

Lesson 12 15 April 2012

Samuel Serves as Prophet and Judge

Lesson Scope: 1 Samuel 3, 7 and 12

Lesson Focus

Not even Samuel realized it at first, but he would be Israel's last judge. During the era of the judges, leadership had often been weak and fragmented, and many people were content to have it so. As the record in the Book of Judges dolefully repeated, "Every man did that which was right in his own eyes."

But some people retained principle, Elkanah and Hannah among them. Their son Samuel's character stood in sharp contrast to the apostate course of Israel. His unwavering integrity marked a significant change from the leadership of Eli and his sons.

Samuel led Israel through some very difficult times. Even though the people did not always respond as they should have, Samuel's faithful example was a constant reminder to them of God's will and purpose.

God's kingdom will endure and triumph. In every generation, God prepares and uses men of commitment and integrity to span the gap between the past and the future.

The qualities that contribute to the advancement of God's kingdom are not limited to leaders. Scanning across the list of important teachings shown later in the lesson show us qualities every Christian should have.

Lesson Aim: To see qualities that contribute to the advancement of God's kingdom.

Theme Verse: [Esther 4:14](#). For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?

Lesson Text:

A Sensitive Heart

1 Samuel 3:1-4, 10, 16-19: ¹ And the child Samuel ministered unto the LORD before Eli. And the word of the LORD was precious in those days; *there was* no open vision. ² And it came to pass at that time, when Eli *was* laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim, *that* he could not see; ³ And ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God *was*, and Samuel was laid down *to sleep*; ⁴ That the LORD called Samuel: and he answered, Here *am I*.....¹⁰ And the LORD came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth.....¹⁶ Then Eli called Samuel, and said, Samuel, my son. And he answered, Here *am I*. ¹⁷ And he said, What *is* the thing that *the LORD* hath said unto thee? I pray thee hide *it* not from me: God do so to thee, and more also, if thou hide *any* thing from me of all the things that he said unto thee. ¹⁸ And Samuel told him every whit, and hid nothing from him. And he said, It *is* the LORD: let him do what seemeth him good. ¹⁹ And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground.

A Compassionate Attitude

1 Samuel 7:3, 8-9, 12, 15: ³ And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the LORD with all your hearts, *then* put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the LORD, and serve him only: and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.....⁸ And the children of Israel said to Samuel, Cease not to cry unto the LORD our God for us, that he will save us out of the hand of the Philistines. ⁹ And Samuel took a sucking lamb, and offered *it for* a burnt offering wholly unto the LORD: and Samuel cried unto the LORD for Israel; and the LORD heard him.....¹² Then Samuel took a stone, and set *it* between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto hath the LORD helped us.....¹⁵ And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life.

A Worthy Example

1 Samuel 12:1-7: ¹ And Samuel said unto all Israel, Behold, I have hearkened unto your voice in all that ye said unto me, and have made a king over

you. ² And now, behold, the king walketh before you: and I am old and grayheaded; and, behold, my sons *are* with you: and I have walked before you from my childhood unto this day. ³ Behold, here I *am*: witness against me before the LORD, and before his anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received *any* bribe to blind mine eyes therewith? and I will restore it you. ⁴ And they said, Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken ought of any man's hand. ⁵ And he said unto them, The LORD *is* witness against you, and his anointed *is* witness this day, that ye have not found ought in my hand. And they answered, *He is* witness. ⁶ And Samuel said unto the people, *It is* the LORD that advanced Moses and Aaron, and that brought your fathers up out of the land of Egypt. ⁷ Now therefore stand still, that I may reason with you before the LORD of all the righteous acts of the LORD, which he did to you and to your fathers.

1 Samuel 12:23-24: ²³ Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way: ²⁴ Only fear the LORD, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great *things* he hath done for you.

Questions for Study

A Sensitive Heart

1. What do we learn about God's methods from the way He prepared and called Samuel?
2. How does God expect us to respond to His various calls?
3. How do we know when to be as frank with people as Samuel was with Eli?

A Compassionate Attitude

4. How did Samuel show a good attitude toward his own people?
5. Whose prayers have helped you during your lifetime?
6. How has the Lord helped your family or congregation in the past ten years?

A Worthy Example

7. How did Samuel show a good attitude toward anything he might have done wrong?
8. How did Samuel's concept of God affect his leadership?

9. What characteristics do you appreciate in leaders?

Analyzing the Passage

Precious (1 Samuel 3:1) means "rare." An open vision (1 Samuel 3:1) is frequent or widely spread. "Ere the lamp of God went out" (1 Samuel 3:3) likely refers to the light of a lamp in the temple.

"Samuel told him every whit" (1 Samuel 3:18) means that he told Eli the message in its entirety.

Ashtaroth (1 Samuel 7:3) was a Canaanite goddess.

In 1 Samuel 12:7, 23-25, Samuel wanted the people to understand that the only reasonable thing to do is serve the Lord.

Principles and Applications

A Sensitive Heart

1. Faithfulness in present duties prepares one for future responsibilities (1 Samuel 3:1-3). As a child, Samuel had duties proportional to his size. He did things like opening and closing doors. Perhaps he thought no one would miss his contribution if he were gone. Yet God was preparing him for a far-reaching, influential role.

Today God gives children to parents, who require them to do their school assignments well and to perform their chores without prompting. Sometime, God will give these children greater responsibilities. Perhaps they will have their own children to raise. Perhaps they will teach or influence other people's children.

No one outgrows the possibility that God has more things in mind for him, either in this world or in the world to come. In God's way of looking at it, the reward for doing a task well is to be given more responsibility. "Well done.... thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things" (Matthew 25:23).

2. Being open to the call of God is essential to advancing His kingdom (3:4, 10). Samuel ran to Eli but was willing to be redirected. Although we too should follow our present calling with zeal, we should not become so absorbed in it that we cannot drop it in favor of a greater call.

If our ears are always tuned heavenward, the Lord will not mind calling more than once. He knows our hearts. He knows we may need to take time and get advice before we clearly understand His leading.

3. Carefulness in declaring the full message of God is a quality that God can use (1 Samuel 3:17-18). We must give Eli this credit; he required Samuel to say exactly what he was supposed to say, and he accepted it. In so doing, he gave Samuel a good start as a prophet and leader. Later, Samuel would need all his early training and encouragement in relating to people like King Saul.

Like Samuel, we should be able to share frankly with others what the Lord has laid on our heart without fear or favor of men. Our own popularity and eagerness to be agreeable are beside the point. In the end, we might get more respect than we expected.

Caution: A real leader is willing to stand alone; however, standing alone does not necessarily make a person a real leader. We also must say yes when God wills. On some issues, we must work out compromises with other godly people.

A Compassionate Attitude

4. A compassionate heart that is willing to intercede for others is a useful quality (1 Samuel 7:8). The popular line "You're in my prayers" may mean little or nothing. But people do appreciate a heartfelt "I'm praying for you." The Lord values it too. How many times during our prayers, He has waited for us to name this or that person so that He could bless them more fully!

Intercession is a wide-open field. It includes a circle of people as big as we care and dare to draw it. For instance, do you ever think of praying for writers of Sunday school lessons?

5. The ability to perceive the hand of God at work is an honorable quality (7:12). We tend to focus mostly on problems. Like the Israelites, we may need to be reminded of all that God has already done. A perceptive leader like Samuel may remind us of this. Old letters, old photographs, and historical books may encourage us to raise a new Ebenezer. "Hitherto hash the LORD helped us."

Being able to see God at work, not only on the group level but also in our personal lives, makes life much more fascinating. About the time we feel that God has forgotten us, some tiny coincidence occurs that makes us reconsider.

A Worthy Example

6. Faithful servants understand the importance of a life of integrity (1 Samuel 12:1-4). People do evaluate us. Consciously or subconsciously,

they give us a line of credit that rises or falls, depending on what kind of persons they perceive us to be. What makes this so serious is that they tend to give God a line of credit that rises or falls along with ours.

Not only are people watching; God is watching. Hopefully, we are watching ourselves.

7. True servants understand that they are serving under the overruling hand of the Lord (1 Samuel 12:6). The Lord's overruling hand is a great leveler. It humbles the leader and reassures the follower. Each one thinks less of himself and thinks of himself less because his focus is on the Lord. The verse "Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:3) should guide our attitude, whether we think our station is high or low.

8. Men of integrity view the movements of God as righteous acts (1 Samuel 12:7). From history's great revolutions to today's weather, God is in control. From our limited viewpoint, we try to evaluate what is happening, but we never have nearly enough information. People of integrity believe that God knows what He is doing. He lets ungodly humans have their way for many a day, but He will have the final word.

9. Men of commitment are aware of the seriousness of failing to fill their God-given role (1 Samuel 12:23). Sin may include not only what we did but also what we failed to do. God holds us just as accountable to do His work as our parents and teachers did when we were children. And much more is at stake.

A charge to keep I have,
A God to glorify;
A never-dying soul to save,
And fit it for the sky.
To serve the present age,
My calling to fulfill
Oh, may it all my pow'rs engage
To do my Master's will."

Important Teachings

1. Faithfulness in present duties prepares one for future responsibilities (1 Samuel 3:1-3).
2. Being open to the call of God is essential to advancing His kingdom (1 Samuel 3:4, 10).
3. Carefulness in declaring the full message of God is a quality that God can use (1 Samuel 3:17-18).
4. A compassionate heart that is willing to intercede for others is a useful quality (1 Samuel 7:8).
5. The ability to perceive the hand of God at work is an honorable quality (1 Samuel 7:12).
6. Faithful servants understand the importance of a life of integrity (1 Samuel 12:1-4).
7. True servants understand that they are serving under the overruling hand of the Lord (1 Samuel 12:6).
8. Men of integrity view the movements of God as righteous acts (1 Samuel 12:7).
9. Men of commitment are aware of the seriousness of failing to fill their God-given role (1 Samuel 12:23).

Answers to Questions

1. What do we learn about God's methods from the way He prepared and called Samuel?

God prepared Samuel as He prepares people today, by giving them duties they can handle and increasing their responsibilities. When He calls (whether to become a Christian or to enter a new field of service), He is patient, willing to call more than once until the person responds to Him. He lets humans help each other to recognize His guidance.

2. How does God expect us to respond to His various calls?

He expects us to be patient as we find out His will for our lives. He expects us to be open, with the attitude, "Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth."

3. How do we know when to be as frank with people as Samuel was with Eli?

We can put ourselves in the other person's shoes. Consider whether they would be better off hearing what we have to say? Did they ask for our contribution, as Eli did? Maybe the question is not so much when to be frank

as how to be frank. The Bible prescribes "speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15).

4. How did Samuel show a good attitude toward his own people? He called them to repentance, and he prayed for them.

5. Whose prayers have helped you during your lifetime?

Answers will vary. Not only parents and leaders but also friends and acquaintances may have prayed for us.

6. How has the Lord helped your family or congregation in the past ten years?

Answers will vary. Hopefully the family or congregation has not only grown larger but also grown in its love for the Lord.

7. How did Samuel show a good attitude toward anything he might have done wrong?

He asked people to come forward with any complaint, and he would make it right.

8. How did Samuel's concept of God affect his leadership?

Realizing that he was under a much greater leader than himself, Samuel did not point people to himself, but to God. He felt a burden to pray for God's people.

9. What characteristics do you appreciate in leaders?

Answers may include things like personal godliness, interest in people, good prayer life, and graciousness.

Summarizing the Lesson

Often a leader has the feeling of standing alone. In fact he rarely is; other leaders are also standing with the Lord. Although not everyone's circle of influence is equally large, each has a task that is critically important. Each must help carry the faith from one generation to the next.

The key to transmitting that faith is not talent in speaking or writing, useful as these may be. The key is character, integrity, and commitment, born out of a living relationship with the Lord.

Research Guide

Since the lesson scope covers a number of chapters in 1 Samuel, you may want to skim the chapters not mentioned in this lesson to get a feel for what was happening in Samuel's time.