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Discover Your Bible Series

# Discover 1 SAMUEL



LEADER GUIDE

**LEADER GUIDE**

# *Discover* **1 SAMUEL**



by  
Steven L. Petroelje

**FAITH  
ALIVE**  
Christian Resources

Grand Rapids, Michigan

*The LORD said to Samuel . . . “People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”*

1 Samuel 16:7

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# Contents

To the Leader .....	4
Map .....	6
Introduction .....	7
Glossary of Terms.....	8
Lesson 1	
Samuel’s Early Years.....	12
Lesson 2	
New Leadership Needed in Israel .....	19
A Note About War in the Old Testament .....	25
Lesson 3	
Narratives of the Ark .....	27
Lesson 4	
“Give Them a King” .....	36
Lesson 5	
Saul’s Rule Begins.....	45
Lesson 6	
Saul Rejected .....	53
Lesson 7	
David .....	60
Lesson 8	
Thousands and Tens of Thousands .....	70
Lesson 9	
David on the Run .....	79
Lesson 10	
Protected from Doing Wrong .....	87
Lesson 11	
Dark, Troublesome Days .....	94
Lesson 12	
A Servant Leader Rises, a King Falls .....	101
An Invitation and Prayer of Commitment .....	109
Bibliography .....	110
Evaluation Questionnaire	

# To the Leader

## Prepare the Lesson

This leader guide is meant to assist you as a small group leader but not to substitute for your own work. As you prepare to lead each lesson, work first through the questions in the study guide. Then use the leader material to enrich your understanding of the passage. Prepare thoroughly before leading each group session so that you can lead without frequent references to notes. This approach will free you to concentrate on leadership responsibilities, keep eye contact with group members, and listen carefully.

## Get Ready to Lead

Learn to think in terms of questions. As you prepare to lead a lesson, ask yourself questions and try to discover the answers yourself. This will prepare you to anticipate group members' questions and thus help others discover truths from God's Word.

## Lead with Questions

Use questions to direct the group discussion. Draw out positive contributions by asking questions. Break down difficult or unclear questions into smaller, concise ones. Also use questions to respond to wrong or problematic answers. If you learn to lead others to truth by questions, you will be a good Bible discovery leader. The questions in this study are designed to be used with Today's New International Version of the Bible, but other translations can also be used.

## Help to Apply

Gently help group members discover the meaning of God's message for their own lives. Be careful not to be judgmental of persons who may not yet seem to be applying the truths you encounter together. It's the Spirit's work to apply God's Word to people's hearts. Tactfully let the group know how the Spirit is applying the Word in your own heart and life. Pray faithfully for the Spirit's work in others.

While giving people the time and space to apply biblical truths as the Spirit leads them, simply try to help group members see that there is a relationship between the Bible and life. Questions for reflection at the end of each session invite everyone to take time for personal reflection and optional sharing. Try to offer at least a few minutes for reflection time toward the end of each lesson, and encourage group members to do follow-up reflection at home.

## **Leadership Training**

If more than one group in your setting is using this Bible study, we strongly encourage leaders to meet regularly for discussion of the lessons, for prayer, and for mutual support.

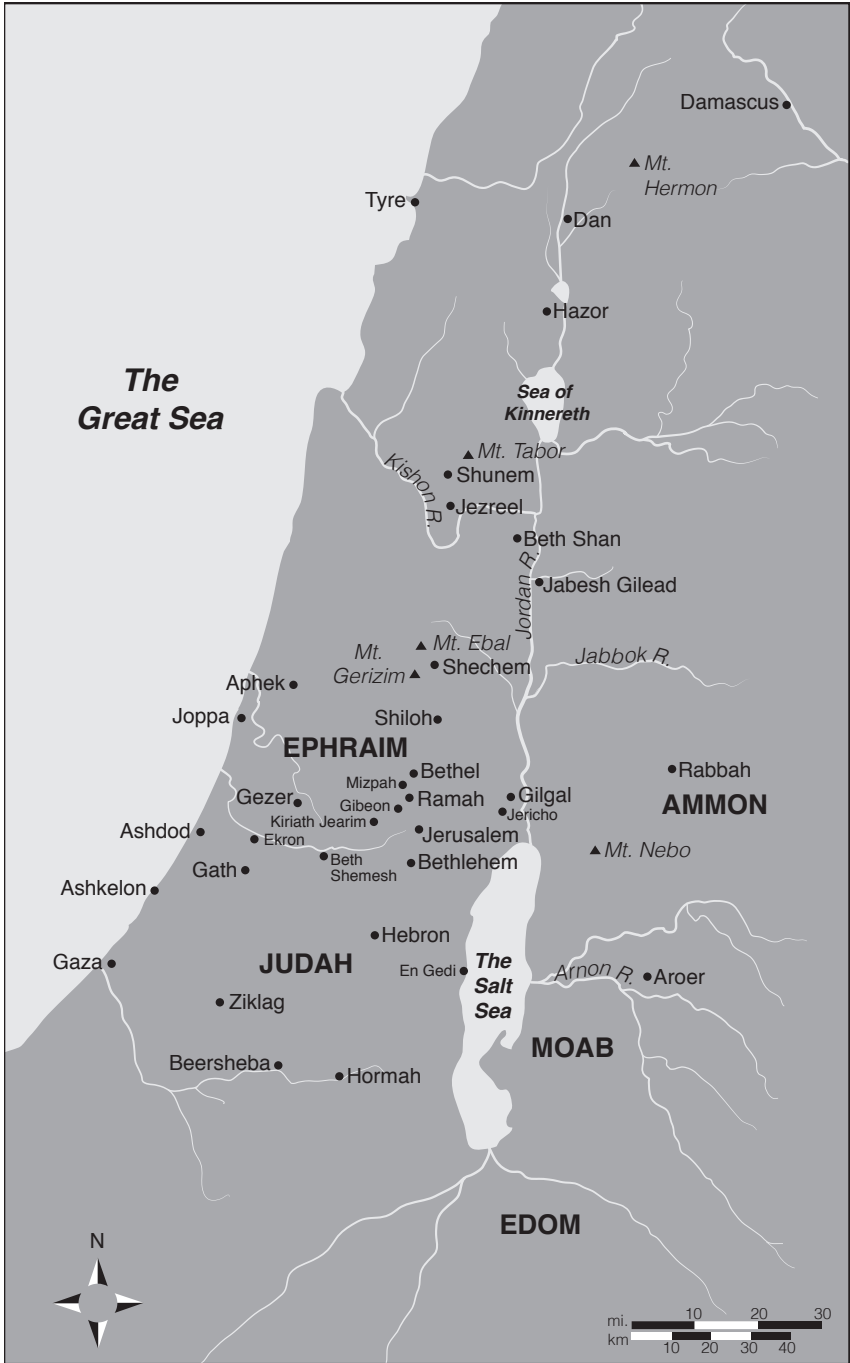
If this study is being used in a Coffee Break Small Groups program, each leader should have a copy of the *Coffee Break Evangelism Manual with Director's Handbook*, a basic "how-to" guide for establishing and leading a Bible discovery group. Reread the book or portions of it periodically and review it at the beginning of each season.

Leaders will also find it helpful to attend a leadership training workshop in connection with small group ministry.

### **For more information,**

- call toll-free 1-888-644-0814, e-mail [smallgroups@crcna.org](mailto:smallgroups@crcna.org), or visit [www.smallgroupministries.org](http://www.smallgroupministries.org)
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# Land of Israel in Samuel's Day





# Introduction

The events of 1 Samuel bridge two major eras in the history of Israel. The priest and prophet Samuel becomes the last major judge of Israel, thus closing the period of judges—and he anoints the first two kings of Israel, Saul and David, thus opening the age of kings (monarchy).

Of course, God is and always will be the true King of his people. But history shows that Israel went through many stages of human leadership before the Son of God (Jesus) became human and established himself as King of all kings for the blessing of all nations—God’s plan from the beginning (see Gen. 12:1-3; 2 Sam. 7:11-16; Matt. 1:1-16; 28:16-20; Eph. 1:18-23; Rev. 1:4-5, 17-18; 21:1-7).

As we journey through 1 Samuel, we’ll focus on the characters of Samuel, Saul, and David. Their stories contribute powerfully to Israel’s vivid history. But, more important, we’ll also focus on God’s faithfulness and care for his people. God shaped and sustained this nation so that one day it could become a light to all others—by giving birth to the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ.

In Israel’s story we see parallels to our own: sin, rebellion against God, cries for God’s mercy. We also see a few examples of the people’s faithfulness to God—showing that God works in and through his people. Israel’s story in 1 Samuel reminds us again that “the LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, [is] slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin” (Ex. 34:6-7). At various places in the story we also see signs and parallels pointing to Jesus.

God bless you as you study this book of the Bible together.

*Note:* Because of the narrative (storytelling) nature of 1 Samuel, some accounts covered in the lessons of this study are lengthy, spanning two or more chapters of Scripture. This may call for more reading than your group is used to, so you may wish to read ahead in your Bibles at home before doing some of the lessons together.

# Glossary of Terms

- Adullam**—a town in the western foothills of the territory of Judah in Israel (Josh. 15:35). David stayed alone in a cave near here while Saul was pursuing him to try to kill him (1 Sam. 22:1).
- Amalekites**—descendants of Esau (Gen. 36:12, 16); they had attacked God’s people when they were weary and newly released from Egypt (Ex. 17:8-15; Deut. 25:7-19; 1 Sam. 15:2-3).
- Ammonites**—descendants of Lot through his younger daughter (Gen. 19:36-38).
- ark of God, ark of the covenant**—a wooden chest overlaid with gold that was placed in the innermost room (Most Holy Place) of the tabernacle (tent of meeting) or, later, in the temple (1 Kings 8). It symbolized the presence of God among his people (see Ex. 25:10-22).
- Ashdod**—one of the five chief cities of the Philistines, along with Ashkelon, Ekron, Gath, and Gaza. Ashdod was the location of the temple of Dagon, where the Philistines placed the ark of God after it was captured (1 Sam. 5:1-2)
- Ashkelon**—one of the five chief cities of the Philistines. See **Ashdod**.
- Baal and Ashtoreth**—Canaanite god and goddess of fertility and war. The phrase “Baal and Ashtoreths” (1 Sam. 7:4) refers to idols that were used to worship Baal and Ashtoreth.
- Beersheba**—often referred to as the southernmost town in ancient Israel (see 1 Sam. 3:20).
- Benjamites**—Saul’s native tribe, the people of Benjamin (see 1 Sam. 9:1-2).
- Bethlehem**—the hometown of David (1 Sam. 16:1, 13); also the birthplace of Jesus, which by then was known as “the town of David” (Luke 2:1-21).
- burnt offerings**—sacrifices laid on an altar and completely burned.
- Carmel**—a town near Maon in the area of Hebron (1 Sam. 25:2); not to be confused with the place called Mt. Carmel, where the prophet Elijah met King Ahab and the priests of Baal (1 Kings 18:16-46).
- covenant**—a mutually binding agreement between two parties; usually both parties agree to accept certain responsibilities.
- Dagon**—one of the main gods worshiped by the Philistines.
- Dan**—often referred to as the northernmost town in ancient Israel (see 1 Sam. 3:20).
- David**—the second king of Israel, beloved by God as a person “after [God’s] own heart” (1 Sam. 13:14), a military genius, and the ancestor to the kings of Judah who ruled throughout the Old Testament. Jesus

of Nazareth, a descendant of David, filled the promised role of Son of David, Messiah, Son of God.

**Edom, Edomite**—Edom was the region inhabited by the descendants of Esau, the twin brother of Jacob. Esau was also called Edom, and his descendants were the Edomites (see Gen. 25:21-34; 36:9).

**Ekron**—one of the five chief cities of the Philistines. See **Ashdod**.

**Endor**—a town about six miles northwest of Shunem (see map). Saul and his attendants went there to visit a medium (1 Sam. 28:7).

**En Gedi**—a desert area with an oasis fed by warm, fresh-water springs on the west shore of the Dead Sea. David and his men fled to the mountain strongholds there and hid from Saul (1 Sam. 23:29).

**ephod**—a special garment worn by the high priest (Ex. 28:6-14). It had a pouch containing lots that the priest would use for inquiring the will of the Lord. See **lot casting**.

**Gath**—the place where David and his men fled in Philistine territory to get away from Saul, who was trying to kill them (see 1 Sam. 19:10; 27:2). Gath is one of the five chief cities of the Philistines. See **Ashdod**.

**Gaza**—one of the five chief cities of the Philistines. See **Ashdod**.

**Gibeah**—Saul's hometown in the territory of Benjamin (1 Sam. 10:26). Its location was near Ramah but is not known (see Judg. 19:13-14). There was also a Gibeah in the hill country of Ephraim (Josh. 24:33), and another Gibeah in Judah (Josh. 15:20, 57).

**Gilboa**—a cluster of mountains near Jezreel where Saul fought his last battle (see 1 Sam. 28:4; 29:1; 31:1).

**the Glory of Israel**—a reference to God (1 Sam. 15:29). Some people in Israel confused the Glory with the ark of the covenant, a symbol of God's presence among the people. That confusion led to a serious mistake, in which some treated the ark almost as a god or as a good-luck charm (see 1 Sam. 4:3-11, 22). See also **ark of God**.

**Hebrews**—descendants of Abraham. Abraham's descendants through Jacob (Israel) became known as Israelites.

**house of the Lord**—the place of the worship of God in Israel. In the days of Samuel this "house" consisted of a large tent ("the tabernacle") consisting of chambers and exquisitely crafted furnishings for use in worship. The ark of God rested within its innermost chamber, the Most Holy Place. During the time of Eli the priest, the house of the Lord was at Shiloh (1 Sam. 1:3; 3:1-3; 4:3). After Shiloh was destroyed by the Philistines, the tabernacle was apparently moved to Nob (21:1; see **Nob**).

**Israelites**—the descendants of Israel (Jacob).

**Jesse**—the father of David. Jesse was a son of Obed and grandson of Ruth and Boaz.

- Jonathan**—a son of Saul and close friend of David (1 Sam. 18:1-4; 20:42).
- Keilah**—a town in the western foothills of the territory of Judah in Israel (Josh. 15:44). At the Lord's direction, David and his four hundred men rescued this town from the Philistines (1 Sam. 23:1-6).
- lamp of God**—a temple lamp that burned oil and symbolized the presence of God (1 Sam. 3:3).
- lot casting**—In ancient Israel, lot casting was used to inquire of the will of God. The lots approved by God for use in Israel were the Urim and Thummim, to be placed in the breastpiece of the sacred ephod worn by the priest of God (Ex. 28:30). See Numbers 27:18-21 for the Lord's instructions on lot casting in Joshua's day. Note as well that the land divisions in Canaan were determined by lot (Num. 26:55-56; 33:54; 34:13-17).
- lyre**—a stringed musical instrument similar to a harp.
- Maon**—a town in the area of Hebron, near a town named Carmel. Nabal and Abigail lived in that area (1 Sam. 25:2-3).
- mediums and spiritists**—people who seek to speak and consult with the dead, an exercise forbidden by God (see Lev. 19:31; 20:6, 27; Deut. 18:9-13).
- Moabites**—descendants of Lot through his older daughter (Gen. 19:36-38). David's great-grandmother Ruth was a Moabite who married Boaz of the tribe of Judah (Ruth 1:3; 4:10, 21-22).
- Naiath**—This word means "dwellings" and probably refers to a complex or compound in Ramah where a local company of prophets lived. Samuel took David there when he was running from Saul (1 Sam. 19:18-20).
- Negev**—a hilly desert region in southern Israel where David spent time on the run from Saul.
- Nob**—described in the *TNIV Study Bible* as "a town northeast of Jerusalem and south of Gibeah where the tabernacle [house of the Lord] was relocated after the destruction of Shiloh" (see 1 Sam. 4:1-10; Jer. 7:12-15).
- Paran**—a desert area in the Sinai peninsula to which David fled from Saul after Samuel died (1 Sam. 25:1).
- Philistines**—descendants of a grandson of Noah's son Ham (Gen. 10:6, 13-14) who, in the time of the early judges, occupied a strip of land along the Great (Mediterranean) Sea from Gaza to Egypt. By the time of Saul and David, the Philistines had grown powerful in metalworking and warfare (1 Sam. 13:16-22), and they continually attacked and often captured portions of Israel.

**priests**—a powerful class of religious rulers in Israel who cared for the ark, made God’s will known through the drawing of sacred lots, conducted worship, and oversaw sacrifices.

**prophet**—one who speaks God’s message to the people. Samuel was an effective, faithful prophet.

**Rachel’s tomb**—Rachel was one of the two wives of Jacob (Israel), and she died giving birth to her second son, Benjamin, while the family was on the road to Ephrath (Bethlehem—see Gen. 35:16-20). Benjamin became the father of the Benjamites, the tribe of Israel into which Saul was born (1 Sam. 9:1-2). So Rachel’s tomb, near the town of Ramah (Samuel’s hometown—7:17), marked the birthplace of Benjamin and later became a border marker for the land allotted to the tribe of Benjamin in Israel (10:2). (See also Jer. 31:15; 40:1; Matt. 2:16-18.)

**Ramah**—A town of Benjamin that was the birthplace, home, and burial place of Samuel (1 Sam. 1:19-20; 7:17; 25:1; 28:3; see also 1:1).

**sacrifice**—the act of offering something precious to God. In the Old Testament this was usually an animal (the best of the flock) or the firstfruits of a harvest.

**Samuel**—a faithful priest and prophet who was also the last major judge in Israel. He anointed the first two kings of Israel, thus opening a new era in the history of God’s people.

**Saul**—the first king of Israel; he was not fully devoted to the Lord, so God rejected him as king and anointed David to succeed him.

**Shiloh**—the town where the house of the Lord, with the ark of God, was kept. Eli and his sons served there. The ark rested there until it was captured by the Philistines (1 Sam. 4:1-11).

**Spirit of the Lord**—In the Old Testament the Holy Spirit came upon certain individuals to empower them to accomplish certain tasks or missions for the Lord.

**stronghold**—a military location of strength and defense.

**uncircumcised**—not having the male foreskin removed through circumcision; this term was used to describe those who did not worship the God of Israel (1 Sam. 17:26). All males in Israel over eight days old were to be circumcised to be included in God’s covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17:1-14).

**Urim and Thummim**—marked stones worn in a pouch over the high priest’s heart and used as sacred lots to discern God’s will (see 1 Sam. 28:6 and **lot casting**).

**Ziph, Ziphites**—Ziph was a town in the area of Hebron. David stayed in the desert of Ziph for a while when he was running from Saul. On two occasions the Ziphites told Saul that David was hiding out there (1 Sam. 23:19; 26:1).

# Lesson 1

1 Samuel 1:1-2:11

## Samuel's Early Years

### Introductory Notes

The book of 1 Samuel opens with the background story about Samuel's family in Israel. This account begins in a stormy period of Israel's history when judges and priests led the people of God (with limited success) to worship the Lord and keep his commands (see Deut. 5:28-33; Josh. 24:24). In those days, as always, God was the true leader of his people, but the people often rejected God and turned to live their own way—and because of sin, that always led toward destruction.

The Bible reveals a pattern that repeated dismally throughout this period (see Judg. 2:10-19):

- Israel would reject God and worship other gods.
- God would eventually punish Israel's sinfulness by giving them over to enemy nations, who would plunder and oppress them.
- When the people cried out to God and repented of their sins, God would raise up a deliverer (a judge) to help them defeat their enemies in the name of the Lord and lead them in peace for a while.
- "When the judge died, the people [would return] to ways even more corrupt than those of their ancestors" (Judg. 2:19).

The people became stuck in this downward spiral for nearly 300 years before the time of Samuel. As the closing line of the book of Judges says, characterizing the whole period, "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit" (Judg. 21:25).

But, of course, some people remained faithful, because God worked faithfully in and through them.

With these things in mind, let's see what the Bible teaches about God and his people in the book of 1 Samuel.

As you begin this study with your group, it will be important to recognize that you don't need to discuss every verse or its meaning in detail. But you can cover the main themes and content of 1 Samuel. If you have additional questions or a desire for learning that goes beyond the scope of this study, you may want to consult a *TNIV* or *NIV Study*

*Bible*, a Bible handbook, or other resources like the ones listed at the end of this booklet.

In addition, point out the map, glossary, and description on how to study—available in each study guide. Note that the lessons in this study will serve mainly as a starting point for growth and learning. Invite your group members also to pray with you during the course of this study, asking God to use it to help you all grow to know the Lord and yourselves in new ways.

## Optional Share Question

*Note:* The optional share question in each lesson may serve well at the beginning of your session or at some other time during your discussion. Use or adapt each share question in a way that works best for your group.

**How do you react when you face heartbreaking struggles? Whom do you lean on?**

### 1. *1 Samuel 1:1-18*

a. *Describe the situation Hannah had to deal with in her family.*

Hannah was unable to bear a child, despite her desire to have children. Her husband Elkanah's other wife, Peninnah, had children, and that made Hannah's barrenness more difficult. To make matters worse, Peninnah would provoke Hannah to irritate her, often making her weep and lose her appetite. Hannah continued to worship God, but she remained childless year after year.

b. *How does Hannah remain faithful despite hardship and questioning?*

Despite her difficulty with remaining childless, Hannah continued to worship God (1 Sam. 1:7). She also endured the suffering provoked by her rival, Peninnah (1:6-7). During one of the family's yearly visits to the house of the Lord at Shiloh, Hannah prayed to God "in her deep anguish" (1:10), and she made a vow that if God would give her a son, she would give him into the Lord's service (1:11). It appears that Hannah also tried to remain pure in contrast to being wicked (rebellious toward God) or bitter (1:16), and she kept trying to bear a child (1:19).

- **In Hannah's prayer, what does it mean that she asks God to "remember" her?**

The *TNIV Study Bible* offers a helpful explanation here: "To remember is more than simply to recall that Hannah existed. It is to go

into action on her behalf” (see also 1:19). For some other uses of this term, see Genesis 8:1 and Exodus 2:24.

- **What would be the significance of not cutting the child’s hair?**

Hannah’s description of dedicating this child to the Lord and never cutting his hair is a reference to the ancient Nazirite vow explained in Numbers 6 for the people of Israel. A man or woman could volunteer to take this solemn vow, but it was also sometimes imposed on a child before birth, indicating that the child’s life would be dedicated to God. If you have time, invite your group to compare Hannah’s prayer in 1 Samuel 1:11 with Judges 13:2-5 (about Samson) and Luke 1:11-17 (about John the Baptist).

c. *Do you think Hannah is trying to strike a bargain with God? Why or why not?*

Though people sometimes try to bargain with God—and it may seem that the Lord goes along with such attempts—that doesn’t mean God is into dealmaking. God is God, so he can respond to his children’s requests as he pleases, as they align with his righteous will (see John 15:16; 1 John 5:14-15).

Hannah probably knows there is no way she can bargain with God, but in her misery and grief she vows to dedicate her child to the Lord if he will give her a son. Considering that she understands the seriousness of the Nazirite vow, we can assume she is not disrespecting God or trying to manipulate him.

For an example that sounds even more like bargaining with God, see Genesis 28:20-22.

d. *In these verses, which persons act as potential obstacles to Hannah’s faith? How do they challenge Hannah’s faith?*

Reflect with your group on various people’s actions in this story and consider how each affected Hannah:

*Peninnah*—The name *Peninnah* can be translated as “precious stone,” “coral,” or “pearl.” Peninnah had several sons and daughters (1 Sam. 1:2, 4) but is described as a “rival” who provoked Hannah “in order to irritate her” (1:6). This spiteful behavior continued “year after year” and resulted in Hannah weeping and refusing to eat (1:7-8). In other words, Peninnah’s harsh actions caused Hannah to withdraw from what should have been the joyful celebration of the feast and worship of the Lord at Shiloh. Peninnah may have treated Hannah this way out of envy for the special treatment Hannah received from their husband, Elkanah (1:5).



*Elkanah*—The *New Bible Commentary* states that “polygamy was tolerated under the law of Moses (Deut. 21:15-17), but it was not the original divine intention (cf. Matt. 19:3-8) and could cause great misery.” We see an example of such misery in Elkanah’s household, and this is similar to the misery and conflict in the household of Jacob, who loved one of his wives but not the other (Gen. 29-30). Elkanah’s special treatment of Hannah also violated the law written in Deuteronomy 21:15-17, which states that the double portion reserved for a father’s heir should go to his firstborn son, whether or not the father loves (or favors) that son’s mother. Elkanah, however, gave the double portion to Hannah rather than to Peninnah’s first son. Though Peninnah’s behavior was not excusable, we can understand that she would be upset by this unfair and illegal treatment by Elkanah. In line with the summation of Judges 21:25, Elkanah was doing “as [he] saw fit,” acting as if he was above the law. If you have time, reflect together on ways we might do that today:

- **In what ways do we bring trouble into our own lives and relationships by acting as if we are above the law?**

*Eli*—Though Hannah prayed sincerely to the Lord, Eli mistakenly accused her of being drunk (1:14). Considering the grief of her situation, this was a harsh blow. Hannah, however, responded with grace (1:15), and Eli withdrew his rebuke by offering her a blessing (1:17). Hannah again spoke graciously and left with an uplifted heart; her appetite returned, and she was no longer despondent (1:18).

e. *In what situations have you poured out your soul to the Lord and prayed out of anguish and grief? In what ways has God answered such prayers?*

- **When you have been in the midst of grief, what responses from others have been most helpful to you?**

Perhaps someone in your group is dealing with the frustrations of trying to conceive a child and not seeing the results they hope for. Or maybe another type of struggle has affected one or more members of your group. Reflect and share experiences briefly, if people feel comfortable doing so. If it seems fitting, take a few moments to pray together for God’s comfort, peace, and blessing in these situations.

## 2. *1 Samuel 1:19-2:11*

a. *What is Hannah's response when God gives her a son?*

Hannah dedicates God's gift back to God (1 Sam. 1:21-28). This is what we should do with every gift and blessing God gives us. Every good gift is from God (James 1:17) and is to be devoted to the glory of God.

Hannah acknowledged that God was the one who answered her prayer and gave her a child (1:20, 27). Hannah also worshiped God (1:24-2:10).

- **In what ways can we dedicate the gifts we receive, including children, to the Lord who has given them?**

Concerning the tender age of Samuel when Hannah brought him to Eli, it may help to know that in that culture, a child could nurse till age three before being weaned. Women involved in the tabernacle service (see 2:22) may have helped care for him after his arrival. Because Samuel was dedicated at such an early age, the house of God would have been the only home he remembered.

b. *How does Elkanah react to Hannah's plan?*

Discuss the role of Elkanah in the process of presenting Samuel to the Lord (see 1:21-23; 2:11).

Note also that Hannah and Elkanah later had three more sons and two daughters together (2:21).

c. *Reflect on Hannah's prayer (1 Sam. 2:1-10). What does it say about God?*

d. *What does this prayer reveal about Hannah's faith in God?*

- **How does Hannah's prayer lift up the attributes of God?**

Note together how Hannah describes various qualities about God's character.

- **How might we use this prayer to express the thoughts of our hearts?**
- **How does this prayer encourage us as it portrays God's wisdom and power?**

- e. *Do you know of other stories in Scripture in which God gives a child to a couple struggling with infertility? What does that tell us about God's power and timing?*

If you have time, invite your group also to reflect on some or all of these other miraculous births in the story of God's people:

*Sarah*—Abraham's wife, Sarah, was unable to have a child till she became pregnant at the age of ninety and then gave birth to Isaac, the child of promise (see Gen. 17-18; 21). God had promised Abraham and Sarah that their descendants would be as many as the stars in the sky (Gen. 15:5; 22:17). Abraham believed, and the Lord "credited it to him as righteousness" (Gen. 15:6). God eventually fulfilled that promise in the twelve tribes of Israel, descended from Abraham—and even more so in Jesus Christ, the Savior, who descended from Abraham through the Israelite tribe of Judah. As the apostle Paul teaches, "all who believe" in Christ as Savior and Lord are also "Abraham's offspring" through faith (Rom. 4:9-25).

*Rebekah*—According to Genesis 25:21, "Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was childless. The LORD answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant." Esau and Jacob were born, and the genealogy of Jesus continued (see Matt. 1:1-17).

*Rachel*—Like all who have struggled with infertility, Rachel longed to build a family with Jacob. Her sister, Leah, who became Jacob's wife through their father's trickery (but whom Jacob did not love), had already given birth to four sons (Gen. 29:31-30:2). God later enabled Rachel to conceive and bear two sons, Joseph and Benjamin, and she died giving birth to Benjamin (Gen. 30:22-24; 35:16-20).

*Samson's mother*—Manoah's wife is described in Judges 13:2 as being "unable to give birth." The angel of the Lord, however, announced that she would bear a son who was to be a Nazirite. She gave birth to Samson, whom God blessed with great strength to lead his people. Though Samson was often disobedient, God worked through him to preserve his people during a perilous time in their history (Judg. 13-16).

*Elizabeth*—Zechariah and Elizabeth were both "well advanced in years" when an angel of the Lord told Zechariah that Elizabeth, who was "not able to conceive," would have a son (Luke 1:7, 13). The child was to be named John, and his life was dedicated to the Lord in a way like Samson's and Samuel's (Luke 1:14-17; see also Mal. 4:5-6). Through this gift of a son, God used John the Baptist to prepare the way for Jesus.

In each of these cases God revealed his power to bring about a miraculous birth and a child who would bring joy and blessing to God's kingdom. These examples remind us that God hears prayer and acts according to his perfect will. And each example points to the fulfillment

of God's promises in Jesus. These situations also remind us to be sensitive to people who long to bear children and who continue to hope and pray for this gift.

***Questions for Reflection***

*What have these first chapters of 1 Samuel taught us about God? About God's people?*

*In what ways does Hannah's story encourage us to trust in the Lord? How can you share that encouragement with others?*

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