

Bible Stories

Between the Judges and the Monarchy

1 Samuel 3:19-21

October 29, 2022

Samuel was the last Judge of Israel and he serves as a link between the time of the Judges and the Monarchy, so our story begins with him {1 Samuel 1-3}.

Samuel's father was Elkanah. Elkanah was of the tribe of Levi (**1 Chronicles 6:23**), but lived in the territory of Ephraim in the city of Ramah.

Samuel's mother was Hannah, one of Elkanah's two wives.

Peninnah, Elkanah's other wife, had several children, but Hannah was barren.

A rivalry developed between the 2 women and Peninnah went out of her way to remind Hannah of her barrenness – gloating and lording it over her.

Year after year the family would go to sacrifice to the Lord at Shiloh, where the Tabernacle was located.

Hophni and Phinehas, sons of Eli, the priest, were attending the Tabernacle at that time – more about them shortly.

During one of those trips Hannah went and wept bitterly before Yahweh because of her barrenness. That day she made a promise. If she was blessed with a son, she would dedicate him to God's service for his entire life - He would be a Nazarite. (**1 Samuel 1:18-28**)

In time Samuel was born. At about the age of 3 Samuel was brought to the Tabernacle and Hannah dedicated him to the service of God as she had promised to do.

Samuel 2:12, 17 - Eli's sons were wicked men; they had no regard for the LORD.... ¹⁷ This sin of the young men was very great in the LORD's sight, for they were treating the LORD's offering with contempt.

Eli was not successful in his half-hearted attempts to reign-in his sons, so a man of God came to Eli with a message {**1 Samuel 2:29-35**}:

- Why do you scorn my sacrifice and offering while you honor your sons above me? Though I solemnly said that your house and your father's house would minister before me forever. Now I say to you that those who honor me I will honor, but those who despise me will be rejected. The time is coming when I will cut short your strength and the strength of your father's house, so that there will not be an old man in your family line.... What happens to your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, will be a sign to you -- they will both die on the same day. I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who will do according to what is in my heart and mind. I will firmly establish his house, and he will minister before my anointed one always.

Sometime later, a young Samuel was called by God to special service in a quiet, yet poignant, nighttime visitation. Accompanying that visitation was a pronouncement of judgment against the house of Eli for his failure to control his sons.

- **1 Samuel 3:11-14** - And the LORD said to Samuel: "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears of it tingle. At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family -- from beginning to end. For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons made themselves contemptible, and he failed to restrain them. Therefore, I swore to the house of Eli, 'The guilt of Eli's house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering.'"

Samuel was afraid to tell Eli about the vision, but Eli encouraged him to not withhold anything God had revealed, so Samuel told Eli everything and Eli responded, **"He is Yahweh; let him do what is good in his eyes."**

Yahweh was with Samuel as he grew and all Israel, from north to south, recognized that he was a prophet of God.

Here are some of the events leading up to the establishment of the Monarchy:

Chapter 4 - the Philistine's capture of the Ark of the Covenant.

The Philistines occupied the southwest of the land of Canaan along the coast of the Mediterranean ---- known as Philistia.

They were a unified group of 5 city-states: Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, Gath, and Gaza.

They were known for their development of tools and weapons made of iron.

They were also the sworn enemy of Israel.

Israel went out to meet the Philistines in battle and Israel lost - 4,000 dead.

Before the next battle Israel decided to take the Ark of the Covenant with them as a **“good-luck charm”** because they thought it would guarantee them victory.

Hophni and Phinehas went with them.

When the soldiers saw the Ark being brought into camp, they let out a great shout. How can we lose? We have the Ark.....

When the Philistines learned that the Ark had come into the Israelite camp, they were afraid,

“God has come into the camp. Woe to us, for this has never happened before! Woe to us! Who can deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? These are the same gods who struck the Egyptians with all sorts of plagues in the desert. Take courage and be men, you Philistines, lest you end up serving the Hebrews just like they have served you. Be men and fight!”

The Philistines went out against Israel and Israel lost.... again:

- 30,000-foot soldiers died
- Eli’s sons were killed
- The Ark was captured and taken back to Philistia

When Eli - 98 years old and blind - was told that his sons were dead and the Ark had been captured, he fell backward off his seat and broke his neck – he had judged Israel for 40 years.

Chapter 5 – the Ark moves around Philistia.

The Philistines took the Ark back to Ashdod and placed it in the temple of their god – Dagon.

Dagon had the upper body of a man and the lower body of a fish. He was worshipped as the source of all prosperity.

The next morning, they discovered Dagon had fallen over, face to the ground, before the Ark. They put him back up.

The next day, not only had Dagon fallen over, face to the ground, but his head and hands were severed from the rest of his body.

God’s hand was heavy on Ashdod. He ravaged them and smote them with tumors, so, the Ark was sent to Gath.

The same thing happened to the all the men of Gath, so they sent the Ark to Ekron.

“No! No! No!! What are you try to do, kill us?” responded the people of Ekron. ***“We don’t want it. Send it back to where it came from!”***

Chapter 6 – the Ark returns to Israel

The Ark of God had been in Philistia for 7 months. Because the hand of God had been heavy upon the whole land, the leaders went to the pagan priests ----- ***“How do we get rid of this thing?”***

Priests: *If you are sending the ark of God back to Israel, you must return it with a guilt offering. You will be healed and it will become evident if this was actually the hand of God or not.*

Leaders: *What sort of guilt offering should we send?*

Priests:

1 - Since the plague struck all five cities, make 10 gold representative offerings {5 tumors and 5 mice} of what has ravaged the land. Give glory to the God of Israel and perhaps he will remove his hand from you, your gods, and your land. Don't harden your hearts like Pharaoh and the Egyptians did. They wouldn't let Israel go until God had ravaged them with dreadful plagues. (Interesting advice coming from pagan priests).

2 - Build a new cart. Find two cows, with new calves, who have never been yoked. Separate them from their calves and hitch them to the cart. Put the Ark on the cart, and place the chest containing the golden offerings beside it. Release the cows and let them go wherever they want to go. If they cross the border into Israel, we will know it was Yahweh who brought this great disaster upon us. If they don't, we will know that the plague was simply a coincidence and was not sent by Yahweh at all.

They took the priest's advice and the cows headed straight for Beth-shemesh in Israel - turning neither to the right or left.

There was great rejoicing in Beth-Shemesh because the Ark had been returned, but some of the men did not acknowledge the holy nature of the Ark, so, out of curiosity, they looked inside. Many of them died on the spot... Out of sheer terror, a call was placed to the mayor of Kiriath-Jearim, **"The Philistines have returned the Ark. Come and get it."** The Ark was taken to the house of Abinadab. His son, Eleazar, was consecrated as the guardian of the Ark. It resided in Kiriath-Jearim for 20 years.

Chapter 7 – Samuel's work as Judge in Israel.

1 Samuel 7 begins by telling us that the people of Israel were troubled and mourned and sought after Yahweh.

Samuel: *If you are really returning to Yahweh with all your hearts, remove the foreign gods and Ashtoreth from your midst. Commit your hearts to Yahweh and serve him alone. Then he will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines.*

So, the sons of Israel removed the Baals and the Ashtoreth and served the LORD alone.

Samuel: *Gather all Israel to Mizpah, and I will pray to Yahweh for you.*

The people gathered at Mizpah, fasted and poured out water before Yahweh, saying, **"We have sinned against Yahweh."**

Apparently, the Philistines had short memories, because when they heard that all Israel was gathered at Mizpah, they went to make war against them. This time Israel sought God's direction and intervention.

As the Philistines drew near, God thundered against them, sending them into confusion. Israel pursued them and defeated them as far as Beth-car.

- **1 Samuel 7:12** - Then Samuel took a stone and set it between Mizpah and Shen, and named it Ebenezer (**meaning stone of help**), saying, "To this point Yahweh has helped us."

The hand of God was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel.

Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life and set up an altar to Yahweh at Ramah.

What do we do we these stories?

One thing is certain - The **"chosen"** people remain fickle and forgetful and they have a wandering eye. Worse still, they are guilty of the sin of presumption. They expected God to come through for them irrespective of the fact that they were actively worshipping other gods. By taking the Ark into battle the Israelites were trying to manipulate God into a victory against the Philistines - **"Surely with His name on the line, God will not let us fail."**, but God will not be manipulated as demonstrated by the fact that he allowed the Ark to be captured. What God wanted from his people was faithfulness ---- not disobedience and then using him as a get-out-of-jail-free card.

Are we any different today, I wonder.....

From the perspective of the Philistines – they assumed that because they had been victorious in battle and had taken the Ark as a war prize, their god was stronger than the God of Israel. They learned quickly, however, that their god was no match for Yahweh. And when they recognized that it was the hand of God that was against them, they took steps, as best they knew, to honor God and return the Ark. They said, **"let's not be stubborn and hardhearted like the Egyptians were"** They were better than Israel at living up to the light they had been given and God honored their efforts.

And what of God? Yes, He declined to be manipulated, but He was also quick to forgive and ready and willing to intercede when the people repented and acknowledged their wickedness.

Even in the midst of unfaithfulness, God remained consistent and faithful and true to His promises.