

MINING THE BIBLE



I Samuel

“The Bible is not a child’s storybook; rather it is great literature that requires thoughtful response. All its diamonds do not lie exposed on the surface. Its richness is mined only through hard intellectual and spiritual spadework.”

Haddon Robinson, Expository Preaching

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ABOUT 'MINING THE BIBLE'

Aim

The aim of these studies is twofold. Firstly, they're designed to help you get to grips with the main message and applications of 1 Samuel as a book. There's a second aim though, which is to help equip you to learn to study the Bible for yourself.

How it works

Each study has two sections: Questions and Summary. The questions for each study are intended to get you thinking about the most important things that the author wants us to understand from each passage. After each of the studies there's a short summary which explains the main point of the passage - but try not to skip straight to this if you're finding one of the questions difficult. Studying the Bible takes thought and isn't always easy, but it's important that you have patience and work hard at understanding it for yourself. If you get really stuck and confused and feel you need the help of the explanation, then do make sure you refer back to the passage again as you read it so that you can see where the points come from in the text.

As you go through the studies, you'll occasionally come across these symbols:



#PRINCIPLE

This symbol accompanies a key principle to learn for studying the Bible.



#METHOD

This symbol accompanies a method which you might find helpful for studying the Bible.

You'll also occasionally come across blank pages with this faded symbol in the middle:



This is to keep the summaries at the end of each study separate from the questions, to help you avoid the temptation of looking across the page for the answers without first working hard at the passage yourself! You could use this space to make notes.

Note on translations

These studies were prepared from the ESV, and it's recommended that you use either that or a translation with a similar level of accuracy to the original wording of the Biblical languages. Without going into all the reasons for this, an important one is that such translations often help make connections between ideas in different passages easier to pick up on because a common word is translated consistently.

Introduction to I Samuel

So you've taken the brave decision to tackle a long Old Testament book. Bravo! Hopefully by the end of this guide you'll feel like that's a less intimidating project to undertake than it may feel now. Along the way we'll be learning some specific principles and methods that come in handy to bear in mind as we read the historical narrative genre in particular.

You'll quickly notice that we're dealing with bigger chunks of material when we're studying through historical narratives like 1 Samuel (we'll explain more about why that is in the first study). That means it may take a little longer to get our head around each passage. Here's a suggestion of how you might practically tackle this study guide, by taking three days to complete each study:

Day 1 - Read the passage carefully & begin to answer some of the questions.

Day 2 - Skim the passage again & finish answering the questions.

Day 3 - Think carefully about the application to you today.

The danger of trying to do a whole study in one sitting is that you could spend a lot of time working out what the passage is teaching, and not have time to think properly about the application. Whatever approach you decide to take, make sure you give good time to thinking through how each passage applies today.

Enjoy!

More study guides can be found at www.miningthebible.co.uk.

OVERVIEW STUDY

Questions:

Read through the whole of 1 Samuel. Don't worry if this means you spend the first day or two just reading, but it will help you to try to do it in no more than a couple of sittings, so that each part is fresh in your mind as you read it. Have the questions below in mind as you read through, then try to answer them.

1) Make a note of any verses through the book that seem particularly important.

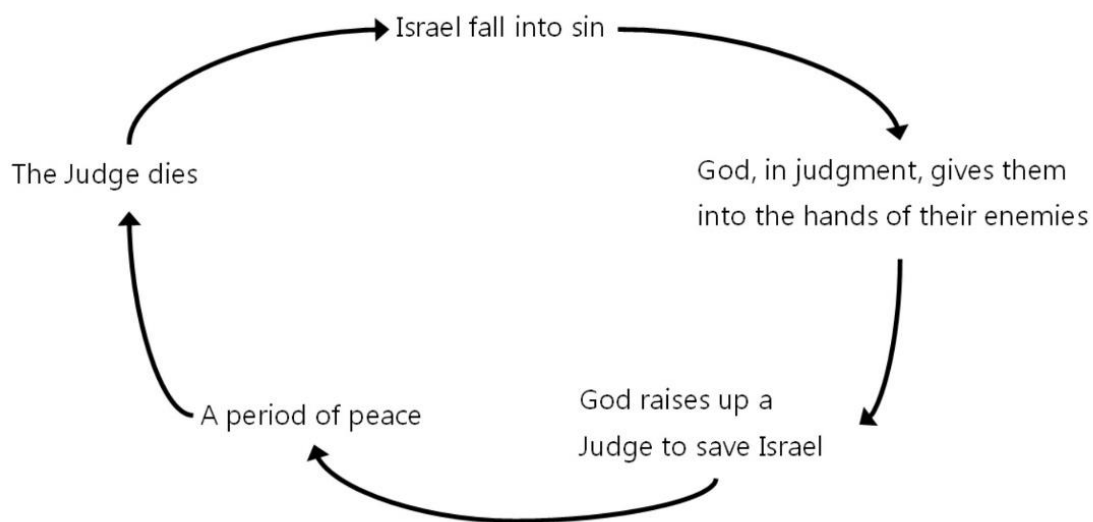
2) Divide the book up into a minimum of 2 and maximum of 5 sections, and give each a heading expressing the main point.

3) Write a sentence of no more than 10 words expressing what you think the purpose of the book is.

BACKGROUND TO 1 SAMUEL

1 Samuel comes hot on the heels of the book of Judges (with a brief interlude for the short book of Ruth in-between). In order to understand what contribution 1 Samuel makes to the Bible story, it's very helpful to understand the situation in which we find Israel at this point in history, which means thinking about where the book of Judges left off.

You may know that events in the book of Judges occur in a cycle that repeats itself again and again through the book - it goes like this:



The whole book shows how dependent Israel were on a leader. That's perhaps seen most clearly in the closing chapters when there are no judges mentioned at all, and it's utter anarchy in Israel - civil war breaks out amongst the people who are supposed to be God's holy nation on earth, and it's about the lowest point for Israel in the whole of the Old Testament. The very last line of the book sums up the big message of the book for us poignantly:

'In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.'

Judges 21:25

That line 'everyone did what was right in his own eyes' could almost be slogan for our post-modern culture, couldn't it? If many people today were to read that statement out of context they'd most likely laud it as an idealistic principle, a situation that every society should aspire to. But read some of the appalling things that happen towards the end the book of Judges - which frankly reads like the script of a Tarantino movie - and we see what that philosophy really leads to.

We need a King. Of course, God should have been Israel's King, that's part of the point of this verse. The other big point is that we need *permanent* leadership - that's why a *King* is what is cried out for at the end of the book of Judges, and not just another judge. The whole idea of a king, of course, is that when they die there is an immediate successor, usually their firstborn son, so there isn't that gap in leadership like there was between judges, which was when things went badly wrong. With a line of Kings, leadership is *permanent* - when one dies, straightaway another one takes their place.

God's people need that permanent leadership, we find in the book of Judges, both to protect us from our enemies, and to establish peace and justice among ourselves.

We'll see that in 1 Samuel Israel get what they needed - a King. But one of the big questions we'll need to think about as we read through is this: Is that all Israel need? Will any old King (or line of Kings) do?

STUDY 1: 1:1-4:1A

Questions:



#PRINCIPLE – Different genres have different densities.

If you've studied through either of the previous guides in the series on epistles, you'll have noticed that we're studying 1 Samuel in much larger chunks. The reason for that isn't so much practical, to limit the number of studies, as it is principled: Different genres make their points in different ways. In epistles, points are made in tight, efficient arguments over the space of just a few verses. A passage of just 10 verses might be densely packed with several important points. Old Testament narrative works differently - big points are often made over the space of a few chapters - so if you only read a few verses in one go, you can be left scratching your head as to what point they're making (or worse, be in danger of reading far more into the details of them than the author intended). As a general rule of thumb for Old Testament narrative, if you're wondering what the point of a particular event or block of verses is, it often pays to read on and see if it makes sense once you've read more of the story.

1) What's your assessment of the different characters and how God deals with them in these opening chapters? Use the table below to help.

Character	Status initially	Status by the end	Character assessment
Hannah			
Eli's sons			

Eli			
Samuel			

2) What's the situation in Israel at the start of 1 Samuel? How much has changed since the end of Judges?

3) This book is largely about Samuel, Saul and David. So why do you think it starts with a whole chapter and a half about a barren woman?

a) Have a think about, for example, Judges 13.

b) How does Hannah's situation compare with Israel's more generally?

4) What are some the key things Hannah's prayer expresses about God?

a) What is there in it that flows out of her own experience?

b) What is there that doesn't seem to come out of her experience (but almost seems more prophetic)?

In the rest of the passage, 2:12-4:1a...

5) What does God explicitly say about what He's going to do?

6) How does the structure of 2:12-4:1 (interweaving Eli & sons with Samuel & Hannah) demonstrate what God is going to do?

7) What do we learn in this passage about:

a) What God is going to do?

b) How He's going to do it?

8) Have a go at coming up with a short summary sentence for 1:1-4:1a.

Application:

1) Are there any ways in which our situation matches with Israel's?

2) What, therefore, are some of the big things we can give thanks for from these first chapters?

Summary:

It's no surprise that regime change often dominates our news announcements - after all, it's a big deal. Changes in leadership have a huge impact on our world and our lives. Sometimes they bring with them a sense of relief, hope and excitement at the prospect of something new and better. Other times they can be really frightening.

The introductory chapters of 1 Samuel give us a preview of what the whole book is going to be about; we find that God is in the business of regime change - and it's exciting news for us!

Our first impressions of the situation in Israel are that not much has changed since the end of the book of Judges. There's no proper leadership - in the absence of a judge or prophet, Eli, a priest, is the only semblance of leadership (c.f. 4:18), and he can't even lead his own family (2:12). That his automatic assumption when he sees Hannah praying is that she's drunk may tell us something about the spiritual state of the nation. The author's explicit remark in 3:1 about God's lack of communication with Israel certainly does!

But God's gracious dealings with Hannah in the first chapter signal to us that He is about to do something about the situation. Her personal circumstances and feelings in some sense reflect the condition of Israel as a whole: She feels distressed and afflicted, and her prayer echoes the language of Exodus. It seems that Israel as a whole has forgotten about what God has done in the past when they've cried out for His mercy. Hannah does what they should have been doing, and God 'remembered her' (c.f. Ex 2:23-24).

That a barren woman is given a child should make us sit up and take notice, given the Biblical precedent of miraculous births preceding significant figures in God's purposes (think Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Samson...). What will become of Samuel?

Before we begin to see the answer to that emerging, the narrative is interrupted by the record of Hannah's prayer in response to God. If you skimmed over these verses, you'll want to go back and read them again; this is hardly a superfluous inclusion - the content of her prayer contains all of the key themes of what God is going to do in the rest of the book!

The pattern of God's salvation is repeated again and again through the prayer - God is going to work a great reversal, bringing low the mighty proud who oppose Him and His people, and raising up the lowly and humble.

That pattern is one (we find as we read on in 1 Samuel - though it's hinted at in 2:9-10 here) that God will achieve both *for His King*, whom He will exalt whilst humbling his (God's King's) enemies, and also *through His King for His people*, whom He will save (raise up) while destroying His and their enemies.

We see a microcosm of the fulfilment of Hannah's prayer played out in the next two chapters. God announces judgment on the arrogant, wicked leaders of line of Eli¹ (which comes to pass in chapter 4). At the same time, interweaved with their fall, God is raising up His own leader in the boy Samuel (2:18-21, 26; 3:1a, 19), who turns out to be a prophet (3:1-4:1a). God also promises a faithful priest (2:35a) to minister before His Anointed King (2:35b) - so by the end of the first three chapters, God has promised to provide a faithful prophet, priest and King - three different kinds of leadership role that are all ultimately fulfilled in one person - Jesus.

The fulfilment of these chapters in Jesus is something Luke in particular wanted us to see in the opening chapters of His gospel - which recall another leader who was born miraculously who grew in stature and favour with God (Luke 2:40, 52). Indeed, a careful comparison of Mary's prayer in Luke 1 with Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel 2 leave us with more than a suspicion of plagiarism by Mary! Ultimately, Jesus is the great leader we need, who God exalts, and through whom God raises up those who humbly see their need for Him, while judging those who reject Him.

These chapters point us beyond Eli and Samuel to God's cosmic regime change - a regime change which in one sense is still to come, and which will affect every one of us. They're great news for us (and terrifying news for those who proudly oppose Jesus). As Christians we're surrounded by 'people who do what is right in their own eyes', unchecked or even encouraged by earthly authorities. We find ourselves oppressed by governments and powers that oppose God's laws. Even within the

¹ Lest we feel bad for Eli, notice from 3:29 that though he may not have approved of what his sons were doing, he wasn't willing to take any action to stop them. In fact, '*yourselves*' suggests he even tucked into their meals himself occasionally. Eli may not have been as bad as his sons, but in the end he still chose to honour them above God. He was a weak leader who tolerated sin.

church, we find self-seeking leaders who deceive for their own gain, and weak leaders (like Eli) who won't act against falsehood.

But there will be a day when God will have His perfect leader, the Lord Jesus, at centre stage - and every wicked power will be removed from its place. Luke tells us that was inaugurated at His first coming (sin, Satan and death have been defeated through Him already). We long now for His return, when we will fully experience His reign, and the final end of all the mighty powers that oppress us.