

Two Year Bible Trek  
Week 21  
1 Samuel 1-15

**Key Concepts:** The key concept in 1 Samuel is that God is active and involved in Israel's transition from a loose confederation of tribes to a nation-state with centralized power residing in a king.

**Stories:** This includes Hannah's desire for a child, Samuel's birth and consecration (1:1-2:11), the decadence of the sons of Eli (2:12-26), the condemnation of Eli's house by God (2:27-36), Samuel's first encounter with God (3), the tragic war with the Philistines including the loss of the ark and the death of Eli (4), the ark causes trouble (5), the ark is returned (6:1-7:2), Samuel reigns as judge over Israel (7), the demand for a king (8), the call of Saul (9-10), Saul demonstrates his leadership abilities (11), Samuel offers his final words (12), the war with the Philistines is renewed (13:1-7), Saul sins (13:7-15), the war continues (13:15-14), and a second story about why God will reject Saul (15).

**Brief Summary:** First Samuel contains one of the great socio-political transitions in the history of the people of Israel. We have watched as the Hebrews went from a family to a tribe (Abraham – Jacob), as they became slaves (following Joseph into Egypt), as they became freed people who wandered in the wilderness (following Moses), as they became a people who conquered the land (following Joshua) and as they struggled to be faithful to God as a loose confederation of tribes (following the judges). We now witness the socio-political-religious struggle over the concept of and implementation of kingship.

This transition to a monarchy is accompanied by the contest for land and power with the Philistines who were a sea-faring people living on the coastal plains. The Philistines would continue to be Israel's greatest threat until the rise of the Assyrian Empire several hundred years later. The Philistines competed with Israel for both territory and religious orientation, meaning the gods of the Philistines were always a temptation for Israel.

As you read these stories, there are several themes I encourage you to watch for. The first is that of the woman who is childless until God grants her a special child. This is the story of Hannah which echoes that of Sarah and will pre-figure that of Elizabeth in the New Testament.

The second is that of the fall of the judges. As was noted in the end of Judges, the people of Israel and the judges who led them continued a rapid ethical implosion. This comes to a head in the stories of the sons of Eli and Samuel. In a sense the entire system of judges must come to an end because their leadership has become a detriment to the faithfulness of the people.

The third is the continuing presence of God. God is not absent from the scene as God seemed to be in Ruth. We return once again to an active, engaged and communicating God. This is a God who is so powerful that even the Ark of the Covenant is capable of bringing pain and suffering on the enemies of Israel.

The fourth is the struggle over whether the monarchy was a good thing or a not so good thing. Scholars have discerned two strands of tradition; one of which supports the monarchy and the other which does not. You will witness this struggle beginning in chapter eight where we read that God and Samuel saw the demand for a king as a rejection not merely of Samuel and his sons, but of God's own kingship. In addition the desire for a king is a desire to be like "the other nations." Thus we witness not only rebellion (as in the wilderness) but a desire to be like others and not a unique God centered people.

1. How do these stories continue the idea that the promise of blessing the world is still at risk?
2. How would you explain the fact that faithful fathers (Eli and Samuel) could produce unfaithful sons?
3. How do you see the transition to the monarchy; as a good or not so good move?