



# The Heights Baptist Church

1 SAMUEL SESSION ONE: THE BIRTH OF SAMUEL 1 SAMUEL 1:1-28 NO DATE

## MAIN POINT

Humble prayer fosters dependence on God and submission to His will.

## INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**Finish the following sentence: “The longest and hardest I’ve ever prayed for something was . . .”**

**When you pray long and hard for something, what is your gut reaction: to wonder whether God actually heard you, that His timing is perfect, that He must have another plan, that you’re doing something wrong, or something else? Explain.**

**If you could ask God any question about prayer, what would it be?**

Hannah was an Israelite who lived during the time of the judges. She was married to a devout man who loved her and provided for her. Yet, she struggled with a sense of incompleteness in her life because of infertility. In 1 Samuel 1, we find this woman whose humility and sense of desperation led her to a life-changing encounter with the Lord in prayer.

## UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 SAMUEL 1:1-19.

Hannah found herself in a desperate situation: she was childless (1:2). In those days, a woman's primary role in life was bearing children for her husband. Infertility equaled failure in other people's eyes. As if infertility weren't bad enough, Hannah was also taunted by her husband's other wife Peninnah (vv. 4-7). (It's important to note that polygamy was never God's plan for marriage but had become culturally acceptable in Old Testament times.) Hannah's despair over the entire situation led her soul to become bitter, or "deeply hurt" (v. 10).

**How does the list of Elkanah's ancestry (v. 1) underscore Hannah's plight? Why is a child so dear to her?**

**What responses did Hannah's childlessness evoke in her? In Elkanah? In Peninnah?**

**How do you tend to respond to God when He seems to say no to your prayers?**

Instead of camping in her bitterness and blaming God, Hannah voiced an honest, vulnerable prayer to Him (v. 11). She pleaded with God to give her a son and, in return, she would give him back to God for His service. Without even the promise of becoming pregnant, Hannah dedicated her life and her child's life to God. Her prayers acknowledged that if she were to have a child, it would be in God's control. Hannah wanted a child not for her needs, but for God's glory. Hannah recognized that God was the giver of life, and despite her apparent lack of ability to conceive, He could give her a child if He so willed it. Hannah's prayer illustrates how her hopelessness brought her to acknowledge the power and control of God.

**Read verse 11 again. What stands out to you about the details of Hannah's prayer? What do we learn about her character in this verse?**

Hannah's prayer in verse 11 reveals the depth of her character. As she prayed, she captured some of God's attributes, including His greatness and sovereignty. Then she asked God to look upon her sorrow. Finally, she told God that she wasn't asking for a child to benefit her, but for ministry in the temple as a Nazarite (lay priest). She offered her not-yet-conceived child to God for His purposes in the world. Hannah asked for a child not for the benefits it would bring her, but for God's kingdom. As we'll see in the next set of verses, God chose to answer her prayer, and she became the mother of Samuel, the last judge and first prophet in Israel. Samuel bore the responsibility of anointing David as king, and he is listed among the greats of the faith in Hebrews 11:32.

**Hannah asked God to look upon her sorrow, and He did. What does it mean to you that the Creator of the universe cares about you enough to answer your prayers?**

**What avenues do we sometimes take instead of taking our heartbreak and desperation to the Lord? Why turn to God first?**

As a result of Hannah's honest prayer (v. 11), the encouragement of Eli (v. 17), and her total surrender to God (v. 18), her sorrow and hopelessness became joy and contentment. She didn't have the guarantee that God would answer her prayer, but she hoped in Him anyway. Through our desperate situations, God is teaching us to be utterly dependent on Him, to have hope in the fulfillment of His promises, and to build testimonies of His mercy and love to encourage others who go through similar situations.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 SAMUEL 1:20-28.

God blessed Hannah with a son "after some time." Hannah specifically asked God for a son, and she even dedicated him to God before the prayer was answered. This displayed the confidence Hannah had in God's ability to work a miracle in her life, which is what gave her hope. But as Hannah shows us, confidence in God doesn't mean we're free from the emotions involved in struggle. It does mean, however, that we can live in hope and anticipation of how God will work in us. After Samuel was weaned, Hannah brought him back to Eli the priest to fulfill her promise to God. He was probably around 3 years old at that time. Faithfulness and obedience to God meant Hannah had to give back to Him what she wanted most—her child.

**What can you learn from Hannah's example in these verses? How did Hannah view the things God gave her? Is this the same view you have? Why or why not?**

**Why do you think so many of us "forget" about God once He answers our prayers? What does this tendency reveal about us?**

Hannah's confidence in God not only gave her hope in her desperate situation, but also created in her a desire to sacrifice to God. Her prayer was answered, and she gave the answer to her prayer back to God.

**What things or people in your life are most indispensable to you? Can you give them back to God as Hannah did? What would that require of you?**

# APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**What is the most reassuring part of this story for you? What encouragement can you find in this text for your present circumstances?**

**In what situation do you need to boldly ask the Lord for your heart's desire, then wait for Him to respond according to His perfect will and timing?**

**What do you find most difficult about letting go and relying on God through prayer?**

**Why do difficult times make us aware of our need for God? Share about a time when you've seen this awareness in your life.**

# PRAYER

Thank God for the ways He blesses you even when your circumstances are not what you want them to be. Confess your tendency to fail to trust Him fully. Ask Him to increase your faith, so that you might entrust your whole life to His will.

# COMMENTARY

## | 1 SAMUEL 1:1-28

1:1-3. Israel entered Canaan under the capable leadership of Joshua. At Joshua's death the coastal plain of Canaan had not yet been conquered (Josh. 13:2-6). Before Israel could occupy this region, the Philistines invaded and captured it. The Philistines and Israelites battled for supremacy in Canaan. Unfortunately the Philistines enjoyed numerous military advantages. Foremost was the superiority of their military technology. Hence as the Book of 1 Samuel opens, the shadow of the Philistine menace hangs over Israel.

Furthermore, numerous other enemies, such as the Amalekites, also threatened God's covenant people. To defend against these recurring threats, Israel relied on the emergence of charismatic leaders known as judges. An organized government did not exist. The era was a time of economic and political instability for God's people.

1:4-5. Every year Elkanah took his family to worship at Shiloh. Although Solomon did not build the temple at Jerusalem until many years later, a place for worshipping God was

earlier established at Shiloh. Eli served as the priest at this sanctuary and was assisted by his sons, Hophni and Phinehas. Although the inspired biblical writer did not identify the exact nature of Elkanah's sacrifice, some Bible commentators suggest it was a communion sacrifice or a fellowship offering. With such offerings, the worshipers would eat part of the animal offered in sacrifice. Elkanah would give portions of the meat to his family members. Because of his love for Hannah, Elkanah gave her a double portion.

1:6-7. Although Hannah already was distressed by her inability to bear children, her rival kept provoking her. The derision continued year after year. Hannah was so upset by Peninnah's taunts that she cried and lost her appetite.

Although Hannah was deeply troubled by her rival's prolonged ridicule of her, she did not lose her faith in God. She endured hardship and prayed for God to help her in her situation. She regularly went with the others in the family to worship at Shiloh. Hannah persevered in the midst of trying circumstances.

1:8. Elkanah attempted to console Hannah, suggesting to her that he was better to her than "ten sons." The reference to "ten sons" suggests the ten sons born to Jacob during Rachel's period of barrenness (see Gen. 29:31–30:22). The patriarchal allusion also suggests a parallel between Jacob's love for Rachel and Elkanah's for Hannah.

1:9. When Hannah left the family celebration, Eli was sitting on a chair—a sign of authority—at the doorposts of the sanctuary. Though too old to participate in the active leadership of the worship center (see Num. 8:23-26), Eli was still able to sit at the entrance to the "holy place," much as elders would sit at the city gate in ancient Israel (Deut. 21:19; Josh. 20:4; Ruth 4:2). This position may have permitted him to act simultaneously as a judge (see 1 Sam. 4:18 and Deut. 16:18) and a protector of worship.

According to the text, Eli's exact location was at the "doorpost of Yahweh's Holy Place." This phrase suggests that the Shiloh worship center was a structure of some architectural permanence (see also Judg. 18:31). Other Scriptures suggest that a tent was a central part of the worship site there (Josh. 18:1 and Ps. 78:60). Perhaps the earlier tabernacle set up at Shiloh in Joshua's day had been supplemented by a building during the days of the judges; alternatively, a smaller ceremonial tent may have housed the ark within the holy of holies.

1:10. Hannah wept and prayed to the Lord "in bitterness of soul," a phrase used elsewhere to characterize the psychological pain experienced by one who has been deprived of a child through death (see Ruth 1:13; 2 Kings. 4:27; Zech. 12:10) or who is experiencing great

personal physical suffering (see Job 3:20 and Isa. 38:15). Relief from this sort of pain is never pictured in the Hebrew Bible as coming from a human being; in each case divine intervention was the only remedy. Wisely, Hannah also went to the Lord for help.

1:11. Hannah's prayer was specifically addressed to the omnipotent deliverer of those in distress, "the Lord Almighty." Her pain had made her a theologian—no character in Scripture prior to Hannah had ever used this term to address the Lord. In her prayer she implicitly recognized that the Lord alone is the giver of life. She also understood that the proper position of a believer in relation to the Lord is that of absolute subjection; three times she referred to herself as "your servant," a term used elsewhere to describe a female household slave. Furthermore, she recognized that a relationship with the Lord involves giving, not just taking. She made a vow—an act without parallel for women elsewhere in Hebrew narrative but conditionally permissible for a married woman (see Num. 30:6-8)—to "give [him] to the Lord for all the days of his life."

1:12-18. Eli misread Hannah's anguish as drunkenness and scolded her for her apparent disregard of the holy place. Hannah immediately clarified the situation with Eli. The depth of Hannah's anguish and resentment over her situation had come to the surface.

1:19. The tender words the Lord remembered her remind the reader that ultimately it is God who brings new life within the womb. In the Old Testament, to "remember" means not simply to think about someone but to act on their behalf.

1:21-23. The passage stresses Elkanah's exemplary piety. He faithfully led his family to participate in annual Torah-prescribed pilgrimage festivals and voluntarily made vows and then fulfilled them (Deut. 23:21). Although the Torah explicitly gave him the right to nullify Hannah's vow regarding Samuel's service in the Shiloh sanctuary, he chose instead to confirm her vow to the Lord, even though it meant losing the firstborn son from his beloved wife's womb. This latter act places him in a category with Abraham, who gave over his son Isaac (Gen. 22). Though Elkanah and the remainder of the family made their annual pilgrimage to Shiloh, Hannah chose to remain at Ramah to care for the infant Samuel. She maintained this practice each year until the boy was weaned, perhaps a total of three years.

Hannah indicated that when the child appeared (literally) "before the face of Yahweh," he would "live there always" (v. 22). The phrase "appear before the face of Yahweh" is found elsewhere only in the Torah (Exod. 34:24) and refers there to annual sacrifice pilgrimage or solemn assembly meetings. Thus Hannah apparently was saying, "When he finally does

go on the annual pilgrimage, he will never return home; he will stay at the pilgrimage site as long as he lives.”

Perhaps the most prominent catchphrase in the story of Samuel is “before the Lord.” Samuel was to live “before the Lord” always, and this he actually did (see 7:6; 10:19; 11:15). This presents a stark contrast with the life of Saul, who was “before the Lord” only during his anointing by Samuel. At the same time, this phrase strengthens the comparison of Samuel with Moses, of whom it was said that he spoke “face to face” with the Lord (Exod. 33:11). The “word” Elkanah prayerfully asked the Lord to “make good” (v. 23) cannot be discerned from the text; perhaps it was an otherwise unknown divine promise made to Elkanah and Hannah when they made their vows.

1:24-28. In this passage Hannah is shown actively fulfilling her preconception promise to the Lord. Though the entire family was involved in the journey to bring Samuel to Shiloh, only Hannah was the subject of the key verbs in the passage: she “took” (v. 24) Samuel and a generous offering with her and “brought” him to the sanctuary complex; finally, she “said” the words that committed Samuel to Eli’s care. Significantly, however, Hannah was not the subject of the verbs describing the sacrificial event accompanying Samuel’s entrance into permanent service. Undoubtedly this is because females were not permitted to perform these actions.



# The Heights Baptist Church

1 SAMUEL SESSION TWO: HANNAH'S SONG 1 SAMUEL 2:1-11 NO DATE

## MAIN POINT

Humble prayer prompts thanksgiving to the Lord for his blessing and exalts him for his great works.

## INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**What has brought you the most joy in the past few years? The most grief?  
What brought relief from your grief?**

**When things go wrong, to whom do you immediately turn? What is your  
initial attitude? What kind of attitude does a person need to have to really  
depend on God in prayer?**

Last week we learned that Hannah was desperate for God to intervene in her life and give her a son. Though distraught, she was humble and knew that God was her only answer. This is true for us as well—not only when we are desperate for help, but also when the circumstances of life are not what we want them to be. True dependence on God in prayer manifests itself both in desperate pleas for help and in joyful thankfulness for revealed blessings. When God answered Hannah's prayer, she did not carry on as usual; rather, her humility demonstrated itself again—this time in thankfulness and exaltation.

## UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 SAMUEL 2:1-11.

**What do you think of Hannah’s prayer here? What thoughts or emotions come to mind?**

This prayer of Hannah’s is not just a prayer; it is also a poem and quite possibly was a song as well. The time and care she took to compose this demonstrates Hannah’s deep devotion to the Lord and her gratitude toward Him for answering her prayers.

**What form do your prayers usually take (i.e. silent conversations with God in my head and heart, out loud conversations with God, written expressions to God)? How does the thought of writing a poem or song of prayer to God strike you—completely natural or out of your comfort zone? Why?**

**What might be a situation that would prompt you to compose a poem or song of prayer to God? Have you ever experienced a time like that in your life?**

Hannah was inspired by the Holy Spirit to sing a song of praise to God for who He is and for what He had done for her. The key idea in her prayer song is that God had shown that He is a righteous Judge. He had brought down the proud (Peninnah) and exalted the humble (Hannah). The song contains a celebration of God’s salvation (vv. 1-2), a warning to the proud of God’s justice (vv. 3-7), an affirmation of God’s faithful care for His people (vv. 8-9), and a petition for God to judge the world and to prosper His anointed king (v. 10). Hannah’s prayer song revealed her confidence in God’s sovereignty and her thankfulness for everything He had done.

**What attributes of God did Hannah specifically highlight in her prayer? Why do you think naming these attributes of God was important to Hannah in the midst of her situation?**

**In what ways might Hannah’s experience have led her to acknowledge God’s holiness (v. 2)?**

**Why is it important to offer thanks before God when we recognize that He has answered our prayers?**

Hannah’s song of praise begins with her personal testimony from her experience with the Lord. Moving from the first person singular pronoun (“I” and “my”) in verse 1 to the plural pronoun (“our”) in verse 2 indicates that she understood herself as a member of the Lord’s covenant community beginning with her own family. That each of the first three lines in verse 2 in Hebrew begins with “There is none” emphasizes Hannah’s belief that the Lord is beyond comparison and must be held dear and sovereign in the believer’s heart

and life. The Lord's holiness, superiority, and stability set Him apart and give Him preeminence. A comparison of Hannah's song to Mary's song (Luke 1:46-55) shows Mary's knowledge of Scripture and her understanding of God's sovereign grace and ultimate power. Hannah's declaration that "there is no rock like our God" is a common Old Testament epithet for God and reflects her confidence that God is faithful and can be relied on for His protection and strength.

**What trends do you notice in the role reversals described in verses 4-8? What has been your greatest role reversal? How did you respond?**

**What do you think Hannah's point is in verse 5?**

Hannah's prayer in this verse is a word of caution. She warns us that even if we have all that we need, like being full of food or having many sons, if we are not grateful to the Lord it will never be enough. "The woman with many sons pines away" because she does not know or understand the blessings of the Lord.

**Have you ever been in the place Hannah sings about, where you had all you wanted but you weren't full? Why does a lack of gratitude lead to emptiness? Describe a time when your ungratefulness led to you feeling empty.**

**How does the practice of prayer help you experience gratefulness in times when you are feeling unfulfilled or empty?**

This inspired song of thanksgiving contains Hannah's last recorded words, offering a picture of her life of faith and commitment to the sovereign Lord of Hosts. It challenges us to submit our lives anew to God as we now know Him through His Son, Jesus Christ the Lord. Hannah's son, Samuel, would be a model of godly character and obedience throughout his entire life, even in the face of uncertain times. Hannah undoubtedly laid the foundation of hope and devotion to God in the life of her son.

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**Finish the following sentence: My heart rejoices in the Lord because . . .**

**Now finish this sentence: There is no one like the Lord because . . .**

**How does Hannah's prayer here challenge you in your own prayer life? What about our prayer life as a group? How are we doing at showing gratitude to**

**God and exalting Him as we pray together? How can we do better?**

**What is something in your life or in our church that you've been praying for that the Lord so far has not done? How do we thank Him when the answer seems to be "no"?**

## PRAYER

Thank God that there is no one like Him, and no other Rock upon which you can stand in life. Thank Him for His great work of salvation in your life. Thank Him for always hearing your requests and answering your prayers as His children. Commit to be thankful and worship Him always, no matter what circumstances life brings.

## COMMENTARY

| 1 SAMUEL 2:1-11

This section, which contains Hannah's last recorded words and her longest quotation, provides a triumphant climax to the narrator's portrayal of the humble woman's faith. It is often considered to be a deliberate literary complement to 2 Samuel 22. Hannah's monologue is described as a prayer; it is cast as a poetic hymn or psalm of thanksgiving and is considered by many scholars to be among the earliest extant examples of Israelite poetry.

Hannah's prayerful song eloquently affirms core concepts of Israelite faith: the Lord is the great judge and overseer of human destinies and a rewarder of those who earnestly seek Him. He is the source of empowerment and victory for those who fear Him, but for all others He is the overpowering authority who dispenses fearful judgment. The prayer's emphasis on the Lord's exaltation of those devalued by others serves not only as a testimony of God's action in Hannah's own life, it also foreshadows the Lord's ways in the lives of Samuel, David, and the nation of Israel. It also foreshadows what the Lord would do in judgment against the house of Eli.

2:1-2. Hannah's prayer begins on an exuberant and highly personal note, employing four first-person references that express unbridled delight in the Lord. Even as Peninnah had taunted Hannah, so now Hannah "boasts" over her enemies because of the Lord's "deliverance." The object of Hannah's delight is neither herself—that she has overcome the disgrace of barrenness—nor her son; instead it is the Lord, who is the source of both her son and her happy circumstance. Borrowing images and confessions from the Torah,

Hannah affirms the Lord's supreme holiness and uniqueness (see Exod. 15:11) and calls him the "Rock" (see Deut. 32:4, 15, 18, 30, 31).

2:3-5. In her prayer, which apparently was uttered in a public forum where others could give consideration to her words, Hannah admonished all who would foolishly brag about or exalt themselves. Over them stands the Lord, who is aware of their thoughts and constantly evaluating their "deeds." When warranted, the Lord will act as the great reverser of fortunes in matters of military force, food, and fertility. He can bring low and He can exalt. Mighty soldiers can be rendered defenseless, while the weak may perform valiantly; those who once had a surplus may be reduced to destitute servitude, while the hungry may cease to be so. Most relevantly for Hannah, a barren woman may, with the Lord's help, bear "seven children"—a number suggestive of completeness—while others who once had large families may end life bereft and mournful.

2:6-10. This section, which is linguistically marked as the most important component of the prayer, contains an extended list of contrastive actions the Lord performs in His dealings with humans. The Lord's actions can be extremely positive. Yet the Lord does not perform these actions indiscriminately. As judge of "the ends of the earth" (v. 10), He brings the worst against "those who oppose" Him (v. 10), while bestowing protection, strength, and exaltation "His faithful ones" (v. 9) and "His king"/"His anointed" (v. 10).

Much scholarly discussion has centered around Hannah's use of the terms "king" and "anointed" in her prayer. Many scholars judge these words to be anachronistic, since Israel obviously had no king at the time. However, it is possible that the words are (1) allusions to the office of kingship mentioned in the Torah (see Deut. 17:15), (2) references to local Israelite rulers (see Judg. 9:6), (3) prophetic of the Davidic dynasty (see Gen. 49:10-12), or (4) references to an anticipated, eschatological figure. The close parallels between Hannah's prayer and Mary's song (Luke 1:46-55) suggest that the first-century Christian community considered the entire passage, and especially the phrases "His king" and "His anointed," to be prophetic references to Jesus Christ and His ministry.

2:11. Elkanah and his family returned home. But this time they were missing one important person. Samuel remained at Shiloh to live before the Lord. Hannah gave Samuel to minister "before the Lord," and this is what he did for the rest of his life (see 1 Sam. 2:18,21; 7:6; 10:19; 11:15; 12:3,7; 15:33).



# The Heights Baptist Church

1 SAMUEL SESSION THREE: ELI'S SONS 1 SAMUEL 2:12-26 NO DATE

## MAIN POINT

God wants us to make sacrifices and use the gifts He has given us for His glory and the sake of other people.

## INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**If you could have a superpower at work, what would you choose? At home?**

**What are some real-world characteristics of everyday heroes?**

**Who is someone in your life who you'd say has been an everyday hero to you? Explain.**

It's fun to think about things like superhuman strength, the ability to fly, and teleportation. But as we've seen in virtually every superhero movie, special powers can easily be misused for evil instead of for good. Today, we're going to examine a Scripture passage that illustrates this truth. God had given Eli's sons the special power or gift of serving His people as priests. Instead of using their gifts and sacrificing for the sake of other people, they misused the powers they'd been given and squandered the opportunity to honor the Lord through serving others.

## UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 SAMUEL 2:12-21.

**What roles and responsibilities were Eli's sons entrusted with (see also Lev. 7:22-36)? How were the sons abusing their positions?**

Verses 12-17 of chapter 2 tell us that Hophni and Phinehas were "scoundrels." They "had no regard for the Lord." This disregard for the Lord can be seen in the way Hophni and Phinehas took advantage of their liturgical office for personal gain. They were abusing their priestly office and "treating the Lord's offering with contempt." Leviticus 10:1-11 records the seriousness with which the Lord takes priestly misconduct. A holy God would not allow this to go on without punishment.

**Compare the description of Eli's sons with the description of Samuel. For help, look at a few other Bible translations.**

**Is it fair to expect Eli's sons to be godly men? Explain.**

**What responsibility, if any, do you believe we have to one another in the raising of godly children? Explain.**

The NLT describes Eli's sons this way: "scoundrels who had no respect for the Lord or for their duties as priests." At the very same time, God was raising up Samuel. In their duties as priests, Eli's sons—Hophni and Phineas—took more than they gave. They were stealing from the sacrifices of others. They should have been sacrificing themselves, but they were not. But Samuel did give sacrificially. God was raising up an everyday hero.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 SAMUEL 2:22-26.

These verses show us that the violation of God's sacred trust by Hophni and Phinehas did not stop with liturgical sins. The brothers added moral sins to their catalog of priestly misconduct. Eli's sons were sleeping with the women who served at the entrance to the tabernacle. It is difficult to say who these women were. They may have been volunteers doing menial chores (Ex. 38:8) or cultic prostitutes like those found at pagan shrines (see Hos. 4:14). If they were cultic prostitutes, then Hophni and Phinehas were guilty of filling the land with "depravity" (Lev. 19:29).

**What are some reasons to explain why, under Eli's leadership, Samuel grew up to serve the Lord honorably while Hophni and Phineas (Eli's sons) were so dishonorable?**

**Why do you think Eli didn't do anything to his sons? How do we see laziness in this interaction?**

**As a father and the high priest, Eli was doubly responsible for how his sons were acting. What does laziness toward our God-given responsibilities communicate to God?**

Eli tried to confront his sons and reason with them, but with little effort. Unfortunately, Hophni and Phinehas would not listen to their father. Since they committed capital offenses (Lev. 7:25; 22:9), they could only expect the death penalty to be brought against them. The divine judgment against Hophni and Phinehas was the direct result of their decision to reject God. They had hardened their hearts against God and rejected the pleas of their father. They persisted in sins that were abominable to the Lord. This means that their disregard for God was so complete that God's judgment was inevitable.

**When you think about your life, what are some of the God-given responsibilities you have? What things has God trusted you with, and what does He expect you to do with these things? What are some indicators that you might be demonstrating laziness toward those responsibilities?**

Any of us may fail. The good news is that God is willing to forgive us when we are sincere and repentant (1 John 1:9). What we do for God and how we do it matters. Like Samuel, we are to grow in stature and in favor with the Lord by serving Him faithfully, respectfully, and reverently. If we fail in the sacred trust God has given to us, He will find faithful servants to carry out His will.

**Agree or disagree: For the health of the church and sake of the gospel, we need everyday heroes at home. Explain your answer.**

**Why is it sometimes harder to use your gifts and make sacrifices for the sake of others at home than in other places?**

The ultimate goal is for our kids to become independently dependent. We need to maintain enough authority to hold them accountable and maintain enough influence to speak into their lives for the purpose of removing them from our authority and allowing them to yield themselves to Christ's authority.

**Is it enough to simply have our kids at church? Is that being a parental hero? Explain.**

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**Would you say you are using the gifts God has given you in the way He intends for you to? Why or why not?**

**How does knowing you were chosen by God to be a part of this body of believers affect the way you view the church and your involvement in it? How does it affect the way you view your work?**

**Is there a way you should be demonstrating and communicating sacrifice at home that you're not currently doing? What changes need to take place for you to serve your family members in a way that better honors the Lord?**

## PRAYER

Thank Jesus for His ultimate sacrifice on your behalf, being the Hero you needed to save you from your sin. Ask Him to show you ways you can sacrifice at work and home this week to use the gifts He has given you to meet needs and point people to Him.

## COMMENTARY

| 1 SAMUEL 2:12-26

2:12. This verse consists of two complementary evaluative comments: Eli's sons were "worthless" (lit., "sons of Belial"); they "did not know" the Lord. The words cast an ominous pall over the passage and prepare the reader for the sequence of disasters that unfold in chap. 4. The verbless clause in v. 12—literally, "the sons of Eli, the sons of Belial"—serves as a sort of double entendre: besides indicating the perverse character of Eli's sons, the construction has the effect of equating Eli with Belial. Indeed, Eli was a Belial because he failed to give due respect to God and therefore threatened the sanctity of the Lord's name in the community of faith.

Hophni, Phinehas, and Samuel were skillfully portrayed by the writer as being similar in the sense that at the beginning of the story none of them knew the Lord (cf. 2:12; 3:7). Yet at the same time, differences and contrasts were also being established. While Hophni and Phinehas were despising the Lord, Samuel was serving Him.

2:13-14. The priestly practices customary at Shiloh in matters of sacrifice are unlike those mentioned anywhere else in the Old Testament and clearly differ from those prescribed in

the Torah (cf. Lev 10:14-15; Num 18:18). The writer described the strange traditions of the Shiloh priests in detail to clarify the need to destroy the Elide line and remove the central Israelite worship site from Shiloh.

2:15-17. These verses focus on the climactic flaw in the priestly practices at Shiloh: Hophni and Phinehas were taking the priestly share of the fellowship offerings “before the fat was burned”—that is, before the Lord had been given His portion (cf. Lev 3:3-5; 7:30).

Furthermore, the priests were consuming fat from the sacrificial animals, an act explicitly prohibited in the Torah (cf. Lev 7:22-26). In addition, they used the threat of violence to get their way. This blasphemous expression of self-interest and disregard for the law was a sin that “was very great in the sight of the LORD” (v. 17; cf. Lev 7:25). Even the laypersons, who acceded to the wrongful demands placed on them, were more pious than the priests and their servants in that they tried to get the priests to give the Lord His portion first.

Samuel’s precocious childhood, one marked inwardly by his unique relationship with the Lord and outwardly by his priestly attire and his presence at Shiloh, contrasted sharply with that of Hophni and Phinehas. The final portrait of Elkanah’s family, which is also presented in this section, contrasted just as vividly with the destiny of Eli’s family. Elkanah’s family was depicted in acts of exemplary piety; Eli’s family will be depicted in acts of disgusting sacrilege. Elkanah’s family received a blessing and fruitful multiplication; Eli’s would receive a curse and desolation. The family portraits are studies in Torah blessings and curses (cf. Lev 26; Deut 28).

2:22-25. Eli’s first recorded rebuke of his sons’ misconduct came when he was “very old.” The writer may be implying that Eli neglected his parental responsibilities earlier in life (cf. Deut 6:7; 21:18-21). Eli reprimanded them because he “kept hearing all that his sons were doing to all Israel.” To the previously reported offenses (cf. vv. 12–17) a new charge was added—they were having sexual relations with “the women who were serving at the entrance to the tent of meeting.” Perhaps these women were Nazarites involved in volunteer service at the worship site (cf. Num 6:2; Exod 38:8); alternatively they may have been cultic prostitutes. However, they were being treated as though they were pagan shrine prostitutes (cf. Hos 4:14).

Eli the judge used the imagery of a legal dispute in warning his sons. In a case pitting two people against each other, God could work either through His revealed law or through circumstances to exonerate the person charged with wrongdoing. However, if a person were pitted against the Lord in court, the human could expect only condemnation.

Hophni and Phinehas, having committed capital offenses (cf. Lev 7:25; 22:9), could expect the Lord to bring the death penalty upon them.

The phrase “it was the will of the LORD” (v. 25) also can be translated “the LORD was pleased.” Although it would be misleading to say that the Lord takes pleasure in killing people (cf. Ezek 18:32; 33:11; 2 Pet 3:9), it is certainly true that He delights in bringing justice to the world order. Justice is a central trait in God’s character (cf. Exod 34:7; 2 Chr 12:6), and the implementation of divine justice always brings satisfaction.

2:26. The phrase “grew in stature and in favor with the Lord and with men” is strikingly similar to the description of Jesus as a child (Lk 2:52).



# The Heights Baptist Church

1 SAMUEL SESSION FOUR: THE LORD CALLS SAMUEL 1 SAMUEL 3:1-21; 4:1A NO DATE

## MAIN POINT

Obedience to God is not as complicated as we tend to make it. In the end, we need to listen to God and do what He says.

## INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**When you spend time with God, do you spend more time talking or listening?  
Why?**

**What things in our lives distract us from hearing the voice of God?**

We live in a noisy culture. Whether it's the TV, our cell phones, music in the background, or even billboards on the side of the road, we are constantly being bombarded with voices. Most of those voices are telling us to do something. If we want to listen to God and do what He says, we must first put ourselves in the right surroundings.

## UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 SAMUEL 3:1-9.

As a young Levite, Samuel served the Lord as an apprentice under Eli's guidance. His mother, Hannah, was barren and had prayed for a son, promising God that she would give him back to God for ministry (see 1 Sam. 1:10-11). God answered Hannah's prayer, and she kept her promise. Samuel joined Eli the priest in the ministry of the temple.

According to Jewish tradition, Samuel was 12 years old when his temple work began, which we read about in 1 Samuel 3:1.

**What do we learn about the spiritual climate of Samuel's day in verse 1?**

**Why do you think the Lord called to Samuel the boy instead of Eli the priest?**

Verse 1 tells us that "the word of the Lord was rare and prophetic visions were not widespread." At that time, prophets were the primary way God spoke to His people. The absence of genuine prophetic preaching describes the poor spiritual climate in this period (see Judg. 10:6). People refused to conform to God's standards. Negligent people were not prepared to hear from a holy God. But God called Samuel to be His prophet.

**Why didn't Samuel recognize God's voice? Why are Christians today often unable to tell if God is speaking to them?**

While resting near the ark, Samuel heard the Lord call to him. The boy had never heard the voice of God before, and he mistook it for Eli's and rushed to help the aging priest. God took the initiative here, as He always does. Samuel's prophetic ministry came in response to God's selecting and recruiting him for this task; Samuel did not choose this vocation based on personal preference. However, he did not recognize God's voice. Instead, he assumed he heard Eli and responded to the priest.

The Lord uses many ways today to call His people to new opportunities of service. Sometimes He confronts them with a need. Sometimes God may give an individual a deep passion for a ministry or a burden for something. When God acts unexpectedly in people's lives, He often calls them to serve in a particular way; but they may not grasp it immediately. As people seek clarity, the Holy Spirit will guide them to God's specific will.

**What do Samuel's actions in these verses reveal about his alertness to hearing from God? How did Samuel's surroundings help him hear from God? If you decided to absolutely commit yourself to hearing from God on a daily basis, what distractions would you need to limit or eliminate?**

The main reason we don't hear the voice of God is not because He's not speaking; it's because we're not listening. But putting ourselves in the right surroundings to listen isn't just about time and place; it's about our relationships. One of the reasons we do life together, investing in each other, is so that we can help each other hear and recognize the voice of God. Once we hear the voice of God, that voice requires a response of surrender.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 SAMUEL 3:10-11.

**Verse 10 is the pivotal verse of this passage. What did Eli tell Samuel to do, and how does this help us understand what we must do if we want to hear from God?**

**How does Samuel's response to the voice of God indicate his surrender to the will of God?**

Having grasped that the Lord had spoken to Samuel, Eli gave specific directions for responding should God speak again. First he instructed Samuel to return to his normal activity. If he heard the voice again, he was immediately to enter into conversation with God. Eli specified what Samuel should say. Each part of the reply would convey definite purposes. "Speak" would invite God to continue His revelation. "Lord" indicated Samuel knew to whom he was speaking. "For your servant is listening" would affirm his willingness to obey God completely. Samuel followed Eli's instructions precisely. When God spoke, Samuel submitted to Him. Without waiting to learn what God wanted, he committed himself to obedience and service.

**When you pray, is it usually with an attitude of "Speak Lord, your servant listens," or "Listen Lord, for your servant speaks"? What is the difference between these two approaches to prayer?**

While Samuel previously had opened the doors to the sanctuary and thus opened up the way to the worship of God, he would do a similar task in his role as a prophet. Samuel would open up doors to God's truth by declaring God's word to the people. His first assignment as a prophet concerned the dreadful message Eli had received previously (2:27-36).

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 SAMUEL 3:12-4:1A.

**What, in your own words, did God tell Samuel to do?**

**Why was God angry at Eli? How had Eli previously responded when God spoke to Him (v. 13)? Compare that with how Eli responded when God spoke through Samuel.**

Samuel had been afraid to tell Eli what God had revealed to him. When Eli insisted on a full account, Samuel told the priest all the Lord said. Eli then made the appropriate response

to divine revelation. He accepted the new prophet's message without protest.

**Why do you think God often chooses to speak to us through community?  
What benefits have you experienced being a part of a community where  
God's truth is taught and shared?**

God has created us to live in community with others, and one of the benefits of that community is the ability to speak His truth into each other's lives. We often hear from God best when people who we know and love affirm things He is teaching us, point out sin in our lives, or challenge and encourage us to take next steps in our faith journeys.

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**What's your next step today to make sure you are putting yourself in the right surroundings to hear the voice of God?**

**Is there something you have been hearing from God and not doing? How can this group help you in that?**

## PRAYER

Before you speak in prayer, spend at least a minute in silence just listening to the Lord. Pray that your group would put themselves in a position to continue to hear God's voice and then do what He says.

## COMMENTARY

| 1 SAMUEL 3:1-4:1

3:1-3. Samuel, as a youthful Levite, was providing service to the Lord under Eli's tutelage. In the days of Eli, prophetic revelations in the form of visions and divine words had been "rare" (v. 1; lit., "precious"), a circumstance that can be linked to divine displeasure (see 14:37; 28:6) and helps explain why society was so degenerate at that time (see Prov. 29:18; Amos 8:11). Background details provided here are laden with symbolism relevant to the events that follow; Eli's eyes—and by extension his spiritual insight—were "so weak that he could barely see" (v. 2). The mention of "the lamp of God" (v. 3) still burning in the midst of Shiloh's darkness provided not only a temporal setting—the predawn hours (see Ex.

27:21)—but also a symbol of Samuel's presence in that spiritually benighted worship center. Samuel lying down in the Lord's temple, "where the ark of God was," positions the youth not only spatially but also spiritually; he was of all Israelites closest to the Lord's throne (see 4:4; Num. 7:89).

3:4-14. While Samuel was fulfilling the Torah obligations to tend the lamp of God (see Lev. 24:3; Num. 18:23), the Lord called the youth and delivered a message of judgment to him. In a form paralleling Abraham, Jacob, and Moses' obedient responses to divine calls (Gen. 22:1, 11; 31:11; Ex. 3:4), Samuel responded, "Here I am" (v. 4). Because he did not initially know the Lord, however, Samuel at first went to Eli for further instructions (vv. 5-6, 8). Eli twice turned Samuel away (vv. 5-6), perhaps because Eli essentially was blind to the possibility of the Lord's revealing Himself in a personal manner. Eventually, however, the elderly priest came to understand that the Lord was calling the youth and advised him to respond submissively.

On the climactic fourth approach to Samuel, the Lord called the boy's name twice and also "stood." The repetition of the personal name is reminiscent of the divine call to Abraham at Mount Moriah (see Gen. 22:1,11) and the one to Moses at the burning bush (see Ex. 3:4). The similarity suggests that this moment was as important in Samuel's life and for all Israel as the parallel moments were in the lives of the earlier heroes of the faith. Samuel obediently identified himself as the Lord's "servant" (v. 10; 1:11) and urged the Lord to speak.

The Lord's terrifying revelation was in fact a confirmatory repetition of the judgment against the house of Eli given by the unnamed prophet (2:30-36). Though prophetic messages could be conditional—warnings of possible consequences resulting from continued disobedience (see Jonah 3:4)—in the case of the words spoken against the house of Eli they were certain. Every promised outcome—"from beginning to end" (v. 12)—would become reality. And Eli, as the family patriarch, would bear the brunt of the blame because "he knew about" (v. 13) his sons' "contemptible" sins but "failed to restrain them" (Deut. 21:18-21). Eli's conscious failure to enforce divine law in his own family amounted to a high-handed (i.e., deliberate) sin; as such it could "never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering" (v. 14; see Num. 15:30-31). Furthermore, the magnitude and form of God's judgment would be so shocking that it would cause "the ears of everyone who hears it to tingle"—that is, to give rise to great fear and dismay (see 2 Kings 21:12; Jer. 19:3).

3:15-18. With the coming of morning, Samuel “opened the doors of the house of the Lord.” The description of a dawn marked by the prophet’s reopening the way into the Lord’s presence is an obvious double entendre: on the one hand, Samuel was merely performing his daily duty as a temple servant; on the other hand, he was ushering in a new era of spiritual consciousness in Israel.

But Samuel did not enter into his role as the Lord’s spokesman without hesitation (v. 15). Eli’s fatherly reassurances and stern admonition provided the encouragement the lad needed to perform his duty. The interaction between Eli and Samuel in verses 17-18 conveys an idealized model of prophetic activity in society: the addressee encourages the prophet to speak the full revelation, the prophet does so, and the addressee accepts it willingly. In these verses both the seriousness of the prophetic responsibility and a model of its proper discharge are presented. Samuel’s alert, expectant reception of the divine message (v. 10b) and his full disclosure of the Lord’s revelation (vv. 17-18a) in spite of personal misgivings (v. 15) are the proper responses of a prophet to a revelatory divine visitation.

3:19. The power of God’s call on Samuel’s life is shown in the faithfulness of God’s presence with his ministry. God did not leave Samuel alone to fulfill his calling by himself. Samuel did not need to get by on his wits or good looks.

Verse 19 says two important things. First, as Samuel grew up, God was with him. It also states that God let none of his words fall to the ground. What exactly does this mean?

Obviously, the phrase refers to Samuel’s prophetic ministry. Whatever Samuel proclaimed as a word from the Lord came to pass. But don’t get the idea that this suggests Samuel could predict anything he wanted to and God was obligated to make it happen. The sentence really means that Samuel learned the first lesson of his call very well. That is, Samuel learned to say, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening” (v. 9).

Samuel did not use his call for fame or personal gain (cp. 1 Sam. 12:3-4). He did not try to twist God’s commands to suit himself or his friends. He listened and spoke as God spoke to him. He had the courage to be faithful to the message of God, no matter what. And because he did, God blessed his ministry and confirmed his prophecies. Samuel’s words were trustworthy because they were the Lord’s words (Bergen, 88).

3:20-21. Since Samuel was faithful to listen to the Lord and obey him, his reputation as a prophet spread throughout the land. Like Moses before him (Num. 12:7), Samuel was now considered a prophet of the Lord in all Israel. The fame of hearing the word of Lord

(Amos 8:11) was over. No longer was the word rare or uncommon. The Lord continued to reveal himself to Samuel at Shiloh. Samuel had truly learned to say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."

4:1 The Philistines migrated to the Judean coastline during the twelfth century b.c. and began threatening Israel during the days of the judges (chaps. 13-16). The Israelites camped at Ebenezer about 20 miles west of Shiloh, while the Philistines camped at Aphek across the plain to the west. Israel's enemies had pushed far north from their home along Israel's southern coastline and now threatened the central territory.



# The Heights Baptist Church

1 SAMUEL SESSION FIVE: REPENT, RESCUE, REMEMBER 1 SAMUEL 7:3-17 NO DATE

## MAIN POINT

God wants us to remember that He hears our repentant cry for help and has come to our rescue.

## INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**Look up the lyrics to or listen to the song, "Come Thou Fount." What lyrics do you relate to the most? Why?**

**Would you say that you are "prone to wander"? Why? Is that simply a statement of fact for all people or is there something that can be done so that we do not wander from the Lord?**

**The original hymn by Robert Robinson (1758) includes the lyric, "Here I raise my Ebenezer, hither by Thy help I've come." Considering the context of the song, what do you think that means?**

In 1 Samuel 4-7, we find that Israel had, indeed, wandered from the Lord. They took the ark of the covenant into battle as if it were a good luck charm of sorts. In that battle, the Philistines defeated Israel and took the ark of the covenant. This news was so distressing that upon hearing it, Eli fell backwards in his chair, broke his neck, and died (4:18).

Still, after losing the ark of the covenant, Israel was not repentant. It took 20 years before they were ready to ask Samuel to lead them in a full return to the Lord. It is at this point in Israel's history that today's lesson begins.

## UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 SAMUEL 7:3-6.

Genuine, heartfelt repentance seemed to have arrived at last; however, Samuel knew Israel couldn't just give lip service. They needed to demonstrate their decision to return to the Lord.

**What "if . . . then" statement did Samuel give in verse 3? What specifically did Samuel indicate Israel's repentance would entail?**

**If the people had put away their idols, then why did Samuel also lead them to pray and fast (vv. 5-6)?**

God would rescue His people when they turned to Him, and turning to Him required true repentance. This involved a verbal confession of sins in prayer, an outward act of physically removing idols, and an inner turning from pride to humility before the Lord through fasting. Fasting acknowledged the seriousness of their sin and their sincere and desperate desire to be cleansed from it.

**Is it possible for a person to truly turn to the Lord and not fully repent? Explain.**

**How might this idea of half-hearted relationship with God help us understand why it took Israel 20 years to get to this point?**

There is a marked difference between generally knowing who God is and truly believing Him for who He is and applying those truths to daily living. Israel had a storied history with God and knew full well who He was; however, they allowed their decisions to be directed by earthly circumstances and human feelings instead. They knew God, but their hearts were far from God. It wasn't until they confessed their infidelity to the Lord (7:6), put away their idols (7:4), came together in humble repentance (7:5), and fasted (7:6) that they truly returned to the Lord in faith.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 SAMUEL 7:7-11.

**In light of verses 3-6, does verse 7 surprise you? Do you think Israel was surprised to find out that upon returning to the Lord they still had difficulties to face?**

**Read 1 Samuel 4:3-4. How did Israel respond differently in 1 Samuel 7:8 to the difficult battle they faced? Why?**

**What was the result of Israel's turning to the Lord for help in humble repentance?**

Israel's previous defeat and shame of the previous 20 years turned to joyful victory. This was not accomplished in and of themselves, nor was it accomplished by the worship of a holy artifact. God alone is worthy of our worship, and when we turn to Him in full faith, He is ready and fully able to generously rescue us in a way that is above and beyond what we could even ask or imagine.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 SAMUEL 7:12-17.

**Ebenezer means "stone of help." Recall the lyrics in "Come Thou Fount." How does the context of verse 12 aid in your understanding of the hymn lyric, "Here I raise my Ebenezer, hither by Thy help I've come"?**

**Why do you think Samuel said "Thus far"? What was he wanting Israel to know about their present and their future?**

**Why did Samuel feel it necessary to set up a stone to commemorate this moment in Israel's history? Why is it important to remember how God has rescued us in the past? What are some ways He has done that for all of us, and what are some ways we can always remember and praise Him for it?**

Samuel wanted God's people to always remember God's intervention on their behalf when they humbled themselves and turned to Him in repentance and belief. They had been unfaithful and did not deserve for God to rescue them, but He heard their honest cry and intervened. This was no slim margin of victory; God fully rescued them from their enemies and gave them peace in the land.

God has rescued us above and beyond what we can ask or imagine, too, through His Son Jesus Christ's death and resurrection. That rescue has impact for today. It impacts our inner thoughts, the words we articulate, and our outward behaviors. God wants us to remember that He hears our repentant cry for help and has come to our rescue. His rescue doesn't mean we won't do battle in this world, but in our battles we can turn to God in faith and obedience, recognizing that we are truly helpless apart from His saving grace.

# APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**Today's passage can be outlined this way: repent (vv. 3-6), rescue (vv. 7-11), and remember (vv. 12-17). Which of those three words stands out to you the most personally in your own relationship with the Lord? Explain.**

**Oftentimes, we move on to whatever is next all too quickly. What is something God has done in your life lately for which you need to take some time to remember and praise Him? Outside of confessing that need to this group, what would that look like?**

**As Israel had done with the ark of the covenant, what might be some good things we, as a group and as a church, might be tempted to turn to or idolize in place of the Lord Himself? How can we guard against it?**

# PRAYER

Praise God for rescuing you from death and giving you eternal life through the blood sacrifice of Jesus. Confess your tendency to ignore or forget His past work on your behalf and to rely on other things besides simple faith and reliance on Him.

# COMMENTARY

| 1 SAMUEL 7:2-17

7:2-6. Twenty years passed while the ark remained at Kiriath Jearim. But the people were not silent. Instead of mourning over "the heavy blow the Lord had dealt them" (6:19), they now lamented after the Lord (7:2). Samuel arrived back on the scene. He had been absent since the time that Israel had gone out to fight the Philistines at Ebenezer (4:1b). What takes place in this chapter is in direct contrast to the first debacle at Ebenezer. Samuel led Israel to follow the proper steps in seeking God's help. The difference is clear, and the result was dramatic.

In order for God to help them against the Philistines, Samuel called Israel to a holy repentance before God (7:3). The language used here is similar to that of Jacob (Gen. 35:2-4) and Joshua (Josh. 24:14-15). Several factors are involved in true repentance.

Israel's repentance must be genuine. They must return to God with all their hearts. It must also be tangible. The people of God must rid themselves of the foreign gods in their homes and in their hearts. Since these gods were often represented in idol form, this must be a concrete action, physically removing and destroying the idol. In this they were to follow the first commandment (Exod. 20:3).

Their repentance would also be difficult because it would fly in the face of the surrounding culture. Samuel clearly stated that the Ashtoreths must also be forsaken. Ashtoreth was the name of the goddess known in Canaan as Ashtar or Astarte, the consort of Baal. Canaanite religion was essentially a fertility cult. Sexual rites were part of its worship.

From the time of Joshua's death and onward, Israel was tempted to believe that the Baals and the Ashtoreths were responsible for the growth of their crops (Judg. 2:13). Only "establishing" their hearts (commit yourselves) to the Lord and serving him would help Israel stand against such temptation. The people of Israel responded positively to Samuel's call for repentance by putting away their idols and worshiping only the Lord (7:4).

Israel completed the first step (repentance) in seeking God's will. They were ready for the next step, so Samuel called a solemn assembly at Mizpah (7:5). This town was located about five miles north of Jerusalem on the main north-south road through the central highlands. The solemn assembly included prayer, fasting, and confession of sin.

Israel also performed a water libation before the Lord (7:6). This is the only time Israel did so in a religious convocation, and its significance must not be overlooked (cp. Jonah 3:7; 2 Sam. 23:16).

Now for the first time in the book, Samuel is identified as a "judge" or leader of Israel (7:6b). His ministry was accepted here at Mizpah. He would follow in the footsteps of the best of the judges before him, and he would lead Israel to the one from whose seed the Messiah would come.

7:7-11. While Samuel and Israel were busy seeking the Lord, the Philistines caught wind of the assembly at Mizpah and decided to attack. Instead of trying to manipulate God with the ark, this time Israel turned to intercession. They pleaded with Samuel to continue to cry out to the Lord for them (7:8).

Quickly Samuel offered a blood sacrifice, a suckling lamb as a whole burnt offering to the Lord (7:9). While he was doing so, the Lord heard his cry on behalf of repentant Israel and

answered him. The Lord thundered with loud thunder against the Philistines (7:10). They were thrown into such a panic that the Israelites routed them and pursued them all the way to a point below Beth Car (7:11). The location of Beth Car is not known, but what is certain is that God gave the Israelites a mighty victory that day. Without the ark at hand, God turned the shame of the defeat of chapter 4 into the rejoicing of triumph.

In the wake of Israel's rout of the Philistines, Samuel set up a stone monument, a new religious symbol. Samuel named it Ebenezer and explained its significance: Thus far has the Lord helped us (7:12). The Ebenezer mentioned here is regarded by many as a different place than the site mentioned in 4:1.

By doing this Samuel sought to keep the memory of God's deliverance current in Israel's mind. He wanted Israel to remember the past and be thankful for God's help. Remembering God's help in the past also encourages hope for the future, and hope sustains faith. The Philistines were subdued, and throughout Samuel's lifetime the hand of the Lord was against them (7:13). The towns captured by the Philistines were restored to Israel. The Philistines ceased to be a dominant power in the area, and there was peace (7:14).

7:15-17. These verses summarize Samuel's career as a judge. The Hebrew verb "judge" (shapat) occurs in each verse. Samuel continued to judge Israel all the days of his life. He became a circuit rider, annually going from Bethel to Gilgal to Mizpah and back to Ramah (7:16). Since Samuel built an altar at Ramah, it is most likely that Shiloh had been destroyed by the Philistines.



# The Heights Baptist Church

1 SAMUEL SESSION SIX: ISRAEL DEMANDS A KING 1 SAMUEL 8:1-21 NO DATE

## MAIN POINT

Only God is worthy of being looked to as the Ruler of His people and of His creation.

## INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**When in your life have you wanted something, only to be disappointed once you finally got it (i.e. a certain job, the latest piece of technology, or a particular type of car). What led to your disappointment?**

**What do our desires to have what isn't ours teach us about our hearts?**

God had called His people to be unique among the peoples of the earth. While nations had kings that ruled over them, God's people did not need an earthly king (Lev. 20:26). God Himself ruled over them and led them. However, God's people looked at the nations around them, envied their kings, and demanded to have one for themselves. They wanted a human ruler so they could be like other nations.

While most of the judges led the nation in battle, Samuel's ministry as a judge demonstrated what Israel truly needed: righteousness, repentance, and a return to the Lord. The Lord God could be all the King that His people ever needed. Unfortunately, the Israelites were blind to such a vision. God warned His people of the troubles that would come from putting their hopes in earthly kings, but they did not relent. God gave the people over to their own selfish desires, and the results were disastrous. Of the kings that ruled over Israel, few honored the Lord with their leadership.

## UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 SAMUEL 8:1-9.

**Who were the judges (see Deut. 16:18-20)? What function did the judges serve in the life of the people of Israel?**

**First Samuel 8:1-3 describes the poor leadership of Samuel's sons during their time as judges. What insight do these verses give us into the struggles the Israelites faced under the judges?**

**Now read verses 4-5 and 19-20. What reasons did Israel's elders give in their request for a king? What was their real reason, according to verse 7?**

**How did Samuel respond to the elders? What is the key difference between Samuel's response to the elders and the elders' response to their situation?**

**What was wrong with Israel's desire to have a king?**

The judges were leaders in the tribes of Israel who were given the task of judging the people of Israel with equity and righteousness. These leaders were to have exemplary character and pursue justice in the land that God had promised them. At the point we pick up this story, Samuel, who was a righteous judge, handed over leadership to his sons. After their appointment, his sons did not model his leadership and the people of Israel grumbled for a king like the other nations around them. Israel wanted what everyone else had. In wanting what the nations had, they exposed the sin in their hearts. God's people were to be different and separate from all the nations of the earth. While nations had kings, God alone was Creator and ruler over Israel. The people of Israel rejected God as their King and demanded another. God would answer their request.

**Describe a time when you rejected God's rule because you thought you knew best. What happened as a result, and what finally opened your eyes to the problem?**

**What are some ways we continue to reject God's plans in favor of a life that looks more like the world around us?**

A fundamental principle of God's Word is that God, and God alone, was Israel's King (Ex. 15:18; Ps. 10:16; 24:10; 93:1). The people of Israel rejected their true leader for a leader they could see, who they foolishly believed would secure their borders and lead to their national prosperity. What they did not realize is that any real security and prosperity they had ultimately came from God. When God made Israel, He desired for them to live with Him forever, yet the people rejected God's rule.

Any time we choose our way over God's, we embrace a life that is less than God's best for us. In wanting what everyone else had, the people of Israel missed what made them unique. Our need to rebel against God and pursue our own way shows us the deep need each of us have to have our hearts, desires, and wills redeemed. Our desire for a king can only be fulfilled by the One True King.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 SAMUEL 8:10-22.

**What warnings did Samuel give the people of Israel about the king they sought?**

**Why were the people willing to ignore these warnings?**

**Why does God seem to "give in" to their request? What does this teach us about Him?**

**When are you inclined to do something just to be "like everyone else"? What does that desire communicate to God?**

God listens to His people, and in this case, He gave them over to the sinful desires of their heart. When the people demanded a king, it was a rejection of all that God had called them to be. As in the past, the people of Israel were more interested in what they wanted in the moment than the place that God was leading them.

Before the gospel can be "good news" to us, there has to be bad news. Reaffirming the truth of Psalm 14, Paul wrote that "no one is righteous" and there is "no one who seeks God." He said that "all have turned away" (Rom. 3:10-12). The gospel teaches us that we are more sinful than we ever dared imagine. All people are alike in their rejection of God. Yet in His grace, God used the people's sinful desire to have a king to point them to the perfect and true coming king through His servant David—Jesus the Messiah.

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**What does your desire for more teach you about your attitude toward God?**

**How can you learn to be content with what God has given you?**

**All people are either pursuing the kingdom of God or the kingdom of this world. Which have you been living for? What needs to change?**

**The people of Israel gathered together and demanded a king. The church has been called together to remember and praise the true and rightful king. As we live together as followers of Christ, what are some ways we can express our appreciation for King Jesus?**

**How does living under the lordship of Jesus change the way you relate to the world around you on a daily basis?**

## PRAYER

Praise God for the coming kingdom and the coming King. Pray that He would give you a desire for this King and His kingdom in your heart, that you would live every day eagerly awaiting the joy that is to come when He comes and brings the kingdom to us in its fullness.

## COMMENTARY

### | 1 SAMUEL 8:1-21

8:1-5. What was Samuel thinking? Had he forgotten the moral failure of Hophni and Phinehas? (2:12-17). Did he not remember the sorrow of Eli and the judgment of God against Eli's house? (2:27-36). In appointing his own sons as judges, perhaps Samuel did not believe that they would turn aside for dishonest gain.

Judges were to be appointed for each tribe and town (Deut. 16:18-20). But judges were to be fair and impartial. They were to "pursue justice" (Deut. 16:20). Samuel's sons were appointed to serve in Beersheba in the Negev. But Joel and Abijah did not walk in Samuel's ways. They perverted justice by accepting bribes (8:3). But to Samuel's credit they turned aside only after they were appointed. Their immoral behavior was certainly a departure from God's will, and it was bound to create problems. It could not be ignored.

Complaints must have reached the ears of the elders, and perhaps the elders did not want to cause a scene with Samuel. But they needed to do something. The last time the elders of Israel are mentioned as a group occurs in Deuteronomy 31:28. But now they gathered together in some type of ruling council or official delegation to address the problem. The people would not tolerate another series of failed judgeships.

The elders, however, chose to correct a wrong with another wrong. There was no praying and seeking of the Lord's face. There were no solemn assemblies—no crying out to God.

The elders simply demanded that Samuel appoint a king to lead the nation, such as all the other nations have (8:5).

First and foremost in the request was the desire for uncorrupt judges. The Hebrew infinitive translated “to lead” in the NIV is literally “to judge.” They wanted a king to administrate the legal system. Perhaps the elders felt that a king would hold local judges more accountable. A second concern was certainly political (8:20). The elders wanted a political monarch who would defeat oppressive enemies. They wanted a king just like the surrounding nations.

Everybody else was doing it. Why shouldn't Israel jump on the political bandwagon and have a king? The trouble was that a fundamental teaching of the Torah was that Israel was to be distinct from all the other nations (Lev. 20:26; Num. 23:9). God, and God alone, was Israel's king (Exod. 15:18; Pss. 10:16; 24:10; 93:1; 95:3).

8:6-9. The request of the elders for a king displeased Samuel (8:6; lit. “was evil in the eyes of Samuel”). But Samuel wisely took the request to the Lord. The tendency today is to answer immediately, to “shoot from the hip.” Samuel knew, however, that wisdom came from God (Prov. 2:6; see also James 1:5; 3:17).

God's response to Samuel's prayer was direct and to the point (8:7-9). He directed Samuel to respond in three ways. First, God told Samuel to listen to the voice of the people (v. 7). The Hebrew verb “to listen” contains the idea of “heeding” or “obeying.” In an emphatic way, God wanted Samuel to know that Israel had not rejected him as judge, but they had rejected God as king.

God's response to Samuel in verse 8 shows that the motivation of the elders was wrong. The request was self-centered and carnal. They wanted a king like “all the other nations.” What was in operation here was a longstanding pattern of sinful rejection. Israel had continuously rejected God. From the day he rescued them out of Egypt until then, they had turned their backs on him and served other gods. Samuel was now getting a taste of what Israel had done for generations.

Secondly, God wanted Samuel to warn them solemnly (v. 9a); the Hebrew text says literally, “warning you shall warn them.” The rejection of God and his covenant involved serious consequences (Josh. 24:19-20). God wanted to remind them that covenantal promise of the land was conditional. Finally, God wanted them to know the actions and deeds of the king who would reign over them like the other nations (v. 9b).

8:10-18. Samuel did just what God asked and repeated all the words of the Lord to the people (8:10). This sober description tells the people what they could expect from a king. Four times the Hebrew text uses the verb “he will take” (vv. 11, 13, 14, 16).

Samuel’s description reveals that a king would establish a permanent bureaucratic institution based on two primary branches of government. First, the king would call up a permanent military. Israelites would be forced to serve in the royal honor guard (v. 11), in the cavalry (v. 11), in the officer corps (v. 12), in the production of weapons (v. 12), and in the production of the army’s food supply.

Second, Samuel noted that a king would need administrative support. From the ranks of the general population would come perfumers (v. 13), cooks and bakers (v. 13), and general laborers and draft animals (v. 16). In order to support all this, the king would need to appropriate the best fields and vineyards (v. 14). The “subjects” would have to pay a tenth of their grain, vintage, and flocks (vv. 15,17). In effect, the people would become the king’s slaves (v. 17). Through Samuel, God warned Israel that they would soon cry out for relief from the king they were demanding (v. 18). But on that day, the Lord would not answer them.

8:19-22. Despite the solemn warning of Samuel, the people still refused to listen (v. 19). They demanded a king! They wanted to follow the crowd, to be like all the other nations (v. 20). They wanted a human king to judge them and to lead them into battle.

Samuel repeated the words of the people before the Lord (v. 21). The Lord then agreed to give them a king (v. 22). In response, Samuel dismissed the elders and men to return to their towns. God would give them a king, but he would do it his way.



# The Heights Baptist Church

1 SAMUEL SESSION SEVEN: A RELUCTANT KING 1 SAMUEL 10:17-27 NO DATE

## MAIN POINT

God is our ultimate leader, and He gives us earthly leaders to help us follow Him.

## INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**Have you ever had a new opportunity to serve or lead and felt ill equipped or even afraid to do so? What happened?**

**Who is someone you admire as a leader? In what areas of life do you think you most need someone to lead you?**

As we saw in last week's lesson, God's people wanted a king to lead them. Though God warned them they did not need an earthly king but needed to trust Him—the One Eternal King—to continue to lead them, their hearts and minds were set. Even though it was sinful to ask God for an earthly king, God showed His love and grace by directing Samuel to anoint a king who would be given every help and opportunity to honor Him as Israel's leader.

## UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 SAMUEL 10:17-19.

Israel had demanded a king, and now God would give them one. Not coincidentally, Samuel directed the people to gather together at Mizpah, the site where they had previously renewed their covenant to God (7:5).

## **What did God want to remind the people before He chose a king for them?**

### **Why?**

Israel had never needed a king. God was their King! He had lovingly led them and provided for all their needs. He had miraculously brought them out of Egypt and delivered them from every nation that had threatened them on their way to Canaan. And He continued to lead and provide for them as enemies were still challenging their right to the Promised Land.

## **In your own words, what was God saying to the people in verse 19?**

Samuel made it clear the people had sinned by asking for a king at this point in their history. However, God would not force Himself on them. He would allow them to reject Him and suffer the consequences.

### **Why is God qualified to be our king?**

**Why do we reject Him as our king and look, instead, to earthly leaders to do for us what only God can do? How might this passage speak to us now?**

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 SAMUEL 10:20-24.

## **What might God have been wanting to communicate by announcing the identity of Israel's king by lot instead of through some form of a democratic process?**

God's guidance of the process of casting lots would verify to the people and again to Saul what He had already made clear—Saul was His choice for Israel's king.

### **Why were the people so excited when they found out that Saul was their new king?**

**Read the description of Jesus in Isaiah 53:2. Considering this, does it seem strange to you that in this instance, God chose someone who stood out physically among the people? Why might He have done this?**

**Based on verses 17-19, why might Saul have been hiding, reluctant to be recognized as Israel's first king?**

Saul did not become king because of personal ambition. In fact, he seemed to resist the call of God to serve Israel in this capacity. He was humble and embarrassed to be pulled into the limelight. This was a stark contrast to his physical appearance, which was

apparently so impressive that it instilled an expectation and confidence in the people they had been lacking. Though strange to consider, it is much like we act today. We often demonstrate that we long more for leadership from God's people we deem impressive than from God Himself.

**Do you think God still calls people today who don't bother to show up to answer that call? Explain.**

**How does the church suffer when we don't step into the unique gifts and calling God has placed on each of our lives?**

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 SAMUEL 10:25-27.

Samuel telling the people the rights and duties of the king was a reminder of his warning about the cost of having a king (8:11-18). This was a major turning point in Israel's history. Samuel wrote these rights of kingship on a scroll as a lasting testimony or covenant between the people and their king. Then he placed them in the tabernacle to demonstrate God's authority and oversight of the process. God would hold His people accountable for their decision.

**With what sort of mood or attitude do you imagine most of the people headed back home after hearing the duties of kingship?**

**How would you characterize Saul at the beginning of his reign as king? What sort of men had God placed around him (v. 26)?**

The Lord provided for Saul a godly army of men to help him as he began to rule Israel. Not everyone was a source of encouragement, however. There were some wicked men who did not approve of Saul as king, likely because of his timidity in accepting the position. Saul ignored their objections, though others would remember it (11:12).

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**How do we balance knowing that God does call us to follow the spiritual leaders He gives us with knowing that He alone is truly our King? What struggles, if any, are there for you in that?**

**How are we doing in this area as a whole? Do we depend too much on the leaders God has given us here to do the work we are each called to do? Generally speaking, are we eager or reluctant servants?**

**What are some tasks God has called each one of us to as servants in His kingdom? How can we encourage each other in that?**

## PRAYER

Thank God for His lovingkindness in continuing to lead you. Thank Him also for the people He has put in your life to help you follow Him. Ask Him to show you where you have been reluctant to step up and fulfill the calling He has placed on your life and to give you the wisdom and courage to step into that calling.

## COMMENTARY

| 1 SAMUEL 10:17-24

In time Samuel summoned the people of Israel to come before the Lord at Mizpah. In his introductory speech, Samuel reminded them that they had rejected the God who brought them out of the land of Egypt and delivered them from their enemies during the time of the judges (vv. 18-19). Israel had demanded a king, so now was the time to do so by presenting themselves before the Lord by their tribes and clans.

The exact process used in selecting the king is not revealed; although the Urim and Thummim may have been used to do so (Exod. 28:30). Samuel knew that the leaders who coveted the kingship would not be satisfied with his testimony alone. God would have to do the choosing. The only other individual identified by the use of a similar method was Achan, who stole from the Lord (Josh. 7:16-18).

We are not told what may have gone through Saul's mind as the public convocation began. The climax was the dramatic selection of a king. Out of all the tribes of Israel, Saul's tribe of Benjamin was chosen. Then, when the clans of Benjamin were brought forward, Saul's clan was chosen. Certainly the drama was intensified. Who among this clan would be chosen?

Finally, the lot fell on Saul, the son of Kish. But when they looked for him he was nowhere to be found (v. 21). Perhaps they couldn't believe that God would choose a man who hadn't even shown up. Further inquiry was sought from the Lord, and unbelievably, it

turned out that Saul was hiding among the baggage (v. 22). Saul's shyness may account for his actions. But it is also possible that his refusal to step forward may foreshadow his later lack of commitment to take up the responsibilities that fell upon a godly ruler. Samuel appears to deflect the shy behavior of Saul by pointing out his unusual height, and the people confirmed the choice (v. 24) by shouting, Long live the king!

10:25-27. Many scholars see the action listed in verse 25 as one of the crucial turning points in Israel's history. The narrative passes over the significant event with a mere statement of seven Hebrew words. We are simply told that Samuel declared the regulations of the kingship to the people. He first declared these to the people, and then he wrote them down in a scroll. The exact contents of the document are unknown. It possibly contained the stipulations for a king laid down by Moses in Deuteronomy 17:14-20. Samuel may have given a copy to Saul, but the original was deposited at the Mizpah sanctuary. The purpose of this Mizpah covenant was to distinguish Israel's kingship from that of the surrounding nations. It would remind Saul to fear the true King of Israel.

Having finished the convocation, Samuel dismissed the people. An unknown number of valiant men went with him (v. 26). God had touched the hearts of these men, and they were willing to make a difference.

God's chosen leaders are not without their detractors. Several troublemakers publicly objected to Saul's coronation. They refused to give Saul the customary tokens of goodwill. Saul responded with grace. He kept silent (v. 27). Further confirmation of his leadership would come in the days ahead.



## The Heights Baptist Church

1 SAMUEL SESSION EIGHT: SAMUEL'S FAREWELL SPEECH 1 SAMUEL 12:1-25 NO DATE

### MAIN POINT

God's character and power demand reverential fear.

### INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**What is a memorable farewell speech you have heard?**

**If you were preparing a farewell speech, what would you most want people to know?**

What at first appeared to be the public inauguration of Saul as king became Samuel's farewell address to the nation and includes his lengthiest speech. As one might expect, Samuel's last words to the people touched on what was most important. Samuel called on Israel to renew their covenant with God. Part of their responsibility in this covenant was to fear God.

### UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 SAMUEL 12:1-12.

This chapter marks one of Israel's most significant moments—the end of the loose confederation of judges and the beginning of the Israelite monarchy. From this point forward, the nation would be evaluated in terms of whether the king did good or evil in the eyes of the Lord (see 1 Kings 11:6; 15:26; 16:25; 2 Kings 8:18; 10:30).

**From verses 1-5, what did Samuel want the people to know about him? Why?**

Samuel established his credentials first by asking if anyone had cause to accuse him of having abused his power. If he had behaved in such a manner, he would have had no moral authority to rebuke them or to lay down God's requirements. Since no one could make such a charge, he told them to brace themselves for what he had to say.

**From verses 5-12, what did Samuel want the people to know about God? Why?**

**From verse 12, what did Samuel want his audience to know about themselves? Why?**

God had always saved Israel from their troubles. For hundreds of years God had proven that He could save Israel from any foe, as long as they put aside their idols and turned to Him for help. But now they were placing their hope in an earthly king.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 SAMUEL 12:12-18.

**What role did fear play in the demand for a king?**

**Identify the directives given in these verses. How does obeying these directives show trust in God?**

**How would having a king change the relationship between God and His people? How would it be different? How would it be the same? How do you see God at work in your life despite the times when you have failed to follow Him?**

Israel went from being a loose confederation with no central government to being a monarchy. Political and social life would be radically different. In another sense, nothing had changed. The terms that set the relationship between God and Israel were found in the Sinai Covenant (Ex. 19–24). Israel was to show devotion to God by keeping His commands and especially by shunning idols and other gods. Doing this, they would love God with all their hearts. And Israel was to respect the rights, persons, and property of others. Doing this, they would love their neighbors. If they did these things, God would keep them safe and well. When Israel adopted a monarchy, they would still be judged by these terms. They would be under God's protection as long as they kept the covenant and stayed away from idols. Both the king and the people had to keep the covenant, and in that sense, being under a monarchy would make no difference in regard to how they related to God.

**What was the purpose of the thunderstorm in verses 16-18? What aspects of nature best represent God's power and character? Explain. How do these aspects cause us to revere Him?**

When Samuel called down rain in the normally dry month of May, he was doing two things. First, he was demonstrating that the words he was about to speak truly came from God. Second, the rain at harvest time was a vivid metaphor. Storms in May implied that the harvest would be ruined; by analogy, Israel's request for a king would end badly. Samuel had warned the people that having a king would be economically ruinous for them. The king would seize their lands, their cattle, their servants, and even conscript their children (1 Sam. 8:11-18). Thus, their king would come down upon them and their fields like a storm out of season.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 SAMUEL 12:19-25.

**What was the Israelites' plea? What was Samuel's response?**

**How would you describe the difference between godly fear and sinful fear?**

No one denied what Israel had done was wrong, and there was no taking it back. However, God is forgiving and redeems our bad decisions. The Israelites would need to do two things. First, they should remain loyal to God and not turn away from following Him. Sometimes, our sin can so discourage us that we give up entirely. People abandon the faith not because they are angry at God but because they are convinced that their guilt is so terrible that they cannot possibly come back. They should resolve to continue to serve God and to do what is right even though their actions make them feel unworthy. Second, they should shun all idols. If the people would simply place their trust in God, He would continue to watch over them and sustain them, king or no king.

**Knowing Samuel was frustrated with the Israelites for demanding a king, consider Samuel's final remarks to the people of Israel. How did Samuel show grace to the Israelites?**

**Describe the balance between God's judgment and His grace. When can they complement each other? When do we see both working simultaneously?**

Even very big, very bad decisions do not mean that our relationship with God is forever ruined. To a great extent, it is not changed at all. God forgives, and the clearest picture of His heart of forgiveness is seen in the crucifixion of His Son, Jesus Christ. What God wants

both before and after our bad decisions is that we fear and serve Him, that we grow in faith and grace, and that we love one another.

The Israelites made a bad decision that changed their nation forever. Nevertheless, God's marching orders for them—that they keep the Sinai Covenant—remained the same. No matter what we have done, God's marching orders for us remain unchanged: that we should believe and obey the gospel of Jesus Christ.

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**Read again 1 Samuel 12:20. When has God helped you overcome something you greatly feared?**

**In your present circumstances, what relationship is there between fear and trust?**

**Regardless of your past sins, what are God's directives to you today? How can this group encourage you in that?**

## PRAYER

Thank God for His everlasting covenant with you made through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Confess your sinfulness. Ask Him to forgive you and empower you to have a healthy fear of Him, living a God-honoring life.

## COMMENTARY

| 1 SAMUEL 12:1-25

12:1-5. Speaking before all Israel gathered at Gilgal, Samuel started by confirming that he had done what the people had asked and set a king over them (12:1). This is no insignificant statement. Here Israel again stood at a crossroad of faith and must ultimately choose in which direction to go. The choice would have far-reaching consequences.

Three interpretive issues underscore the power of this chapter. First, three of Samuel's six longest discourses are recorded here, including his longest (205 words in Hebrew). Second, the poignancy of Samuel's urgency is heard in his use of the Hebrew particle

“now” in verses 2, 7, 13, and 16. Each use of “now” divides the chapter into its four major subsections. Finally, three literary devices are interwoven in the passage. What appears at first to be a farewell speech quickly moves into a prophetic oracle as Samuel issued stern warnings, called on heavenly portents, and challenged Israel to reject the sins of the past. At the same time, underneath the speech and prophetic oracle is a renewal ceremony emphasizing Israel’s accountability to the covenant.

In essence, Samuel’s actions show that covenant leadership must be held accountable on three levels. First, Samuel appealed to the Lord as a witness (12:5). Ultimately, he knew that as a covenant leader he was first and foremost accountable to the God of Israel. Servant leaders must remember that their ultimate accountability is to God (Ezek. 34:10; Matt. 12:36-37; Rom. 3:19; Heb. 9:27).

Samuel also appealed to the Lord’s anointed (12:5). In the immediate context, this meant Saul, the king, who was anointed to rule over Israel. Samuel the judge opened his ministry to Saul’s scrutiny. In the same way, servant leaders are also to be accountable to one another (James 5:16).

Finally, Samuel began his farewell speech by inviting the people to examine his public ministry (12:3). Samuel was in fact declaring that he was subject to the same ethical standards as the people. By this we learn that covenant leadership is also accountable to the people of God. Servant leaders are not above the people; the same standards by which the people are judged also apply to them.

12:6-12. In verse 6, Samuel reminded Israel that the Lord established Moses and Aaron as leaders to bring their forefathers up out of Egypt. As Samuel stood on trial before the people to give an account of his covenant faithfulness (12:1-5), so too it was time for Israel to stand and be confronted with the evidence of all the righteous acts performed by the Lord on their behalf (12:7). The trial motif of verse 3 is maintained, but this time the people are the defendants.

The threat of Nahash the Ammonite was no different than before (12:12). But this time, Israel lost faith in God’s divine pattern of deliverance. Instead of trusting the Lord to provide their salvation, Israel demanded a king like the nations around them. In effect, Israel broke the covenant by rejecting the Lord God as their true king.

12:13-15. Continuing his speech, Samuel turned and pointed to Saul and identified him as the king you have chosen, the one you asked for (12:13). Israel was not to think that the

covenant was done away with because God had given them a new type of leader. The king, too, was subject to the stipulations and requirements of the covenant.

The blessings and curses of the Sinai covenant are summarized by Samuel in the conditional sentences of verses 14-15. If Israel, and the new king, fear, serve, and obey the Lord—if they do not rebel against God’s commands—then Israel will continue to walk after the Lord (12:14). But if they do not obey the Lord, then God’s hand will be against them just as it was against their fathers (12:15). God intended for the covenant relationship to continue. Not only were the people to be held accountable to its stipulations, but so also was the new king.

12:16-25. Samuel again exhorted the assembled Israelites to stand still and consider the meaning of his speech (12:16). The Lord was about to do a great thing before their eyes. Samuel called upon God to bring thunder and rain upon the earth as a divine portent of his covenant-making power. The portent was designed not only to cause awe before the people, but also as a means of punishment for the sin of asking for a king (12:17-18).

This was no mere thunder and rain. It rarely rains in Israel during the wheat harvest. Thunder and rain at this time would have been a very unusual event. It would also have damaged the heads of the ripe grain, causing the harvest to be reduced. God had also spoken in thunder and lightning on Mount Sinai (Exod. 19:16).

The heavenly display produced a contrite confession of sin (12:19). Israel had wanted a king in order to trust in a human deliverer. Samuel consoled them, reminding them that for the sake of his great name, the Lord will not reject his people (12:22). Samuel encouraged the people to learn the way that is good and right (12:23). Israel would survive if they continued to fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all their heart (12:24). Samuel’s last words in the chapter offered an ominous and serious warning. Israel would still be held accountable to the covenant; but if they persisted in evil, Israel and the new king would be swept away (12:25).



# The Heights Baptist Church

1 SAMUEL SESSION NINE: SAUL'S FEAR AND IMPATIENCE 1 SAMUEL 13:1-15 NO DATE

## MAIN POINT

Fear is the enemy of faithfulness.

## INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**How do you typically handle your fears (i.e. give in to them, power through, pray, etc.)?**

**Fear can steal our good judgment. Fear can steal our dreams. Fear can rob you of relationships. In your experience, what else can fear steal?**

Saul was anointed by God to lead Israel as king. At first, Saul was reluctant (1 Sam. 10:22), but at his first test, God's Spirit came on him and he faithfully led Israel (1 Sam. 11). However, just two chapters later in 1 Samuel 13, we quickly see an opposite response as fear got in the way of Saul's faithfulness. His fear led to impatience, and his impatience led to disobedience and disaster.

In last week's session, we learned the importance of fearing the Lord (1 Sam. 12). In this week's session, we'll see what happens when we fear people or things more than we fear the Lord.

## UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 SAMUEL 13:1-7.

**How did Saul respond to Jonathan's victory over the Philistines (vv. 3-4)?**

**Why do you think Saul took credit for Jonathan's victory (v. 4)? Aside from the possibilities of wanting to rally the troops or instill confidence among the people, what other possibilities are there for Saul's response here?**

**Recall Saul's behavior when being named king in 1 Samuel 10:22. Which response do you think is probably a truer reflection of who Saul was—reluctant and insecure or eager and self-confident? Why?**

Saul summoned his army to meet at Gilgal—the very place where he had been crowned king of Israel. As news of the size and power of the Philistine army spread, so did Saul's grip on the Hebrew soldiers in his charge.

**Compare Saul and Jonathan's forces (v. 2) with that of the Philistine forces that had gathered at Michmash (v. 5). How did this imbalance affect the men in Saul's army (vv. 6-7)? What does the Israelites' response to this disparity in numbers tell you about them?**

Both Saul and the Israelites were unhealthily focused on themselves. While Saul was puffed up with pride, the Israelites were petrified with self-doubt as they “hid themselves in caves and in holes and in rocks and in tombs and in cisterns” (v. 6). Both Saul and the Israelites looked to themselves rather than to the Lord, who had blessed them and promised to fight for them.

**Who is someone you know who is faithful even in the face of fear? Why do you think that person responds to the circumstances of life that way?**

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 SAMUEL 13:8-15.

**What evidence is there in verse 8 that Saul and his men were placing their level of confidence or fear in circumstances?**

**How does this help explain why God would have allowed Samuel to show up later than expected?**

Samuel had told Saul to wait seven days at Gilgal, at which time he would come and give him instructions (10:8). But Saul and his troops were in trouble. The situation was so serious that Saul's troops began to desert him.

In his fear and impatience, Saul offered the burnt offering himself—a task Samuel should have done as high priest. This might have seemed like a good idea, but it was actually a

faithless violation of God's commands. Years later, King Uzziah also usurped priestly duties and received God's judgment (2 Chron. 26:16-21).

**It's clear from Saul's behavior on day eight that his faithfulness was based on an "If . . . then." If Samuel showed up in seven days, then Saul would follow the Lord's directions. Why is an attitude of "If . . . then" often a wrong response to fear?**

Throughout Scripture, we find the importance of waiting on the Lord. Our culture of instant gratification does not value patience. Because of this, we are often tempted to take matters into our own hands when things do not go our way. This is exactly what Saul did when faced with the prospect of going to war against a fierce army, and the results of his impatience were disastrous. Saul's example teaches us that impatience is rooted in prideful self-reliance, but patiently waiting on the Lord strengthens our faith.

**Where was Saul's focus when he went ahead with giving up burnt offerings and sacrifices on his own?**

**What did Saul's fear and rash decision say about his relationship with God? What do pride, impatience, and disobedience say about our relationship with the Lord?**

Saul's focus was not on the Lord, but on the present circumstances of his life. Instead of responding to the Israelite's desertion by patiently trusting the Lord, Saul fell prey to his own pride and offered sacrifices he was not authorized to make.

**How did God respond to Saul's impatience (vv. 13-14)? What does this tell us about God?**

**What does God's response to Saul's impatient actions tell us about the importance of addressing and combating the impatience in our hearts?**

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**Is there any place in your life where God is pushing you to obey Him? Are you willing to commit yourself to faithfully say "yes"?**

**What fears tend to rob you of the joy of saying "yes" to the Lord?**

## How would your life look differently this week if you were to fear disobedience more than any other thing?

### PRAYER

Thank God that He brings beautiful things out of desperate situations. Invite Him to show you where your fears get in the way of fullness in relationship to Him and to give you the courage to choose faithfulness.

### COMMENTARY

#### | 1 SAMUEL 13:1-15

13:1. Ancient manuscripts differ on exactly how many years Saul reigned. Based on a comparison of these manuscripts and Acts 13:21, where Paul gives the round number of 40 years, 42 years seems the most likely.

13:2. Israel's new king began to establish a standing military presence for his kingdom. In light of the army's larger size mentioned earlier (11:8), the 3,000 men from Israel may have represented an elite fighting force to protect the king and local interests. Michmash lay about four and one-half miles northeast of Gibeah of Benjamin, Saul's hometown and new capital. Bethel's hill country describes the rugged terrain around the ancient site of Jacob's dream (Gen 28:10-22). Jonathan was one of Saul's sons who would befriend David and become significant later in the narrative (18:1-3; 19:1-3; 20:1-42; 23:16-18).

13:3 The presence of a Philistine garrison... in Geba less than three miles from Gibeah posed a significant threat to Israel's heartland and to Saul's kingdom. News of their defeat at the hands of Jonathan quickly reached the coast, and Saul blew the ram's horn to alert Israel that a larger battle was certainly coming.

13:4. More troops joined the king at Gilgal to ready themselves for a Philistine counter offensive.

13:5. The Philistines responded with chariots and horsemen. Saul's departure from Michmash (vv. 1-4) left the area open for his enemies again.

13:6. The men of Israel... were in trouble. The Philistines controlled the high ground—a clear military advantage. Further, their push to Michmash meant they controlled much of the central Benjamin plateau, effectively cutting Israel in half and limiting Saul's access to

the coast. Saul's decision to retreat to Gilgal gave his enemies control of this region; the situation was indeed serious.

13:7. Many of Saul's citizens even crossed the Jordan River and moved northward to the land of Gad and Gilead. They calculated that the Philistines would be content with the territory west of the Jordan River.

13:8. Samuel had told Saul to wait seven days at Gilgal at which time he would come and provide further instructions (10:8). Saul, however, looked around and saw the troops were deserting him as morale weakened.

13:9 Saul offered the burnt offering himself—a task Samuel should have done as Israel's priest. Years later, King Uzziah also would usurp the priest's duties and receive God's judgment for his act (2 Chr. 26:16-21).

13:11. Samuel's ominous question, "What have you done?" recalls God's questions to Eve and to Cain (Gen 3:13; 4:10) as well as the sailors' terrified question to Jonah (Jonah 1:10).

13:12. Saul rightly estimated the seriousness of the Philistine threat. If they reached Gilgal, they would control territory from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River. However, the Lord's favor did not come through sacrifice but through faithfulness, a fact Samuel would later drive home to Saul (15:22).

13:13. "Foolish" is a word that also would describe later kings who failed to put their trust in the Lord (2 Sam. 24:10; 2 Chr. 16:9).

13:14. God's purposes would continue for Israel despite Saul's failures because the Lord had found a man loyal to Him. The phrase "the Lord has appointed him as ruler" indicates how from God's perspective, His work was already moving ahead and was as good as done, even though David would not become king for several years.

13:15. From Gilgal to Gibeah was a distance of about 15 miles upward—a gain in elevation of about 3,000 feet. Meanwhile, only 600 men (cp. v. 2) remained with the king.



# The Heights Baptist Church

1 SAMUEL SESSION TEN: THE LORD REJECTS SAUL AS KING 1 SAMUEL 15:1-35 NO DATE

## MAIN POINT

Judgment awaits those who reject God's instruction.

## INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**Which is easier to justify in our minds: partially disobedient actions or totally disobedient actions? Why is that?**

**When God seeks someone to fulfill a task or role, what qualities does He desire?**

When the Lord God seeks a man or a woman for a particular task or role, He looks for someone who will obey Him. While other qualities can be spiritually valuable, they become meaningless if the person in question doesn't take God at His word and obey Him. King Saul possessed some admirable qualities for leadership, such as discernment (1 Sam. 14:19) and courage (14:36). But at key moments, Saul failed the greatest test of a spiritual leader—the commitment to obey God. Just as Saul ascended quickly to the throne, he also descended quickly because of his disobedient actions.

## UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 SAMUEL 15:1-9,13-15.

**How clear were God's instructions to Saul through Samuel?**

Amalek was the grandson of Esau (Gen. 36:12). His descendants were the first people to attack the Israelites after their exodus from Egypt (Ex. 17:8), even before the receiving of the Ten Commandments. God had determined at the time to “blot out the memory of Amalek under heaven” (v. 14; see also Num. 24:20). He decided this was the appropriate time to make good on His word to Moses, and King Saul was the appropriate instrument to use.

**What did King Saul do right in these verses? What did he do wrong?**

**Why do you think Saul felt justified, even faithful to God, in what he did?**

After King Saul received the instructions to destroy the Amalekites, he gathered his troops (apparently without delay or hesitation) and set about his task (vv. 4-6). The region “from Havilah all the way to Shur, which is next to Egypt” represents a very sizeable geographic area. It was much more extensive than merely an attack on a single city and likely took days, if not weeks, to accomplish. Even so, the campaign was successful as Saul and his army “completely destroyed all the rest of the people with the sword”—all except Agag, their king . . . and the best animals . . . “and the best of everything else.” But other than that, he had pretty much done what he’d been told. And the goods that remained had been spared “in order to offer a sacrifice to the LORD.” Sounds pretty noble, doesn’t it? Because of his fear of the people (v. 24), Saul surrendered what God wanted for what the people wanted.

**What makes settling for partial obedience so tempting? In what ways could a believer exclude the “best” from his or her obedience to God?**

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 SAMUEL 15:10-12,16-21.

**Why did the Lord regret He made Saul king? In your estimation, does it seem like God was overreacting here? Why was it a big deal if Saul didn’t completely destroy the Amalekites and everything they had?**

**What lessons should we draw from Saul’s example and God’s and Samuel’s reactions?**

Israel was God’s people, not Saul’s. It was important for Saul to listen and obey all of God’s instructions. Saul did not do this. He spared Agag and the best of everything else. Destroying all the worthless and unwanted things was no great sacrifice, no act of trust. Saul was God’s chosen leader, but Saul’s pattern of disobedience showed he was not the man God needed and required him to be.

**When Samuel initially confronted Saul about his disobedience, what was Saul's perspective (vv. 20-21)? What does this tell you about Saul's heart?**

**What makes confronting someone about his or her disobedience a challenge? What risks are involved when confronting someone? What risks are involved when we don't confront someone?**

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 SAMUEL 15:22-35.

**How would you state the principle of verse 22 in your own words? What relevance is there in this principle to our day and culture? Explain.**

**How does accepting partial obedience or religious practice as a substitute for full obedience show disrespect for God?**

**Once Saul acknowledged his sin, what reason did he give (v. 24)? What was the consequence for Saul's actions (vv. 26-29)?**

In response to Samuel's confrontation, Saul confessed his sin twice (vv. 24,30), but we have no evidence that he repented of the sin. The remainder of the biblical account of Saul shows him either being ineffective or attempting to kill David, his God-anointed successor. Had he repented, the Bible is clear that God offers forgiveness and cleansing (Isa. 1:18; Acts 3:19; 1 John 1:9).

**What are some common consequences believers face today for only giving partial obedience to God?**

Good intentions never cancel out disobedience. And the good intentions with which we excuse disobedience are often fraudulent. We disobey because of something we want, and then we try to salve our consciences with some religious act, such as giving something to the church. God is not fooled. His judgment is certain, even if delayed. The only preparation for divine judgment is to believe and obey Jesus Christ and His gospel.

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**What are some common situations or circumstances in which believers are tempted to compromise and only partially obey God?**

**Why do many believers tend to think it's not a big deal to cut some corners in obedience to God? In your own words, why is it a big deal?**

**What are some ways you can choose to fully obey God? How can this group help you in that?**

## PRAYER

Thank God for His love, forgiveness, and patience, though we often think we can improve on His plan or placate Him with sacrifices rather than obedience. Ask Him to teach you to follow Him in full obedience.

## COMMENTARY

| 1 SAMUEL 15:1-35

15:1. Saul's power and purpose lay in God's anointing; Israel was His people, not Saul's. Therefore, Saul needed to heed the divine instructions that Samuel now was giving him.

15:2. Exodus 17:8-16 records Israel's initial victory over Amalek under Joshua's leadership. At that time, God promised to oppose the Amalekites continually.

15:3. The phrase destroy everything they have describes the practice of the ban, wherein Israel would destroy everything in a town that had breath, including humans and animals. God had authority over when all life began and ended. In the battle of Jericho (Jos 6:17-21), the plunder went into the Lord's treasury; at other times, the people were allowed to keep it (Jos 8:27).

15:6. Saul's warning to the Kenites rewarded earlier friendly terms with them (Jdg 1:16; 4:11). The kindness to all the Israelites is only mentioned here, but clearly this was part of Israel's memory in a land where people had long memories (2Ch 20:10-11).

15:7. This extensive campaign covered a broad region, from Arabia almost to Egypt's border, whose inhabitants included many descendants of Ishmael (Gen 25:18).

15:8. The phrase captured Agag... alive hints at Saul's coming disobedience to what God had commanded (v. 3).

15:9. The Hebrew text emphasizes that Saul was the one primarily responsible for sparing Agag. The people also spared... the best of everything else, another violation of God's

command (v. 3). Of course, destroying all the worthless and unwanted things was no great sacrifice.

15:11. The verb regret with God as its subject occurs only here and in Gen 6:7, where it denotes God's regrets over making humanity and His ultimate decision to bring the great flood. In both cases, people made wrong moral choices, and God's foreknowledge meant He knew what people would do. Nonetheless, it pained Him to see the disobedience come to pass. The word translated turned away commonly means "repent" when it speaks of turning away from sin, but here it describes Saul's conscious decision to cease following the Lord. Samuel was frustrated by Saul's failing kingship, particularly as he remembered he had anointed him (10:1). Saul had indeed turned out to be a king just like the ones of "all the other nations" (8:5,20), but the people had persisted in their request despite his sober warnings (8:11-18).

15:12. Perhaps God had told Samuel to get up early during Samuel's intense prayer the previous night (v. 11). Ironically, Saul had gone to Carmel, a town about seven miles south of Hebron in Judah's hill country (Jos 15:55), to erect a monument for himself. This monument presumably would remind the Carmelites of the peace that came to their region because of Saul's victory over Amalek. Gilgal had great historical significance; it lay about 15 miles east of Gibeah, Saul's capital.

15:13. God did not share Saul's perspective on this matter.

15:14. The sound of sheep and cattle was proof that Saul had failed to execute God's command.

15:15. Saul's reference to the Lord your God (not "my God" or "our God") sounds an ominous tone but aptly fits the situation because Saul did not appear to have much of a relationship with the Lord.

15:16. Stop!—The prophet had had enough of Saul's excuses and cut him off, an action most subjects would not dare take with their king.

15:17. God had taken Saul from relatively unimportant status as a common citizen (cp. Saul's own words in 9:21) to king over Israel. The word you is emphasized in the text with respect to Saul to heighten the intensity of Samuel's words.

15:18. The presence of any survivors (in this case, King Agag and the best of the flocks and herds) was a violation of God's command.

15:19. The verbal idea in the phrase rush on the plunder is related to the word for “bird of prey,” in this case swooping down on the spoils of war.

15:20. Saul’s own description of his actions condemned him because he admitted to sparing Agag and to putting to death only the Amalekites and not their domesticated property as God had commanded (v. 3).

15:21. Sacrifice... at Gilgal would not substitute for obedience on Saul’s part; further, God had already claimed the animals and given orders for their destruction (vv. 2-3).

15:22-23. Samuel wasn’t buying the excuse. At issue was complete obedience to God. As covenant leader, Saul was to lead the nation to follow the Lord’s direction and commands. In this eloquent poetic quotation, Samuel pronounced God’s judgment against Saul’s kingship.

To obey and heed the Lord God was far better than burnt offerings or the fat of rams. The term translated rebellion has to do with pressing one’s case (cp. Deut. 31:27). Samuel referred at this point to Saul’s attempts to justify and excuse his actions. Samuel compared this with the sin of divination. Divination attempted to gain control of a deity by foretelling what would please the god. Saul believed he knew what would please the Lord. Saul would later use divination (cp. 28:7-9).

The term translated arrogance is used when someone is trying to force a certain course of action. Samuel equated this with idolatry, using the specific word teraphim (cp. Gen. 31:19). Food and gifts were presented to teraphim (apparently small hand-made idols) in an attempt to manipulate a god into granting requests or bestowing blessings. Samuel implied that Saul was attempting to manipulate Yahweh with the best of the Amalekite flocks just like the pagan idol worshipers.

There is no reason to suppose that Samuel was rejecting sacrificial worship. After all, Samuel was a Levite (cp. 1 Chron. 6:22-26) and often performed ritual sacrifice himself (1 Sam. 10:8; 11:15; 16:3-5). Samuel recognized that for a sacrifice to be effective, it must be offered with complete obedience. Worship that counts must result in obedience to the will of God. Because Saul had rejected the Lord, the Lord had rejected him as king.

15:24-31. Saul finally admitted that he had sinned, that he had violated (lit. “transgressed”) the Lord’s command and Samuel’s instructions. Instead of fearing the Lord, Saul was afraid of the people. Saul begged for forgiveness, but Samuel was adamant. Samuel must

have felt that Saul had not really repented. Saul again was concerned with appearances. He wanted the people to think that everything was all right.

When Samuel turned to leave, Saul grabbed the hem of Samuel's robe and it tore. Samuel used this as an illustration: the Lord had torn the kingdom of Israel from him (15:27). The Glory of Israel would not change his mind (cp. Num. 23:19); Saul was rejected from being king. Even through this exchange, Saul still thought about appearances. He continued to plead his case that Samuel would honor him before the elders and return with him. Samuel reluctantly agreed.

15:32-35. What Saul had failed to do, Samuel carried out. When they returned, Samuel called for Agag, the Amalekite king. Agag thought that by this time, the bitterness of death had passed, that the Israelites would not put him to death. But Samuel declared an oracle of judgment against him and put him to death as the Lord had commanded. After this Samuel left for Ramah. The men did not see each other again before Samuel died. Samuel continued to mourn for Saul, and the Lord regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel.



# The Heights Baptist Church

1 SAMUEL SESSION ELEVEN: SAMUEL ANOINTS DAVID 1 SAMUEL 16:1-13 NO DATE

## MAIN POINT

God desires people who seek to follow Him with all their hearts.

## INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**When you meet a person, what qualities make a good first impression? What qualities make a bad first impression?**

**Have you ever been wrong about a first impression? Have you met someone whose good or bad first impression ended up not being at all how you knew them going forward?**

Research indicates that there is a correlation between a person's height and the salary he or she earns. This is particularly true in occupations where the perception of others is crucial, such as sales and management. It is also documented that height is seen as a social asset and perceived as indicative of a person's competence. Of course, no research suggests that taller people actually fulfill these perceptions. It is merely indicative of the way we often judge people based on external traits. Today, we'll be looking at God's qualifications for a leader, which are quite different from our human qualifications.

## UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 SAMUEL 16:1-3.

**What was Samuel mourning at the start of this passage?**

**Why and when did God reject Saul? Read 1 Samuel 13:8-14 and 15:10-11 to aid in your discussion.**

By the time we get to 1 Samuel 16, it is not clear how many years had passed since Saul was anointed as king. It was a fairly extensive period, and it may have been decades. This is important because we can see that a major change had come about in Saul's life in the intervening years. When first told that he would become king, he protested that he was unworthy (9:21). When his supporters wanted to kill some men who had opposed the choice of Saul as king, he spared his opponents (11:12-13). But years of ruling had turned Saul into a different man. He became so entrenched in his position that Samuel feared that Saul would kill him in order to hold on to his throne (16:2).

Our story begins in a politically tense situation. The once humble Saul is now determined to hold on to power, and he knows that Samuel no longer supports him (1 Sam. 15:28). God has commissioned Samuel to anoint a new king. Samuel, being as fallible as any other man, needs God's guidance in making his choice of whom to anoint.

**What does this conversation between Samuel and God teach you about their relationship?**

God is sovereign. He has power and authority over everything and everyone in the world, and we can trust Him even as we express to Him our fears about the roles and responsibilities He gives us. In what aspect of your life do you most need that reminder right now?

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 SAMUEL 16:4-10.

Samuel showed up unexpectedly at the town of Bethlehem. This alarmed the townspeople, who felt that his arrival could only mean something bad. Prophets so often brought bad news with them—messages of doom and judgment—and people preferred not to see them at all. When Elijah turned up at the court of Ahab, he received the greeting, "Is that you, you destroyer of Israel?" (1 Kings 18:17).

**In what ways does pursuing the call of God upon one's life bring isolation from others? What are the risks and rewards of such a pursuit? How might the people's response to Samuel have contributed to him initially thinking (or hoping) Eliab was the Lord's anointed? What was the irony here (see 10:23-24)?**

Eliab evidently had the physical features of a star actor or athlete, looking every bit the part of a potential king. As Jesse's oldest son stood before him, Samuel must have compared him with the tall and impressive Saul (1 Sam. 10:23-24). Our culture also evaluates people by their appearance, social status, and other superficial traits. Nevertheless, people do not see what God sees.

**What does verse 7 suggest about the qualities God counts as most important for His servants? What would you consider qualities of the heart that are necessary for serving God?**

Appearances are only hints at the true character, intelligence, grace, and virtue of a person. They can be misleading. God sees directly into the heart. He has no need to use the outside as an indicator of what may be on the inside, because the inside is fully exposed to Him.

**What dangers lie in assuming that certain individuals are suited for leadership based on appearance or a generalization?**

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 SAMUEL 16:11-13.

**What characteristic would seem to hinder David from being anointed as king (v. 11)?**

**What did David's faithfulness in watching the sheep say about his character? How did this prepare him for the future (see 1 Sam. 17:34-37; Ps. 23)?**

Tending sheep helped prepare David to rule Israel. "Shepherd" would become a symbolic job description for king. God intended for the king to care for the people with the same compassion that a shepherd gives to his flock. Furthermore, David's encounters with predators developed skills that later became useful in combat.

**What was the real secret of David's power that enabled him to accomplish God's work (v. 13)?**

Immediately after Samuel anointed David and the Spirit came upon him, the Spirit abandoned Saul (see 1 Sam. 16:14). Later, however, Saul prophesied again by the power of the Spirit (19:23). David, after his sin involving Bathsheba, was fearful that God would take away His Spirit (Ps. 51:11). Thus, it appears that the Spirit could come and go in the lives of kings.

In the New Testament, the Spirit dwells within believers primarily for their sanctification (Rom. 8; 1 Cor. 6:18-20; Gal. 5:22). Even the gifts of the Spirit are primarily for the edification of the church, and they were given to all rather than to a select few (1 Cor. 12:8-13). Paul indicated that believers can grieve the Spirit (Eph. 4:30), but he does not say that the Spirit might abandon us.

Samuel anointed David in Bethlehem (1 Sam. 16:4). Not only would Bethlehem be important for God's people in Samuel's day but also in days to come. The prophet Micah would point to Bethlehem as the birthplace of the Promised Messiah. Centuries later, that prophecy was fulfilled with the birth of Jesus Christ, God's Anointed One (John 1:41) who is our perfect King (Matt. 2:1-6).

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**What are some signs a person is spending more time on external or superficial attributes than on applying the gospel to inner character?**

**What are some steps we can take to spend more time on growing an inner character of godliness than we do on being appealing to others?**

**How can we encourage our pastors as they seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit for the church?**

## PRAYER

Thank God for the perfect King, Jesus. Thank Him for the leaders He has given His Church and ask His Spirit to lead them even now. Pray that you would pursue godly character and would point others toward Christ as David's life did.

## COMMENTARY

| 1 SAMUEL 16:1-13

16:1. Samuel had anointed Saul as king. Saul's failure hurt the prophet deeply, but he was not alone. The Lord also had grieved over Saul's conduct. The Lord confronted Samuel about his continuing distress over Saul and instructed Samuel to go to Bethlehem to the home of Jesse. The verb mourn usually refers to a rite that is observed for the dead.

Biblical mourning involved human emotion and usually was expressed both audibly and visibly. Possibly Samuel moaned aloud and hung his head in despondency. Certainly he hovered in a state of mental and spiritual depression.

As chapter 15 shows, the Lord had spoken to Samuel about Saul's failure to conform to His will. Here the Lord spoke to Samuel about the prophet's attitude. The time for mourning was past; the time for action had come. The prophet's mission was identified in three specific actions. First, Samuel was to "fill his horn with oil." Then he was to go to the home of "Jesse of Bethlehem." Third, he would anoint one of Jesse's sons to become the next king. God would identify the particular son at the appropriate time.

16:2-3. Samuel's assignment was simple. He was to anoint a new king. He already had announced God's rejection of Saul. However, the prophet's inquiry reflected the inherent danger of the task. Samuel had legitimate concerns about how Saul would interpret his anointing one of Jesse's sons as king. While the prophet might have divine authority, the king had the political will and the armed power to act if he knew about Samuel's taking action to replace him. So the Lord gave Samuel a second task that would mask the primary purpose of his visit to Bethlehem. As a priest, Samuel was authorized to offer sacrifices. This act doubtless was intended to designate Samuel's visit to Bethlehem as religious and not political. What on the surface might appear to be a strategic tactic of rebellion was in reality just the opposite. In ancient Israel the king was a representative of God. His appointment was sacred, not secular. Samuel followed the Lord's directions concerning his visit to Bethlehem. He assured the town's leaders of his peaceful intentions and invited Jesse's family to be special attendees as a sacrifice. In doing so he emphasized the king served at God's prerogative. Not knowing whom he would anoint demanded faith on the part of Samuel. He had to trust that God would speak to him at the appropriate time.

16:4. Perhaps the elders trembled because they interpreted Samuel's appearance as an indication a murder had occurred in the area. According to Deuteronomy 21:1-9, the ritual surrounding an unsolved murder prescribed that a priest break the neck of a young cow. Samuel was a priest, and he came to Bethlehem with a young cow. Or, perhaps the recent execution of Agag may have been in their minds and the leaders feared they had incurred Samuel's displeasure. He might exhibit similar violent behavior toward them if they had offended him in some manner. Or they may have been aware of the discord between Samuel and Saul. If so, they were terrified that any possible action on Samuel's part to subvert the reigning monarch would bring royal retribution against their community.

16:5-6. "Consecrate" refers to becoming ritually clean. The specific guidelines are uncertain, but they presumably involved bathing, putting on clean garments, abstaining from sexual activity, and avoiding contact with unclean objects (such as a corpse). The consecration of Jesse and his sons demonstrated Samuel's complete obedience. The incident would require that he fully comply with God's revelation and not merely do what he wanted to do. Samuel did not know whom the Lord had selected. Therefore the prophet began to guess at who might be chosen. However, his faulty insight led him to the wrong conclusion. Eliab was Jesse's firstborn son. His appearance compared favorably to Saul's appearance (see 1 Sam. 10:23-24). Samuel incorrectly guessed Eliab's height and appearance qualified him to be king (v. 7).

16:7. As Samuel sized up Jesse's oldest son, he felt confident this was the Lord's choice for king. Before Samuel could pour oil on Eliab's head, however, the Lord ended his silence. The Lord then explained He looks at people's hearts and not just their physical features. God's words were not what Samuel expected. Having been disappointed over Saul and having been corrected concerning Eliab, Samuel then showed where his priority was. He would listen to God's voice, look for God's choice, and advance God's purposes. External appearance does not qualify an individual to govern. The language of the Lord's rebuff linked Eliab to Saul—I have rejected him. Here, God's decision was not based on Eliab's previous behavior. Instead, it reinforced the weakness of human methodology and reminded Samuel of the vast difference between our methods and God's.

God's statement that "the LORD sees the heart" is the crux of this passage. The heart refers to human volition. God is much, much different from humans (see Isa. 55:8-9). His thinking and His ways are unlike those of people. His methods cannot be understood by mortal minds and are vastly superior to those of the human race. People often base decisions on visible perceptions. God's actions are based on information inaccessible to a human being. God knows and understands human volition. The message of the cross of Jesus is an example of God's methodology (see 1 Cor. 1:18-2:5).

16:8-11. A second son was brought before Samuel. This time "Jesse called Abinadab," but God also rejected him. A third son, Shammah, was brought before Samuel. Once more, God did not select him. God rejected seven consecutive sons of Jesse. They were the only sons present on this occasion. A perplexing situation confronted Samuel. God's revelation seemed contradictory. God had instructed him to anoint a son of Jesse as the next king. But then God rejected each son presented to Samuel. Rather than give up in frustration, Samuel sought additional information. He asked Jesse if he had any other male children. Jesse's response suggests he did not think his other son would be selected. The Hebrew

word for “youngest” literally is “small or insignificant one.” The root term denotes “small” in quantity or quality. Hence the word can mean “small in years,” or the youngest. Because of David’s youth he had been excluded from consideration. Because David was a son of Jesse, he fell within the sphere of the Lord’s instructions. Thus Samuel could not proceed until the last son appeared.

16:12. The description of David as “healthy” is literally “reddish.” It means David either had hair with a red tint or a bronze complexion. His appearance later would generate a magnetic effect on women. Yet, these physical attributes did not qualify him to become king. His qualification was in his “heart,” and only God could evaluate that. God had spoken and told Samuel the purpose for bringing the oil. In addition God indicated He had selected the young man who would become king (v. 1). Surely Samuel already understood the implication of filling the horn with oil. Regardless, God’s instructions made the purpose of the oil irrefutable. God kept His promise to reveal to His prophet the person He had selected. Samuel’s action would be the result of obedience, not conjecture.

16:13. The Lord identified Jesse’s youngest son David as the new king, and Samuel obeyed God. Samuel anointed David and witnessed the Holy Spirit take control of him. The anointing took place within the family circle. To what extent was this ceremony kept secret? We do not know, but in time everyone would become aware of this new reality, even Saul. At that time the privacy of the event and the inconspicuous nature of the son being anointed combined to create little understanding of its true importance. The reference to “the Spirit of the LORD” taking control of David indicates that unlike Saul’s, David’s disposition was one of obedience. God was his primary guide in life. The Holy Spirit’s control of David confirmed that Samuel had completed his God-given task. Samuel had moved on from a grievously disappointing situation. He witnessed encouraging spiritual evidence that God had used him in advancing His purpose. Having completed the assignment, Samuel returned to his home in Ramah.