

Lesson 74

God Calls Samuel

God gave Samuel a message of judgment on Israel and the house of Eli.

Overview

Lesson Focus

God called Samuel as a young man and gave him a message of judgment on Eli's family and the nation of Israel. God's prophecy came to pass during a battle between the Israelites and the Philistines. God let the Philistines defeat the Israelites, kill the wicked sons of Eli, and capture the ark of the covenant.

Key Passages

1 Samuel 2:23–26, 4:3–4, 4:10–11

Objectives

Students will be able to:

Describe how Samuel responded to God.
Describe how God judged Israel under Eli.

Memory Verse

Psalm 34:17–18 When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.

Prepare to Share

Scriptural Background

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages for this lesson along with this background.

As the book of 1 Samuel opens, we meet Hannah, wife of Elkanah. She was in distress at being childless. During an annual visit to the tabernacle in Shiloh, Hannah breathed a prayer to God, asking him for a son. She vowed to the Lord that if he would grant her a son, he would be given to the Lord's service for his whole life, and no razor would touch his head. Her wordless prayer was mistaken by the high priest Eli for drunkenness. But after Hannah shared her grief and prayer with the priest, he blessed her, asking God to grant her request. The Lord did remember her, and she conceived. Her son was born, and she "called his name Samuel, for she said, 'I have asked for him from the Lord'" (1 Samuel 1:20). Hannah cared for him in the family's home until he was weaned. Then she gave him into the care of Eli so that Samuel would be devoted to serving the Lord as a helper to the priest, just as Hannah had promised the Lord.

Eli seemed to be a devout man, but he was weak regarding his responsibilities. His sons were wicked, corrupt, immoral, and self-serving (1 Samuel 2:12–17, 2:22), and though Eli admonished them, he failed to restrain them (1 Samuel 3:13). God's judgment was

pronounced not only on Eli's house but also on Israel (1 Samuel 2:27–36) because the people had again turned to idols.

The entire period of the judges shows a cycle of behavior in Israel: wickedness and idolatry, judgment, cries for mercy, deliverance by God through the means of a judge, and then a lapse back into wickedness, which started the cycle all over again. During Eli's lifetime, God sent the Philistines against the Israelites as punishment for turning to false gods.

Through these events, Samuel played a faithful part. God had chosen to reveal his plan of judgment to this young man under Eli's care. Samuel was lying down and thought that he heard Eli call him. The priest had not called, and at the third visit from Samuel, Eli realized that the Lord was the one speaking. Eli instructed Samuel to be receptive and obedient: "You shall say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant hears'" (1 Samuel 3:9). In this context, Samuel was "hearing" with a will to obey. Samuel received fearful news from the Lord that night, news of God's plan to judge Eli's household (1 Samuel 3:11–12). The judgment foretold to Samuel would prove to be God's final judgment on Israel during this dark era of history under the judges. Sadly, even in the next period of Israel's history under kings instead of judges, Israel continued to be unfaithful to God, and both Israel and Judah ended up in captivity.

Eli's response to the judgment intended for him and his family may seem noble at first: "It is the Lord. Let him do what seems good to him" (1 Samuel 3:18). But at closer look, Eli's history of failing to manage his own household after repeated pronouncement of judgment indicates that Eli was unrepentant and inappropriately passive—unmoved to act by the Lord's warning, just as he had been previously.

After the pronouncement of God's judgment, Israel went out to battle against the Philistines (1 Samuel 4). Israel was defeated. The people responded by sending for the ark of the covenant to be brought to the battlefield (1 Samuel 4:3–4), apparently thinking that it would serve as a kind of spiritual force of protection and power.

The people believed that the Lord's power was necessary to defeat the Philistines. But this belief seems distorted when we consider the corruption in the tabernacle, perpetrated by Eli's sons, and the continuing cycle of the nation's idolatry recorded in the book of Judges. Their intent in this instance was to use the ark as assurance of victory through God's power. However, the living and true God will not be used; he will not allow even his covenant people victory if they attempt to use him for their own ends rather than serving and glorifying him. God intends that his power and might—not the power and might of men—be revealed and praised.

The Philistines did, in fact, fear the outcome of the battle when the ark was brought to the camp of the Israelites. But they had no idea that God's judgment on his people was about to be executed. The Philistines won that battle, killing 30,000 Israelite soldiers, and captured the ark of the covenant. Both of Eli's sons died in the battle (1 Samuel 4:10–11). Eli, upon hearing that his sons were dead and the ark was taken, fell backward off his seat, broke his neck, and died (1 Samuel 4:18). These events fulfilled the word of the Lord delivered by Samuel, whom God raised up to be a faithful prophet, priest, and judge.

Historical/Apologetics Background

There are many parallels between Samuel and Christ. Both were conceived by God's intervention, though only Jesus was conceived in a virgin by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:34–35). Both were to be instrumental in the deliverance of Israel, though the kinds of deliverance were different (1 Samuel 7:3–13; Matthew 1:21). Both were used by God to usher in a kingdom. Both arrived on the scene at a time in history when God's dealing with Israel was to change dramatically. Both spoke God's words; they were his prophets (Samuel was also a priest and judge while Christ is a priest and king). Their mothers showed great faith and obedience to God. The song of Hannah bears remarkable resemblance to the song of Mary, who likely was familiar with

Hannah's prayer of praise and borrowed from its imagery. (1 Samuel 2:1–10; Luke 1:46–55).

There are other similarities in descriptions and phrases, such as both being described from childhood as growing in stature and in favor with God and men (1 Samuel 2:26; Luke 2:52). Samuel is a type—a pattern, a living illustration—foreshadowing God's unfolding plan to bring Jesus to save his people from their sins. By definition, types are necessarily incomplete, imperfect illustrations, but the similarities are still striking; and as we look back from our time, they show how God was graciously preparing Israel for the time in which the Messiah would come.

Limited License to Reproduce

A limited, non-exclusive, non-transferable, nonsublicensable license is hereby granted to a single local church or organization to print copies of the PDF materials in the Teacher Digital Resources if 1) you are the original purchaser; 2) you are using the copies for noncommercial purposes (such as for teaching in class) exclusively within your single local church or organization (multi-campus churches, and national/regional denominations are not covered under this license); and 3) you follow the instructions provided in the curriculum pertaining to the printable materials.

This license is for the specific purchaser of the product and does not include affiliated groups or organizations, or other churches or groups in the same denomination as the purchaser, not identified as the actual purchaser. There is no limit to the number of printed copies for use within the single local church or organization which is the actual purchaser. None of the material in this curriculum may be reproduced for any commercial promotion, advertising, or sale of a product or service, or to share with any other persons, churches, groups, or organizations.

The media (audio/video) portions are copyrighted and duplication is prohibited. This license is for materials in the Teacher Digital

Resources only and does NOT include reproduction rights for pre-printed teacher books, student guides, student take home sheets, or posters, except on an emergency basis when purchased quantities are not sufficient for a given week.

Bible Version

Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.