

Lesson 12

The Faith of Samuel

Introduction

And what more can I say? Time is too short for me to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets,

– Hebrews 11.32

Samuel is one of the final names mentioned in the verse above, which acts as an appendix to the “Hall of Faith.” The Hebrew writer declares that time would not even permit further writing about the works of the people listed in this verse—so despite being an “addendum,” we shouldn’t infer that they are any less important than any of the prior characters listed. On the contrary, Samuel had quite a resume. He served as Israel’s last judge, a priest and a prophet.

Samuel’s greatest work though was certainly in the latter role—He was a prophet of great faith and efficacy in his ministry to the nation of Israel. Samuel’s spiritual leadership makes him stand out, especially considering the backdrop of the culture and the leading men of his day.

Samuel’s name comes from a Hebrew word that means “heard by God.” As his mother, Hannah, named him Samuel because God heard her prayer for a son, 1 Samuel 1.20. 1 Chronicles 6.16-28 shows us that Samuel was a Levite from the descendants of Kohath. He is often called a prophet, 1 Chronicles 9.22; 2 Chronicles 35.18, and is associated with Moses, Psalm 99.6; Jeremiah 15.1. As a judge, he traveled Israel on a circuit, 1 Samuel 7.15-17. The New Testament describes him as a prophet and judge, Acts 13.20.

Samuel and the Sons of Eli

Samuel was raised by the priest Eli. As a child, Samuel ministered before God and wore an ephod. He was a faithful servant who had the favor of the Lord, 1 Samuel 2.26; 3.1, 19. 1 Samuel 3.4-14 records an instance where God spoke to Samuel while he was asleep. The young boy mistook His voice for Eli’s. This happened three times until Eli realized that it was God who was speaking. That night, God spoke to Samuel and told him He was going to punish the house of Eli because of Eli’s sons, 1 Samuel 3.10-14. Samuel then gained the reputation throughout Israel as a prophet of Yahweh, 1 Samuel 3.20.

After Eli’s death, 1 Samuel 7.2, there is a gap of 20 years in the record of Samuel’s life. As the biblical record once again shows the spotlight on his life, it shows how he had become a leader in Israel.

- 1 Samuel 7.4 – he led the Israelites away from idolatry.
- 1 Samuel 7.6 – he served as a judge over Israel.
- 1 Samuel 7.8-10 – he interceded over Israel as priest.
- 1 Samuel 7.5-14 – he led Israel to national repentance and victory over Philistia.
- 1 Samuel 7.15-17 – he became judge over Israel.

Several mentions of Samuel in the biblical text offer positive accolades of his leadership.

- 2 Chronicles 35.18 – Samuel led the people in keeping the Passover. He was faithful in religious ordinances.
- Psalm 99.6; Jeremiah 15.1 – He is compared to Moses, where his status as a prophet is indicated. See also Acts 3.24; 13.20; and Hebrews 11.32.
- 1 Samuel 3.20 describes his sphere of influence, stating, “all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established as a prophet from the Lord.”

Establishment of the Monarchy

As Samuel aged, he appointed his sons (Joel and Abijah, 1 Samuel 8.2; 1 Chronicles 6.28) as judges over Israel. His sons were corrupt, however, prompting Israel’s leaders to ask him to appoint a king, 1 Samuel 8.1-9. Samuel reluctantly agreed and anointed Saul as Israel’s first king. Samuel continued to be active during Saul’s reign, acting as priest and prophet, 1 Samuel 13.8-15; 15.1-3. In 1 Samuel 11.14-12.25, he led Israel in a covenant renewal ceremony at Gilgal, where he gave his farewell address. Here he expressed his feelings about the monarchy. He also encouraged Israel to pray and serve God faithfully.

After Saul disobeyed God’s instruction to destroy the Amalekites, God rejected Saul and instructed Samuel to anoint David instead, 1 Samuel 15.26-16.13. Samuel obeyed and then returned to his hometown of Ramah. After Saul began to threaten David’s life, David fled and lived in proximity to Samuel at Naioth in Ramah, 1 Samuel 19.22. When Saul attempted to find David there, Saul and his servants prophesied and were unable to catch him, 1 Samuel 19.18-24.

Samuel’s Death

After his death, Samuel was buried at Ramah. All Israel gathered and mourned his death, 1 Samuel 25.1. Samuel is last mentioned in 1 Samuel 28 when a necromancer conjured up the spirit of Samuel for Saul. Samuel foretells the death of Saul and his sons, the victory of the Philistines over Israel, and David inheriting Saul’s kingdom.

For a 21st Century Audience

Hear and Embrace the Call

Once again, for the third time, the Lord called Samuel. He got up, went to Eli, and said, “Here I am; you called me.” Then Eli understood that the Lord was calling the boy. The Lord came, stood there, and called as before, “Samuel, Samuel!” Samuel responded, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”

–1 Samuel 3.8, 10

Now while it should be said that God no longer call us personally today by speaking directly to us, 1 Corinthians 13.8-10; Hebrews 1.1-3, we want to pull out the principle here. That is, when God calls us through His word to respond, we need to respond. One of the things here that is easy to see is Samuel’s eagerness to hear and respond, no matter what God was about to say. Do we have a similar readiness to obey? Will we move with a sense of urgency?

Stand for Truth

Then Samuel said: Does the Lord take pleasure in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord? Look: to obey is better than sacrifice, to pay attention is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and defiance is like wickedness and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you as king.

– 1 Samuel 15.22-23

Saul has just disobeyed God to the point to where God has finally had enough. Saul's pride had led him here. And now, Samuel is charged by God to go confront the arrogant king and tell him that God had rejected him, and a new king would be appointed. Don't just pass over that. Here God is telling his servant to go and confront a man with very bad news, news so distressing it could have resulted in being killed. Samuel is unafraid. He is on a mission from God and trusts in His protection. He doesn't mince words; the truth is delivered to Saul.

Will we have the courage to stand for the truth when we have to communicate it inside of extremely difficult circumstances?

For Thought and Reflection

1. What is the meaning of Samuel's name? What is the context behind it? How is that story a demonstration of faith?
2. Read 1 Samuel 3.1-18. What is something that stands out to you regarding this story? What do you think about Eli's response in v. 18?
3. How did Israel know Samuel was a *confirmed* prophet of the Lord?
4. How did Samuel demonstrate his faith in 1 Samuel 7.3-5?
5. What was the result of the great battle against the Philistines in 1 Samuel 7? By whose power did they conquer? (7.10)

6. For Samuel, what was the result of the victory? (7.15)

7. How did Samuel feel about a monarchy being established? What are some things he said would happen because of it?

8. What was Samuel's role during Saul's time as king?

9. How do you think Samuel exhibited courage and faith in confronting Saul in 1 Samuel 15?

10. Where is the last time we read of Samuel? What are we to make of this story?