kings, as he anoints young David and oversees the abortive kingship that God introduces through Saul—himself one of the

more provocative figures in Scripture. Commended for kingship by his good looks and great height, Saul is David's shadow. He is the epitome of the man-centered, self-reliant kingship that worldly people often admire but that God rejects. Samuel contrasts David with Saul when he speaks these notable words: "Man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7).

David bursts onto the narrative of 1 Samuel in chapter 17, when as a young man he appears at the scene of battle and is aghast at the humiliation visited upon God's people by the Philistine giant Goliath. By slaying the giant with a single shot from his sling, David not only changes his own life forever but also highlights the theme of faith that is so important to this book. And yet David's faith is not the source of Israel's deliverance. Rather it is God's anointing—which makes David a preview of the Messiah who was yet to come—that provides salvation. Although David is a model of faith for Christians today, his faith doesn't so much provide an example of what we can do if we only believe but rather displays the salvation that God provides through Jesus Christ to people who trust in him and his Word.

One of the more enjoyable **features** of 1 Samuel is the covenant friendship between David and Saul's son, Jonathan. Together over the course of many years and through many trials, these men of like spirit encouraged one another as they placed their confidence in the promises of God. Jonathan is an extraordinary figure—one of whom the sacred narrative records no vices. How different life in the church would be if more believers imbibed the selfless, loving spirit of this great man. Although Jonathan held a high station and had been quite the hero prior to meeting David, he subordinated himself to God's purpose regarding the true anointed king. 1 Samuel 18 tells how Jonathan loved David for his faith and did everything he could to promote him—even divesting himself of honor and privilege. Over the years, Jonathan struggled to balance his faithfulness to his increasingly mad father, King Saul, with his faith in what God said and the loyalty to young David that this demanded. That Jonathan managed to maintain this balance—though it cost him his own life—reinforces his inspiring example. When the apostle Paul wrote many years later that the only thing that ultimately matters is "faith expressing itself through love" (Gal. 5:6 NIV), he might easily have used Jonathan's life as an illustration.

It remains the case, however, that David himself dominates the narrative of 1 Samuel. He presents a type of Jesus Christ—the greater Anointed One through whom God’s promises to David would finally come true. Like Jesus, David exercises his faith throughout many scenes of painful trial and sorrow. This is not to say that he consistently excels in showing faith; indeed, throughout the years of persecution he experiences at Saul’s hands, we can track the ups and downs of a life that wavers between faith and forgetfulness. The same man who stands before the giant in the pristine faith of youth later resorts to feigning insanity after he foolishly seeks refuge in Goliath’s Philistine hometown. Finally despairing of ever escaping Saul, David departs from Israel altogether and finds refuge as a bandit leader under a Philistine lord. He is delivered from ruin only by the providence of God—albeit through a tragedy that reduces him to tears. In short, David is a completely human figure who struggles to act consistently in faith while facing the most daunting trials—all of which serve to refine his character for the kingship that will come to him in 2 Samuel. It is at his best, when he acts in the strength of the Lord and through the means of faith, that David meets his generation’s need for spiritual leadership—and is a type of the Savior Jesus Christ.

The material of 1 Samuel may be organized into three main **sections**. The first section, consisting of chapters 1 through 7, presents the saving power of God in contrast to the spiritual impotence of his people. Its chief figure is Samuel. His mother’s barrenness reflects the spiritual condition of the people as a whole; and yet when Hannah prays in faith, God brings forth life from her barren womb and provides a leader for the nation. During this time, the priesthood has become especially debased due to the poor leadership of the high priest Eli and the wantonness of his sons, Hophni and Phinehas. Thinking that God’s power can be stored in a box, these false priests lead the Israelite army out into battle—only for the Lord to deliver the ark of the covenant into the hands of the victorious Philistines. No sooner has this catastrophe fallen on Israel than God’s power appears in the midst of the Philistines—humbling their false god Dagon and visiting such wrath on the ungodly people that they hastily return the ark to Israel. This opening section concludes with the restoration of Israel at Mizpah, which showcases the grace that God gives for repentance, which in turn leads Samuel to raise the Ebenezer stone in remembrance of God’s faithfulness.

The second main section of 1 Samuel, which consists of chapters 8 to 15, tells of King Saul. We watch in bewilderment as the people respond to Samuel's approaching death not by renewing their faith in what God says but by demanding to have "a king to judge us like all the nations" (1 Sam. 8:5). A broken-hearted Samuel appeals to God, but the Lord tells him to give the people what they want. Therefore, an impressive person who is strong in the flesh is, to the acclamation of the tribes, brought forth to be king. Saul has virtues to go along with his height and strong looks, and they produce some signal victories early in his reign. It soon becomes clear, however, that he is incapable of trusting God's commands. When Saul willfully violates God's commands, Samuel announces that his kingdom will be torn away and speaks the notable words "to obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Sam. 15:22).

The final section of 1 Samuel, which covers chapters 16 to 31, introduces the man after God's own heart (see 1 Sam. 13:14): the young hero David. As we first encounter him in his youth as a devoted but overlooked shepherd boy, we see that God has been preparing David through early lessons in faith. Anointed as the chosen king by Samuel and filled with the onrushing Holy Spirit, he burns with a passion for the glory of God. The sight of young David standing courageously before the massive Goliath, "in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied" (1 Sam. 17:45), is a scene that readers can hardly forget. Armed with faith, empowered by God's Spirit, and playing a role that would ultimately be filled by Jesus Christ, David strikes down the foe and delivers the people of God. He immediately becomes a national figure—a development for which he is less than prepared. Armed with God's power, he leads Israel's soldiers to great victories but fails to perceive the annoyance and then hatred that his preeminence is stirring in Saul's jealous heart. Before long, David's early faith is tested and matured when he becomes a fugitive from the irrational, malicious king. The best biblical commentary on the faith he maintained throughout his life of struggle comes from David himself, in poems such as Psalm 27: "The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" (Ps. 27:1). The varied experiences throughout which he proves these words true ultimately set before us the kinds of circumstances in which David's heir Jesus Christ would gain true victory.

A study of 1 Samuel is therefore far more than a mere “life of David.” The Lord is the true hero of Samuel’s books, as he provides Samuel to be the prophet and judge that Israel needs, prepares the ground for David’s appearance, and empowers the young champion through the outpouring of his Holy Spirit. Bible students will find this book to be an unforgettable account that is filled with rich and memorable stories. If this study is guiding your first journey through 1 Samuel, I envy you for the sheer enjoyment of the discovery that lies ahead. The trials, prayers, faith, and struggles of the men and women in these pages provide a great deal of help for us as we make our way through a world that has not truly changed even after the passage of so many years. But we must not take our eye off the book’s true **subject**: God’s incarnate Son, who bore a truly holy heart and whose victories, which he won in the power of faith and the Holy Spirit, accomplished an eternal victory for all those who believe. As Jesus reported in Luke 20:42, David’s own profession of faith was lifted to a Savior whom he prophesied would come: “The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool’” (Ps. 110:1). After this study, you will never forget the young David of 1 Samuel. His own expressed desire, however, was for God’s people to steadfastly look to the Messiah who would someday come, who now has come, and who is the true object of our faith as we follow the story of 1 Samuel.

Richard D. Phillips

Coeditor of the Reformed Expository Commentary series

Coeditor of the Reformed Expository Bible Study series

Author of *1 Samuel* (REC)

LESSON 1

FROM BARRENNESS TO BIRTH

1 Samuel 1:1–2:10

THE BIG PICTURE

As you begin your study of the book of 1 Samuel, it will be important for you to remember the most immediate historical context for the narrative that is beginning to unfold. God's people have been enduring the era of the judges—a messy and dark season that has involved some positive deliverance . . . along with much sin, idolatry, and rebellion. It has become clear that God's people need someone to lead them well in the areas of worship, obedience, and covenant faithfulness to their God. In a way, the predicament that Hannah faces as a barren woman represents the predicament of Israel as a whole: God's people suffer through the barrenness of leaderless chaos, spiritual darkness, and rampant wickedness.

The passage that you will study today, though, points to how God faithfully provides for his people. He will ultimately provide them a king—but before he does that, he will raise up a final, godly judge: Samuel. Just as the barren Hannah gives birth to a son who has been given to her by God, so the barren Israel will receive a king who has been chosen and anointed by God. Today you will meet Hannah, who lives with a kind and loving husband and yet longs for a son (1:1–8). She pleads to God for the gift of a child and vows that she will commit him to the Lord's service for all the days of his life, and God grants her petition (1:9–20). After committing her son Samuel to service in the temple under the leadership of Eli the priest, Hannah responds to God with a great song of praise (1:21–2:10).

Read 1 Samuel 1:1–2:10.

GETTING STARTED

1. Why do we tend to doubt God during times of waiting? What false views of God are you tempted to embrace when he seems not to be answering your prayers—or at least not answering them in the way you would like?

2. In what surprising ways have you seen God’s faithfulness and provision throughout your life? Do you tend to remember to thank him for these times? Why, or why not?

Preparing the Way for the King, pg. 6

The birth of Samuel portended a new age. Just as God would later prepare Israel for her Messiah by sending John the Baptist, God prepared the way for a king after God’s own heart . . . by sending Samuel, who was at once the last of Israel’s judges and the first of the great line of the prophets who served during Israel’s kingdom.

OBSERVING THE TEXT

3. What does the author want us to notice about Hannah's situation? How does the text help to make her a truly human character with whom we can identify?
4. Consider the ways in which the character of God is developed throughout this passage. In what way does he act in Hannah's life? What does Hannah say about God in her prayer?
5. What hints might this passage be offering us about what will happen in the rest of the book? What might cause the reader to expect that Samuel will be significant to the nation of Israel?

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

6. Why is it significant for us to remember the historical context of this passage (i.e., the time of the judges)? What does knowing that context contribute to our understanding of the situation that God's people were in during these days?

7. What does the author do to emphasize Hannah’s poignant pain in 1:1–8? How would you describe the character of her husband, Elkanah?

8. What makes Hannah’s prayer to God bold and specific (1:9–11)? What does the initial response that Eli gives Hannah in verses 12–14 tell you about the spiritual state of Israel during this time? What words of truth and assurance does he ultimately speak to comfort her (1:15–18)?

9. In what way does God answer Hannah’s prayer (1:19–20)? What does this tell us about his character? How will this answer to her prayer further go on to provide hope, life, and salvation for the people of Israel?

The Key to Hannah’s Prayer, pg. 26

We know that Hannah reasoned in a believing manner, because she did not wait until her prayer was answered to regain a joyful attitude. Her example urges us similarly to find our peace in waiting on the Lord, knowing his mercy and grace. The key to Hannah’s prayer is that she knew the Lord.

10. What does Hannah reveal about her character and integrity by committing Samuel to the Lord (1:21–28)? What would have made this extremely difficult for Hannah—as it would have for any mother? What truths about God and his purposes might have been guiding her when she did this?

11. What are the main themes of the prayer of praise that Hannah offers to God in 2:1–10? What actions does she attribute to God? What does she say about his character? How do the themes of this prayer show us glimpses of the God of the gospel, who sends his Son to be the great Savior for his people (note especially verse 10 and its mention of the “anointed”)?

BIBLE CONNECTIONS

12. Read Judges 21:25. How does this verse clarify the barren situation that characterized the people of Israel during the days of Hannah and Elkanah? What was the result of Israel’s not having a king during this time?

13. Read Philippians 4:6–7—one of the many places within Paul’s letters that contain instructions for Christians on prayer. How does Paul instruct followers of Jesus to pray? About what should we pray? What is the clear promise that God offers for those who pray in these ways?

THEOLOGY CONNECTIONS

14. Monica, the mother of the great St. Augustine, prayed for years for her son’s conversion while he was living for pleasure, sin, and his own selfish desires—before he finally turned to Christ in faith.¹ In what way can both Monica and Hannah serve as models for us of how to persist in prayer? What must we remember about God’s character, sovereignty, and perfect timing as we appeal to him in earnest prayer?

15. Answer 98 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism defines prayer in this way: “Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies.” How do you see Hannah serving as a faithful model of this approach to prayer? What can you learn from this brief and clear description of Christian prayer?

1. See Richard D. Phillips, *1 Samuel*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: 2012), 13.

APPLYING THE TEXT

16. What can this passage teach us regarding the times of waiting and watching we experience when we ask God for specific answers to prayer? What must we remember about God’s character and purpose, even when he does not immediately answer our prayers?
17. How does the provision that God makes for Hannah—and for Israel—remind us of the sovereign purposes he has for the good of his people? In what way do you hear “echoes” of the gospel within this passage? How does it foreshadow the coming of an even greater child who would be set apart for God’s purposes?

A Fitting Foretelling, pg. 49

Hannah’s Song is the first direct reference in the Old Testament to God’s promised *Messiah*, which in New Testament Greek is rendered as *Christ*. How appropriate that this promise should come from Hannah’s lips! Who better to foretell God’s gift of his own Son to be the Savior of sinful mankind than the woman who freely gave her firstborn son to serve the Lord . . . ?

18. How could Hannah serve as a good model for your prayer life? In what way can the joy she experienced, even before her prayer was answered, serve as an example of the joyful trust that you should place in God as well? In what way could her prayer of praise from 2:1–10 shape the way we respond to God for the provision, grace, and forgiveness he has shown us?

PRAYER PROMPT

You have studied the beautiful beginning of the narrative of 1 Samuel, in which the faithfulness God shows to the barren Hannah coincides with the faithfulness he shows to the barren Israel. He will give the barren women a child; he will bring his people a great judge . . . and ultimately an anointed king! Today, as you close your study of this lesson, praise God for the eternal faithfulness he has shown you by giving the gift of the great Anointed One—his Son, Jesus Christ. Ask him to help you to remember this ultimate faithfulness, even as you continue to lay before him the desires of your heart, the pains of your life, and your very real needs. Pray for patience and joy as you trust him and wait to receive his answer—in his time and in his way.