



# 1

## The Essentials of The Book of First Samuel



The Failed Priest: Eli



Samuel, A Faithful Priest



### Scripture Reading:

1 Samuel 3:19-20, 15:22-23, 16:6-12



## Prelude

Each of us started our life journey with expectations. What are your expectations for the journey of 1 Samuel? Where is the destination you're headed to? Who are your companions? Do you expect to meet God?

Whether you invite God or not, His existence is not just a feeling, nor is it a first aid kit left in the luggage only to be taken out during an emergency. In 1 Samuel, each character had his or her own journey and a destination s/he was headed to. Whichever station or road they were at, whether they sensed God's presence or not, God never left them.

It is my hope that on the journey of 1 Samuel, we will clearly see the conspicuous sign on the roadside, telling us that as long as we seek God sincerely and repent completely, the path under our feet will become a glorious road filled with God's grace and deliverance. Let us all be determined to walk with God from the beginning to the end.



## Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father,  
Thank You for guiding me onto the path of learning in 1 Samuel. I pray that You will walk with me along the way. Open my eyes to know You more and open my ears to hear Your constant guidance. I also pray that the Holy Spirit come and fill me with the oil of gladness and strength of courage and lead me onto a glorious and victorious journey of life. Thank You for listening to my prayers. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen!



### Station 1

For Mandarin, English, Arabic and Spanish versions of the videos, please go to [www.sowim.org](http://www.sowim.org).



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## Scripture Illustration

1. Brief Introduction
2. Author and Date of Composition
3. Features of Theological Themes
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### 1. Brief Introduction

In the Hebrew Bible, 1 Samuel is at the center section and the 4th book in the Former Prophets. 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel were originally one book in the Hebrew scroll. It was not until the Greek Septuagint that they were divided. 1 Samuel illustrates the transitional period between the period of the Judges and the Kingdom of Israel and explains the establishment of the Kingdom of Israel. Samuel was the last judge (see 1Sa 7:25; Ac 13:20) as well as the first prophet (see 1Sa 3:20; Ac 3:24). He anointed Saul and David to be king, successively. During this turn of course in Israelite history, Samuel assumed an extremely important role, and is considered the founding father of the Kingdom of Israel.

1 Samuel starts with the period of the Judges, which was after Joshua led the Israelites to conquer the land of Canaan and acquired “the land flowing with milk and honey” that God had promised to them. Each of the Israelite tribes lived in their own area divided geographically, and each tribe governed in their own way. Only during significant annual festivals or major events that concerned

the safety of all did they gather together. In the last five chapters, the author of Judges repeated twice: “In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes.” (Jdg 17:6; 21:25) to illustrate how the Israelites were not obeying the word of God, how their society was in chaos, and how they continued to suffer from domestic disturbances and foreign attacks.

Their toughest enemy at that time was the Philistines. The Philistines were brave and fierce. They had superior weapons as they brought iron-casting technology from their previous dwelling place. From along the coast, the Philistine chariots and horsemen attacked inland, and the Israelites had no way to defend themselves. Even the Ark of the Lord was captured (see 1Sa 6:11). In 1050 B.C., the Philistines had already conquered more than half of the central mountains of Canaan. By then, they probably had also destroyed the first Israelite government center, Shiloh.

The high priest was Eli, the religious leader of that time. From his conversation with Hannah and the way he trained Samuel, we can see that he clearly understood the will and calling of God (see 1Sa chapter 1, 3, and 12-18). However, his sons were punished by God for despising God, and the Ark of the Lord was captured. All these made his life end in shame (see 1Sa 4:10-18). The death of Eli marked the fall of the priesthood and the rise of the prophets.

The next leader God prepared for Israel was Samuel. To this day, the story of his mother, Hannah, still inspires many women to dedicate their children to God. Hannah gave Samuel to God at a very young age, and under the direct guidance and care of

God, Samuel grew to become a great prophet in the history of Israel who inherited the past and ushered in the future, anointing Saul and David to be kings of Israel. Samuel was a godly man and a man of prayer. Sadly, his sons turned out to be like the sons of Eli; they turned away from the way of God, accepted bribes, and perverted justice. As a result, the Israelites rejected the judges and priests to be their leaders and demanded a king, so that they could be like all the other nations (see 1Sa 8:1-5).

Samuel successively anointed Saul, and then David, to be kings of Israel. Saul, as the first king of Israel, had a shining debut, but after being abolished by God, his story ended dimly with his suicide. The life of Saul was a testament to the misery of disobeying God. Saul was handsome (see 1 Sa 9:2) and charming, and he was chosen by God to be the first king of Israel (see 1Sa 10:24). At first, he demonstrated outstanding leadership (see 1Sa 11) and bravery (see 1Sa 14:47-48). But later, he disobeyed God (see 1Sa 15), and out of jealousy he was determined to murder David in order to secure his throne by his own power and might (see 1Sa 18-19). As a result of his unrighteous heart, God abolished his kingship (see 1Sa 16), and from that time on, his life deteriorated. He was obsessed with killing David (see 1Sa 20-27), sought the witch of Endor (see 1Sa 28), and eventually was defeated on Mt. Gilboa (see 1Sa 31).

During his lifetime, a successive leader stepped onto the stage of history under the persecution of Saul—that is, David. David was the youngest son in his family, and his father did not give much attention to him. He tended the sheep in the wilderness,

yet he experienced the grace of God at his young age. He played the lyre well (see 1Sa 16:17), served Saul (see 1Sa 16), killed Goliath, and became a heroic warrior (see 1Sa 17). This caused the narrow-minded Saul to envy him, becoming hostile to him (see 1Sa 18:8) and obsessed with killing him every day. Therefore, miserable years of exile started for David, as well as a journey of walking closely with God. While escaping from Saul, David got to know God more deeply, and the suffering gradually shaped him into a man after God's own heart. He learned to make decisions that pleased God, and twice he spared Saul's life because he feared God (see 1Sa 24, 26). Although David was persecuted and oppressed by Saul, God's will to appoint him to be king over all of Israel did not change. 1 Samuel ends with Saul bleakly taking his own life on Mount Gilboa.

When reading 1 Samuel, we need to pay special attention to the Israelite politics, especially to how they transitioned from theocracy to kingship. On one hand, this process was the advancing of God's plan, but more importantly, it was the typology of God's eternal will. From the incarnation of Jesus Christ in the New Testament to the prophecy of the second coming of Christ Jesus in Revelation, it is the ultimate mystery of theocracy transitioning into kingship, yet returning to theocracy at the very end. On another note, although the major characters in 1 Samuel, such as Eli, Samuel, Saul and David, had their flaws, God still used them in great ways

### QUICK TIPS

**What's left for us to do is to make up our minds to obey God's word from the beginning to the end, all throughout our life journeys.**

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in God's story. Their lives show us that though we are also unworthy instruments, like flawed pottery, God is still willing to use us in His work! What's left for us to do is to make up our minds to obey God's word from the beginning to the end, all throughout our life journeys.



### Self Reflection/Group Discussion

- Paul says in 2Ti 3:16-17: “All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.” How do you expect 1 Samuel to benefit you? What kind of good work do you want it to equip you for?

## 2. Author and Date of Composition

There is no set conclusion on who wrote 1 & 2 Samuel. According to the Jewish tradition, it is written in the Talmud that “the book was written by Samuel up until 1 Samuel 25, which notes the death of Samuel, and the remainder by the prophets Nathan (see 2Sa 12:1) and Gad (see 2Sa 24:11).” In 1 Chronicles 29:29-30, it also says: “Now the acts of King David, from first to last, are written in the records of the seer Samuel,



and in the records of the prophet Nathan, and in the records of the seer Gad, with accounts of all his rule and his might and of the events that befell him and Israel and all the kingdoms of the earth.” Combining the above information, the author probably was a prophet during that time, and he compiled information that Samuel, Nathan and Gad had handed down (see 1Sa 10:25; 1Ch 29:29).

As for the date of composition, most believe that 1 & 2 Samuel was composed between 930 BC when Solomon died and 722 BC when the Northern Kingdom perished. From 1 Samuel 27:6 “so that day Achish gave him Ziklag; therefore Ziklag has belonged to the kings of Judah to this day,” we learn that the Southern Kingdom of Judah and the Northern Kingdom of Israel had already split. Therefore, the author should have lived shortly after the division, and the book was composed after King Solomon died. Some also believe that the bulk of the book was written after Samuel died (see 1Sa 25:1; 28:3). But we still consider the Talmud and 1 Chronicles 29:29-30 as more credible. Of course, we admit the possibility that some parts of the book were compiled according to records by court historians (see 2Sa 20:24), the Book of Jashar (see 2Sa 1:18) and records about King David (1Ch 29:29) by one or multiple authors who lived after the split of the kingdom. In any case, we believe that the whole process of composition was guided by the Holy Spirit.

### 3. Features of Theological Themes

What makes the Book of Samuel important is that the

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historical events recorded not only tell the story of the birth of Israel's monarchy, but also provide deep insights on the theological issues this policy change had brought. These theological issues have significant impact on the biblical theology of both the New Testament and the Old Testament. The Book of Samuel does not record the history of independent events in a dull way. This does not imply that the Book of Samuel twisted or fabricated history. In fact, any kind of historiography has to use a clearly defined perspective to choose, organize, and explain the meaning of the historical events it records. In Jewish tradition, historical books are considered the Former Prophets—a proper way to call it, as the historical books illustrate and interpret history to readers as a way of understanding God's plan. They are clearly narrating a prophetic perspective with theological context. The Book of Samuel uses this perspective to make the author's theological approach and the theological meaning of the events stand out.

The primary theological perspective from the book of Joshua to the Chronicles, including 1&2 Samuel, is built on the basis of the Sinai Covenant: the LORD Jehovah has chosen the Israelites to be His people (see Ex 19:1-6). He delivered them out of the land of Egypt, brought them to Mt. Sinai and made a covenant with them with the Ten Commandments. In Exodus and Deuteronomy where the laws are listed, we can find the covenant contingency. It emphasizes that obeying God brings blessings, and rebelling against God brings curses (see Lev 26). God led and kept the Israelites through the years of wandering in the wilderness, until Moses passed down the responsibility of leadership to Joshua. When the Israelites were about to enter Canaan, God again

made a covenant with them. This event is described in detail in Deuteronomy, including the blessings for covenant-keepers and curses for covenant-breakers. All these have deeply influenced and dominated the theological viewpoint of the historical books, including 1&2 Samuel.

Reading 1&2 Samuel, one can find that the author begins with “the song of Hannah” (see 1Sa 2:1-10) and ends with “David’s song of triumph” (see 2Sa 22) and “David’s last words” (see 2Sa 23:1-7). This framework manifests the theological foundation of the whole narrative. These three songs are the only non-narrative style passages in the whole book of Samuel, and they are distinct in explaining the book’s theological themes. The contents of these songs complement each other and depict a mighty view of God, expressing the LORD Yahweh as the LORD of Israel, that the word of God is all true, that He reigns in everything—the rock and refuge—and that whoever relies on Him will have peace and protection. Through the praise songs at the beginning and the end, the author’s narratives, and the dialogues of the protagonists, we can see that whether it be the destiny of an individual or of all the Israelites, it is all completely in God’s sovereign reign.



**The LORD Yahweh as the LORD of Israel, that the word of God is all true, that He reigns in everything—the rock and refuge—and that whoever relies on Him will have peace and protection**

In the narrative the author does not need to point out which events happened out of God’s sovereignty, but the readers can

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sense it. For example, Saul’s army surrounded David and was about to capture him and his followers: “Then a messenger came to Saul, saying, ‘Hurry and come; for the Philistines have made a raid on the land.’ So Saul stopped pursuing David, and went against the Philistines” (1Sa 23:27-28a). Clearly the author did not consider this a coincidence. God had already ordered things to take place according to His plan so that David was able to escape from Saul. The author put together these events that seem fortuitous to make readers know this truth: All the things that happened to the characters or to Israel were out of God’s sovereignty.

Besides that, the author also makes it clear to readers that God’s sovereignty is not a spiritual absolute beyond the intellect or a spiritual apprehension that lacks initiative or purpose. On the contrary, as we can see in 1 Samuel, Yahweh God chooses to be with His people, and He actively participates in the history of the Israelites. When people seek God and earnestly repent, He responds with grace and mercy. Yet on the other hand, He carries out righteous judgment towards those who rebel against His commandments and have no remorse.

In the very last chapter of 1 Samuel, we see that after David sinned by counting the fighting men, prophet Gad came to him and asked him to pick from three options to receive God’s punishment. David responded, “I am in great distress; let us fall into the hand of the Lord, for his mercy is great; but let me not fall into human hands” (2Sa 24:14). The author offers readers a clear understanding that even while carrying out judgment, God

is full of mercy. However, being merciful does not mean He allows people to be reckless or that He is indulgent. When Saul violated God’s command and did not completely destroy the Amalekites and their animals, but rather shirked the responsibility and claimed that the soldiers wanted to save some of the best animals to offer to God, God responded, “Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has also rejected you from being king” (1Sa 15:23b).

By the historical events recorded in 1 Samuel, the author made a clear statement: Even though God independently controls all human actions (whether good or evil), this does not exempt human responsibility nor dismiss God’s righteousness and holiness. God’s sovereignty and human responsibility coexist and do not contradict. God is the highest power in all the universe, and everything that happens in human history is under His control. In the meanwhile, humans must take responsibility for their own actions from beginning to end.

### QUICK TIPS

**God’s sovereignty and human responsibility coexist and do not contradict.**



### Self Reflection/Group Discussion

- What is your understanding of the relationship between God’s sovereignty and human responsibility?

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## 4. Outline

There are 31 chapters in 1 Samuel. In this study workbook they are roughly divided into 9 stations among 4 parts:

**Part I:** ▶

Station 1- The Essentials of The Book of First Samuel

**Part II:** ▶ The Corruption of Eli and the Rise of Samuel

Station 2- A Failed Priest: Eli (1-6)

Station 3- A Faithful Priest: Samuel (1-3)

Station 4- A Priest that Established the Kingdom:  
Samuel (7; 8; 12)

**Part III:** ▶ The Rise and Fall of Saul

Station 5- The First King: Saul (9-14)

Station 6- The Failed King: Saul (15-16; 21; 26; 28; 31)

**Part IV:** ▶ Tempering and Preparing King David

Station 7- A Man After God's Own Heart: David (16-20)

Station 8- A Man Who Determines to Trust in God  
(I): David (21-26)

Station 9- A Man Who Determines to Trust in God  
(II): David (27-30)



## Conclusion

1 Samuel not only talks about Samuel's faithfulness, Saul's failure, and David's success, but also about how God works at important moments in the history of the Israelites. Therefore, we should not view 1 Samuel as merely a history book, because God continues speaking to us through historical events recorded in this book. The Holy Spirit leads the author to record how God's plan has been fulfilled step by step in the history of His people, so readers of all time may witness the truthfulness of God by reading about the marvelous works God has performed in Israel.

There are four primary aspects we can take away with us from this book:

1. God is in charge of human history, and all things happen according to God's plan and will.
2. God is with His people and saves them from their enemies for His name's sake. He also reveals Himself to His people through prophets, so that they can know Him more.
3. God loves His people; therefore, when they disobey Him, He disciplines them through the consequences of their choices for their benefit.
4. God raises up leaders for His people to fulfill His eternal plan. David's life is witness to this, and David himself became a channel of the realization of God's salvation plan.



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## Tips for the Guide

- Discipleship-oriented one-on-one Bible study is the core value of the “Back to Bible” movement which SOWIM has been promoting. Through multimedia materials and discipleship experiences, we bring people to the live scenes where God spoke. As you’re about to start studying the Bible with a companion, your focus should not be to comment on the Bible characters like a historical commentator, but rather to be together at the scenes where the events in the Bible took place and to meditate on God’s actions: *Why is He quiet? Why does He guide things this way? How is God shaping this character or these people?* Meditation like this not only guides us through each passage in 1 Samuel, but also brings us together as Bible study companions. Are you ready to take your companion on this splendid journey?
- What do you think of the chaotic history during the era of the Judges? In addition to letting us see that God has preserved many weak and corrupted judges, the Bible also reveals in the book that follows 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, the continuing process of God raising up new leaders. The omniscient God knows that as long as leaders are human, they all have weaknesses and will face all kinds of temptations and challenges—yet He still chooses to use leaders to bring the disorderly people back to a life of faith that is pleasing to God.

KING SAUL

SAMUEL

When launching a Bible study of 1 Samuel as a guide, we need a correct perspective that we are not perfect, yet God still continues His work in our lives. Therefore, as we decide to walk with our companion on the journey of 1 Samuel, we need to constantly remind ourselves that we do not have control over his/her life. The only one that can change lives is God, the loving God who has chosen the person to be your companion. God has been patient with your transformation, and so should you be patient with the transformation of others.

- We each may have established our stereotyped understanding of certain biblical events of 1 Samuel. Please write down your understanding of the themes of 1 Samuel according to your knowledge and in your own words. After we finish the journey of 1 Samuel, we can review them from and see if there is any difference between your perspectives, before and after.

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## Tips for the Companion

- How are you feeling and what do you expect when you are invited by a guide onto the journey of a one-on-one Bible study through 1 Samuel? In the past, Bible reading was often an activity of personal devotion, but when you step onto the extra mile of “the road to Emmaus,” do you understand that the one-on-one Bible study of the “Back to Bible” movement is based on the sharing and trust between the guide and companion. We believe that the Bible is the truth that God reveals to His people for the purpose of building up godly people to live out the truth that pleases Him. Therefore, only when you have in mind the concept of “making disciples of all nations” while reading the Bible can you realize the discipleship training of the biblical events.
- At the scenes of biblical events, we will have many opportunities to enter the inner world of the Bible characters as the discipleship training through the development of the narrative in the passages. Please do not rush to draw conclusions or form principles that you are going to live by. Instead, leave your noisy minds for a while and truly walk in the shoes of the biblical characters to experience their struggles and their realities of life. Only when we strive to return to the actual scenes of the Bible can we understand that scriptures are not about people without names and faces, but rather shaping each

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one of God's people and leaders that God has chosen and treasured, step by step and day by day.

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