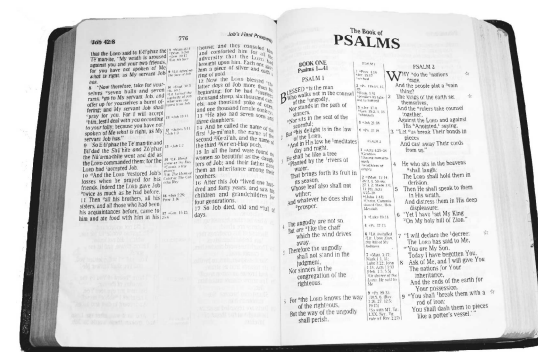


PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



September 2016

Bible readings from 1 Samuel chapters 1 to 16

The Spirit of the LORD came upon David... but the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul

Look at the contrast between Saul and David — *The Spirit of the LORD came upon David ... but the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul* (13–14). The king had grieved away the Spirit of God through his persistent disobedience and he was now open to trouble from a *distressing spirit*. (Hebrew = ‘evil spirit’ – see AV and ESV). If we are walking with the Lord, we have no need to fear evil spirits, for they are subject to the sovereign will and power of God (14,23). Saul’s servants suggested that a skilled musician be found, whose playing would soothe his troubled mind. The king readily agreed with this suggestion and so David was brought to the palace.

David is commended not only as a skilled musician, but also as *a mighty man of valour, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a handsome person; and the LORD is with him* (18). When the Spirit of God is at home with us, there is an obvious attractiveness about our lives. David soon became a palace favourite (21) and his music brought peace to Saul’s troubled mind (23). We must recognise that music is capable of being a great influence in our lives, for good or evil. Satan and his evil spirits are very much at home with certain types of music. We abhor the frenzied din and unwholesome lyrics which are so common in the modern ‘pop’ music scene. Some music popular among younger people is vile and often extols satanism and death. It breathes out blasphemy and has driven some young people to suicide.

We must always be careful to see that music in the church encourages thoughtful and reverent worship. The use of ‘gospel rock’ groups in some churches does little to commend the worship of God or the gospel. We do not go to church to be entertained but our music is important. May we seek always to honour God through it. *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord* (Colossians 3:16).

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But the LORD looks at the heart

In the remaining chapters of 1 Samuel, our attention is turned away from Saul to David. Though Samuel may have appeared to be hard on Saul as he delivered God's word to him, he did have a great affection for the king and was heartbroken over his failure. Do we grieve over the weakness of our churches and of the lack of spiritual discernment among us? Do we mourn over those who have drifted away from God into sin or doctrinal error? Do we pour out our hearts in prayer for those who have disappointed us?

The Lord had rejected Saul as Israel's king but he had chosen another man. He told Samuel to go to Bethlehem with his horn filled with anointing oil. He was to anoint one of the sons of Jesse as king. Samuel was fearful because he knew that such a mission could provoke Saul to kill him (1–2; cp. 22:18–19). The Lord instructed Samuel to invite Jesse and his sons to a private sacrificial ceremony where one of them should be anointed as king (3–5).

Samuel made a common mistake as he looked for a king among Jesse's sons. Seven sons passed before Samuel, but God indicated that he had not chosen any of them to be king though they were fine young men. God's choice was the youngest who had not been invited to the ceremony. David was a man after God's own heart and the Lord told Samuel to anoint him as king. The Spirit of the Lord then came upon David (6–13; cp. 13:14; Acts 13:22).

Samuel looked at outward appearances *but the LORD looks at the heart* (6–7). Never forget that *the LORD looks at the heart*. He looks at your heart and my heart. He knows our motives and our desires. He sees our pretence when we try to impress others with our spirituality. **Oh, let us be real and genuine. Let us get rid of all sham and pretence in our lives.** We may deceive our fellow-believers, we may even deceive ourselves, but we cannot deceive God. The Lord searches the heart (Jeremiah 17:10). Let us now examine our own hearts before the Lord.

1 & 2 SAMUEL

The Hebrew Old Testament has only one book of Samuel and it was not divided into two books until the 16th century AD. This is an artificial division which breaks up the record of the reign of Saul and the end of his dynasty, as well as the history of David.

The first book of Samuel records the transition from the rule of the judges to that of the monarchy in Israel. Four characters dominate the record – Eli, Samuel, Saul and David. While Samuel was growing up in Shiloh, there were other judges beside Eli, who ruled different parts of Israel, eg. Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon and Abdon (Judges 11 and 12). Samson was judge over Judah and Dan towards the end of Eli's life, overlapping into Samuel's period as judge at Shiloh. Samuel was a prophet as well as a judge (1 Samuel 3:20–21; 7:15).

We see in these books, the contrast between the attitude of Saul and David. Saul rebelled against God's prophets and never came to true repentance but David heeded the prophets and repented of his sin. God promised David that his kingdom would last for ever. Our great Prophet, Priest and King, the Lord Jesus Christ, fulfilled this promise (2 Samuel 7:16; cp. Luke 1:32–33). Many of David's psalms contain prophecies concerning the Lord Jesus Christ (eg. Psalms 18, 22 and 69).

Approximate dates:

1107 – 1067 BC	Eli is judge.
1105 BC ?	Samuel born.
1067 BC	Samuel is judge.
1043 – 1010 BC	Saul's reign.
1020 BC ?	Death of Samuel.
1010 – 970 BC	David's reign.

*You have rejected the word of the LORD,
and the LORD has rejected you*

Outline of 1 Samuel

1. The life and ministry of Samuel (chapters 1 to 7)
 - The birth and early years of Samuel – 1:1 to 3:21
 - War with the Philistines – 4:1 to 7:17
2. The reign of Saul (chapters 8 to 31)
 - Israel requests a king – 8:1–22
 - Saul anointed king – 9:1 to 10:27
 - Saul’s victory over the Ammonites – 11:1–15
 - Samuel addresses Israel – 12:1–25
 - Saul’s disobedience and rejection as king – 13:1 to 15:35
 - David anointed as king – 16:1–23
 - The last days and downfall of Saul – 17:1 to 31:13

For further reading: I have found Dale Ralph Davis very helpful and relevant in his commentary on 1 Samuel, ‘LOOKING ON THE HEART’ published by Christian Focus. You will find several quotations from this book in my notes.

Saul eventually owned up to his sin but he excused himself by blaming the people saying that he was afraid of them (24). Saul begged Samuel to go with him to worship the Lord but the old prophet refused and gave him a solemn message, ‘*You have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel*’ (26; cp. verse 23). As he turned to go away, Saul tried to detain him by seizing the edge of his robe which was then torn. This was a sign that the Lord had torn the kingdom from him and had given it to someone else (27–28).

Samuel told Saul that ‘*the Strength of Israel will not lie nor relent*’ (29). God’s word that he had rejected Saul from being king would not be changed (23). Saul prevailed on Samuel to remain while he worshipped the Lord. He wanted to avoid loss of face (honour) in the sight of the people. Samuel executed the king of the Amalekites and departed (33). He was never to see Saul again, but he mourned for him (35).

What are we to make of the statement that *the LORD regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel* (35) which appears to contradict verse 29? The Hebrew word is the same as that translated ‘*relent*’ (29 – both are translated ‘repent’ in the AV). We must understand that this is quite different from the regrets that we have, when we make mistakes. The all-wise God cannot make a mistake. The Hebrew word also carries the idea of ‘sighing.’ Dale Ralph Davis comments, ‘Only in the consistent God of verse 29 and in the sorrowful God of verse 35 do we find a God worthy of praise. Here is a God who is neither fickle in his ways nor indifferent in his purposes. Here is a God who has both firmness and feeling’ (COMMENTARY ON 1 SAMUEL, page 131).

God is not indifferent when we persist in rejecting the teaching of the Bible. The day will come when he no longer speaks to us!

To obey is better than sacrifice

Saul was victorious but he spared Agag, king of Amalek and kept the best of the livestock. He and his army were unwilling to destroy them (9). *The word of the LORD came to Samuel, saying, 'I greatly regret that I have set up Saul as king, for he has turned back from following me, and has not performed my commandments'* (10–11). * Samuel was grieved (translated 'angry' in some Bible versions). The distressed prophet *cried out to the LORD all night* (11). He heard that the king had gone to Carmel and had set up a monument for himself (12). That sums up Saul! He was a self-centred, self-willed man who sought his own honour rather than that of God.

Samuel went to Gilgal and Saul greeted him by saying that he had *performed the commandment of the LORD*. The bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the oxen gave the game away, however (13–14). We cannot hide sin; it cries out to God and he hears it (cp. Genesis 4:10). Saul tried to excuse himself by lying, saying that the animals were intended for sacrifice to God at Gilgal. Samuel told Saul that God had sent him on a mission to destroy the Amalekites, but he had failed to obey God. He had also done *evil in the sight of the LORD* by keeping the spoils of battle (15–19). Saul insisted that he had obeyed God, but that the people were responsible for taking the plunder and the animals (20–21). Witchcraft and idolatry are dreadful sins, but Samuel pointed out to Saul that rebellion and stubbornness are just as evil in the sight of God. He had rejected the word of the Lord, and because of this God had rejected him from being king (22–23).

There is a solemn warning here. God demands total obedience from us. Partial obedience is not good enough. God will not accept our second best – *to obey is better than sacrifice* (22). The Lord Jesus became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross in order to save us from our sin (Philippians 2:8). He said, *'If you love me, keep my commandments'* (John 14:15).

* See tomorrow's notes concerning God 'repenting' or 'regretting.'

The LORD had closed her womb

During the time of the Judges, Israel was in a confused and lawless state. *Everyone did what was right in his own eyes* (Judges 21:25). The Lord always has a faithful remnant, even in dark and confusing times. When many had turned to idol worship, Elkanah faithfully took his family to Shiloh every year to worship and sacrifice to the Lord (3–4). All was not well in this religious family, however. Elkanah had two wives and one of them, Hannah, was desperately unhappy because she was childless and was despised by the other wife, Peninnah (6–7). Hannah described herself as *a woman of sorrowful spirit* (15). Though polygamy was common in Old Testament times, it was not ordained by God (Genesis 2:18,24; cp. 1 Timothy 3:2,12). Polygamy brought stress and trouble into many families (eg. those of Abraham, David and Solomon).

Peninnah resented Elkanah's tender affection for Hannah, but she had what Hannah desperately desired – she was blessed with children. Elkanah *loved Hannah, although the LORD had closed her womb* (5), but he did not fully appreciate just how much this destroyed Hannah's happiness and that she could not eat (8). Though she had Elkanah's love, she longed to bear his children.

Peninnah often taunted Hannah, especially before they went to Shiloh to worship. No doubt, she delighted to infer that Hannah must be out of favour with God, *because the LORD had closed her womb* (6). Notice how the sovereignty of God is acknowledged in this desperate situation – the Lord had closed Hannah's womb. Why did God allow this trial to come upon Hannah? Many a child of God has asked a similar question concerning their own unhappy circumstances. Job was such a person. When we suffer tragedy, loss or disappointment, we may wonder whether God really does love us and care for us. God loved Hannah and was to work beyond her wildest dreams. The words of the hymn are true:– For I will be with thee thy troubles to bless; and sanctify to thee thy deepest distress. **Dear perplexed Christian, take heart! The Lord does love you. Trust in him for he will not fail you.**

I ... have poured out my soul before the LORD

Hannah's yearly visits to the tabernacle at Shiloh were never happy occasions (7–8), but the years of sorrow were soon to end. Following the family meal in Shiloh, she went to the tabernacle to seek the Lord in prayer. Despite her sorrow, she had not given up on prayer!

Hannah was *in bitterness of soul* (10). Dale R. Davis writes, 'Sometimes tears themselves apparently constitute prayer, for the Lord hears "the sound of [our] weeping" (Psalm 6:8).' (COMMENTARY ON 1 SAMUEL, page 14). What must we do when we are miserable and in bitterness of soul? We must do what Hannah did, and pray to the Lord. She called upon God to remember her and she vowed that if he gave her a son, she would give him back to the Lord (11). (Dale R. Davis comments, 'She addresses Yahweh of hosts, cosmic ruler, sovereign of every and all power, and assumes that the broken heart of a relatively obscure woman in the hill country of Ephraim matters to him' (COMMENTARY ON 1 SAMUEL, page 15).

It is a sad reflection on the state of religion in those times that Eli thought that Hannah was drunk in God's house as she fervently prayed (13–15). Hannah responded to Eli's accusation, '*No, my lord, I am a woman of sorrowful spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor intoxicating drink, but have poured out my soul before the LORD*' (15). Eli blessed her, saying, '*Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition which you have asked of him*' (17). Hannah came to Shiloh burdened and sorrowful, but she was so different when she left – *She ate, and her face was no longer sad* (18).

Many Christians are desperately unhappy and sorrowful because of difficult and perplexing circumstances. **Are you burdened or discouraged? Whatever you do, do not stop praying or attending the house of the Lord?** Many a sorrowing Christian has dragged himself (herself) to worship God with his people. There, they have poured out their soul *before the LORD*, and he has met them. They go away rejoicing, and with a song in their heart. Hallelujah!

Now therefore, heed the voice of the words of the LORD

Saul was given one more chance to prove that he would obey the Lord. Samuel said to him, '*Now therefore, heed the voice of the words of the LORD*' (1). He was told to destroy the Amalekites, who were long-standing enemies of God's people (Exodus 17:8–16). This may appear harsh, but they were such a cruel, wicked and degraded people (cp. verse 33) that they were to be completely destroyed (3). Dale Ralph Davis asks, 'Is Yahweh not slow to anger when he gives them three hundred years to repent?' (COMMENTARY, page 125). On the other hand, the kindness of the Kenites towards Israel is remembered, and Saul warned them to depart from among the Amalekites (6).

Many of us may feel uncomfortable with the severity of God in his dealings with the Amalekites. **Should a holy God avenge his people? The answer is an emphatic, 'Yes!'** The Lord reminds us that his punishment of the Amalekites was just because of what they had done to Israel when they had left Egypt (2). They had attacked the weakest and most vulnerable of the Israelites and they had not feared God (Deuteronomy 25:17–19). Had they feared God, they would have hesitated to attack his people.

Dale Ralph Davis writes (COMMENTARY ON 1 SAMUEL, page 125), 'It is precisely in God's vengeance that his people find comfort! Yahweh does not forget how his enemies have hated, trampled, and crushed his people. To hear, "See! Your God will come with vengeance!" (Isaiah 35:4) is to hear good news of great joy, for that means that God will put down and overthrow all who strangle and oppress his people. If he does not do that, what ultimate hope do we have? No vengeance on God's enemies means no deliverance for his people. The "full gospel," the good news in all its completeness, always proclaims both the year of the Lord's favour and the day of vengeance of our God (Isaiah 61:2). His people enjoy his favour, his enemies receive his vengeance. Perhaps we do not understand this as we should? But God's suffering people always have; it is the bedrock of their prayers (Revelation 6:9–10).'

My father has troubled the land

The scent of victory over the Philistines led Saul to make a very rash vow; he put his army under an oath cursing anyone who ate before evening. Jonathan was not present at that time because he was fighting the Philistines and on his return, he ate some honey. When told of Saul's oath, he rightly observed, *'My father has troubled the land'* and if the people had been allowed to eat, they would have had the stamina for a greater victory (24–30). When the oath expired in the evening, the desperately hungry army rushed on the spoil. They violated the law of Moses by eating meat with blood and by killing calves with their mothers (Leviticus 17:10–14; 22:28). Saul told them that they had dealt treacherously in sinning against the Lord. He did not see that it was his folly that had led the people into sin. He called for a large stone to be rolled to him so that it could be used for the slaughter of the animals (to drain their blood) and as an altar to the Lord (31–35).

Saul now wanted to take his army (refreshed with food, but still needing sleep) to fight through the night to consolidate his victory against the Philistines. The priest said that they should draw near to God in prayer. When Saul asked counsel of God, Heaven was silent (36–37). He rightly assumed that there was sin among them and he stated his determination to have the offender put to death, even if it was his own son, Jonathan. The casting of lots revealed that Jonathan was guilty of breaking his father's vow to God. Saul would have killed him but for the protection of the people who recognised that God had wrought a great victory through Jonathan (38–45). Saul's ongoing battles and the names of his family and army commander are also recorded (47–52).

Saul had plenty of religious zeal even though he was out of touch with God. He was the man who was troubling the land. **Christian, If you are sinning against God, you will not only bring unhappiness to yourself, but you are leaving yourself wide open for Satan to cause you to bring trouble to your church.** The Lord will be silent to your prayers until you repent of your sin.

And the LORD remembered her

We saw yesterday how Hannah went to the tabernacle with a heavy heart and that she came away a different woman (17–18)! She had called upon God to remember her (11) and her prayer was answered. *And the LORD remembered her* (19). Hannah called her son, 'Samuel', which means 'heard by God.' Hannah had vowed that if God gave her a son, she would give him to the Lord, to serve him as a Nazirite for life (11; cp. Numbers 6:1–5). The Nazirite was separated to God and was obliged:

- To abstain from taking wine.
- To refrain from cutting his hair.
- To avoid ceremonial defilement through touching a dead body.

Hannah remained faithful to her vow and when Samuel was weaned, she brought him to Eli at Shiloh (in those days children were often three or four years old when weaned). Imagine how she must have felt. She was so thankful to God for hearing her prayer but she was now to lend him to the Lord. She knew that she would only see her precious son once each year (22–28; 2:20) but she was determined to keep her vow to God. Elkanah fully supported Hannah saying, *'Only let the LORD establish his word'* (23).

Never make rash vows to God. If you make promises to God, he will hold you to them. Have you made vows and forgotten them? The Lord honoured Hannah for keeping her vow. The Lord gave her five more children (2:20–21) and Samuel grew up to be a great and godly man. **The Lord is no one's debtor; he richly repays those who are prepared to obey him.**

*We lose what on ourselves we spend,
We have as treasure without end
Whatever, Lord, to thee we lend,
Who givest all.*

(Christopher Wordsworth)

He will guard the feet of his saints

Hannah kept her vow to lend Samuel to the Lord, whatever the cost to herself (1:11,28). The answer to her prayer following years of trial had done much to strengthen her faith and love for the Lord. She uttered a great hymn of praise to God (1–10). Samuel followed in her footsteps and was known for his prayer life (12:19,23; Jeremiah 15:1).

Hannah's song is full of praise to God as it expresses her joy. Now she is full of thanksgiving as she testifies that her *horn* ('strength') is exalted. She was now able to smile at Peninnah who had made her so miserable and provoked her when she was childless (1; cp. 1:6–7). The song is also prophetic, pointing to the victory of the Lord over his enemies and to the coming of Christ's kingdom. The Lord's instrument to accomplish victory over Israel's enemies would be the king anointed by her son, Samuel. This prophecy also points to Christ, the Anointed of God, the eternal King (10–11). Mary's Magnificat echoes many of the thoughts in this song (Luke 1:46–55).

In her song, Hannah praises God for his glorious attributes:

- His holiness and strength (2).
- His infinite knowledge and justice (3).
- His sovereignty and his triumph over all his enemies (6–10).

With such a God to watch over us, we too can smile at our enemies (1). *He will guard the feet of his saints* (9). The Hebrew word translated *saints* in this verse could be rendered 'faithful ones' or 'godly ones'. Matthew Henry comments, 'If he will keep their feet, how much more their head and hearts ... While we keep God's ways, he will keep our feet. See Psalm 37:23–24.'

Christian, Hannah's God is your God! He will keep you and watch over you. Be encouraged and rejoice in him!

So the LORD saved Israel that day

Saul heard from his watchmen that the Philistines were in disarray. His own company of six hundred men did not appear to have any missing but a roll-call revealed that Jonathan and his armour-bearer were not there. Ahijah, of the rejected priestly-line, had the ark of God with him (16–18). Matthew Henry comments that Saul was 'desiring to know whether it would be safe for him to attack the Philistines, upon the disorder they perceived them to be in. Many will consult God about their safety, that would never consult him about their duty.'

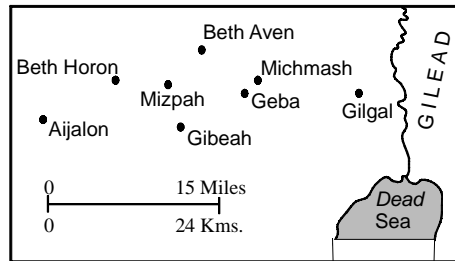
As the disarray and noise in the Philistine camp increased, Saul ordered the priest, '*Withdraw your hand,*' in other words, 'Wait no further for an answer' (19). Matthew Henry writes, 'He was very unwise indeed, if (as some think) he forbade him to lift up his hands in prayer.' Saul was determined to take advantage of the Philistines' distress and did not wait for any divine direction.

Only Saul and Jonathan had spears and swords among the Israelites because of the mastery of the Philistines (13:19–22). God brought great confusion upon the well-armed Philistines who began killing each other. The Hebrews who had previously deserted Saul to go over to the Philistines rejoined their king as the Israelites pursued their enemy. Other Israelites who had hidden themselves in the mountains of Ephraim also joined the pursuit (20–22).

Jonathan had said to his armour bearer, '*It may be that the LORD will work for us. For nothing restrains the LORD from saving by many or by few*' (6). God vindicated Jonathan's daring faith: *So the LORD saved Israel that day* (23). The Bible and church history teach us that when all seems lost and hopeless, God steps in to deliver his people. **Let us be encouraged to earnestly seek the Lord in this time of spiritual apathy and indifference. Who knows what he may be pleased to do among us?**

For nothing restrains the LORD from saving by many or by few

Jonathan was a brave soldier whose earlier victory over the Philistines had been marred by his father's disobedience to the Lord (13:3–15). He took his armour-bearer on a daring mission to the Philistine garrison at Michmash (13:23 to 14:1) but did not tell his father of his plans. It is interesting to note that Ahijah, a grandson of Eli, was with Saul at this time (2–3). Dale Ralph Davis comments, 'Here are the leaders: sitting there is Saul, whose dynasty has been rejected (13:13–14), assisted by Ahijah, whose priestly line has been rejected. Since Samuel has left, Saul has no authorized prophetic direction; he has a rejected priestly line instead. What help can such a priest and such a king give?' (COMMENTARY ON 1 SAMUEL, page 112).



Jonathan was not a man to give in to despair. He was confident that God could give him victory over the Philistines, though he was not presumptuous ('*it may be that the LORD will work for us,*' 6). He then made a great statement of faith: '*For nothing restrains the LORD from saving by many or by few*' (6). Jonathan was not rash, however, and he sought Divine confirmation for the success of his mission (7–10). The Lord indicated through the Philistine response that Jonathan and his armour-bearer would be successful. They then killed twenty Philistines, probably those guarding the pass lying between the two armies (4–5). The Philistines were seized with panic as God sent earth tremors (14–15).

Jonathan was convinced of God's power by which he could give victory by many or by few. It is encouraging to see how God has often used just one man or a few to accomplish his purposes. Pray that the Lord will be pleased to raise up bold and faithful men in our needy times.

Samuel grew in stature, and in favour both with the LORD and men

This chapter paints a vivid contrast between two different parents. Hannah, a mother who honoured God, and Eli who was a weak and pathetic father to his two sons. Eli allowed Hophni and Phinehas, his two wicked sons, to function as priests at the tabernacle even though they were corrupt (Hebrew = 'sons of Belial') and did not know the Lord (12). He failed to restrain them from their vile deeds (3:13).

When a worshipper brought a peace offering to the tabernacle, the breast and right leg of the animal was allocated to the priest. Following the sacrifice, the worshipper was allowed to cook the flesh of the animal and eat it with his family. Eli's son's, however, sent a servant to plunge a fleshhook in the pot, and whatever meat was drawn out was taken for the priests. Apart from stealing meat allocated to the worshipper, they committed sacrilege by taking sacrificial meat before the fat was burned as laid down in the law (12–17; Leviticus 7:29–34). When a worshipper protested, the servant would threaten him (16). Even worse, they also committed lewd, immoral acts in the tabernacle (22). Their wickedness could not go unpunished.

Hannah's yearly visits to Shiloh were no longer an occasion of weeping (cp. 1:7). She made a little robe each time which she brought to Samuel (19). The Lord blessed Hannah and visited her and she had another three sons and two daughters (21). It is encouraging to observe that though the child Samuel was surrounded by such wickedness and hypocrisy, he *grew in stature, and in favour both with the LORD and men* (26; cp. Luke 2:52). Parents have awesome responsibilities before God to honour him in the training of the children entrusted to them. Christian father, Christian mother, are you lovingly but firmly training your children? **May Hannah be an inspiration to us all and Eli a warning.**

Those who honour me I will honour

The lewd and wicked behaviour of Eli's sons had become a national scandal. He heard about all that they did but remonstrated with them in vain. They had made a farce of worship and had led people into sin (24). He should have removed them from the priesthood because they had violated their sacred office. He was the judge over Israel (4:18) but he failed to punish his own sons. They had gone past the point of no return in their sin and refused to listen to their father, *because the LORD desired to kill them* (23–25). What solemn and terrifying words!

A man of God warned Eli that the Lord would bring disaster to his family. He reminded the old man of the Lord's goodness to his tribe in giving them the privilege and awesome responsibility of the priesthood (27–28). He had honoured his sons more than he honoured God (29). The priesthood would be removed from them and the wicked sons would die in one day. His descendants would know poverty and would die in the prime of life (27–36). There is a very important principle in these verses. God says, *'Those who honour me I will honour, and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed'* (30). Eli failed to honour God and this led to disaster. Hannah honoured God and he richly blessed her. **If you want to have the blessing of God on your life, you must seek to honour him in the way that you live.**

God never abdicates his sovereignty and he was quietly working out his purposes, beginning in the unhappy domestic life of a woman in the hill country of Ephraim. He wonderfully answered her prayer and she responded by faithfully honouring her promise to him. God was preparing young Samuel for great things. There is much to discourage us when many national church leaders, like Eli's sons, do not know the Lord (12), and when some tolerate or even encourage perverted sexual practices. Let us take heart from what God did in raising up Samuel. Who knows what God may be preparing for his people today?

The LORD has sought for himself a man after his own heart

Bible versions differ in their translation of verse 1 as the Hebrew is obscure. The events in this chapter could not have taken place two years after Saul became king. He was a young man when he came to the throne; here, his son, Jonathan is a grown man in command of soldiers (2; cp. 9:2). Israel had not gained freedom from foreign oppression by having a king and the Philistines had mastery over Israel (19–22; cp. 8:19–20). Jonathan's successful attack on the Philistine garrison in Geba provoked them to prepare a massive response to punish Israel (1–5).

The morale of the army which Saul had gathered at Gilgal was very low. Many deserted, some hiding themselves and others fleeing over the Jordan in the east (6–7). Samuel had told Saul to wait for him to come to Gilgal in seven days but the old prophet was delayed. The impatient and fearful king then took matters into his own hands, intruding into the sacred priestly office by sacrificing a burnt offering.

Samuel arrived at Gilgal as soon as Saul had finished making the burnt offering. Samuel challenged him concerning his disobedience. The king made his excuses – the people were scattered – Samuel had failed to arrive at the time promised – the Philistines were ready for battle and he had not sought the Lord (8–12). These excuses may appear reasonable but Saul knew that he had disobeyed the command of God given through Samuel. That one act of disobedience led to the removal of the kingdom from his family. Saul failed to trust in God in a crisis, though he seemed to think that he would be helped by sacrificial ritual.

Samuel told Saul, *'The LORD has sought for himself a man after his own heart'* (13–14). That person was David. **A person after God's own heart is one who trusts in him and who obeys his Word.** When our faith is tested, we must never resort to human expedients which contradict the will of God as revealed in the Bible. Is your faith being sorely tried? Do not panic, but *rest in the LORD and wait patiently for him* (Psalm 37:7). He will not fail you!

That I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you

Samuel was a great man! The people who had rejected him begged him to pray for them. Look at his response, *‘Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you’* (23). Humanly speaking, he had every reason to wash his hands of an ungrateful people who had rejected him. The Lord Jesus said, *‘Pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you’* (Matthew 5:44). Samuel lived by that precept and so must we. Is there someone who has hurt or offended you, for whom you should be praying? The Lord is waiting to hear your prayers for them. Could it be that your silence is keeping you from enjoying God’s blessing in your life?

Prayer is a wonderful privilege which is much neglected. We can come to the throne of grace at any time and find God’s help (Hebrews 4:16). Our heavenly Father delights to hear our prayers but we must never forget that it is sin to neglect prayer. Samuel was very much aware that if he ceased to pray for the Israelites, he would be sinning against the Lord. Have you thought about that? If you neglect prayer, you too are sinning against the Lord? Your pastor needs your prayers, missionaries need to be remembered much in prayer, there are needs in your church that call for prayer and there are friends and relatives who are without Christ and lost. You also need to pray for grace each day to live the Christian life. **If you do not pray, you can hardly expect any answers to prayer. How is your prayer life?**

*Have you no words? Ah! think again,
Words flow apace when you complain,
And fill your fellow-creature’s ear
With the sad tale of all your care.*

*Were half the breath thus vainly spent
To heaven in supplication sent,
Your cheerful song would oftener be,
Hear what the Lord has done for me!*

(William Cowper)

Then the LORD appeared again in Shiloh

Worship had degenerated in Israel through the weakness of Eli and the wickedness of his sons, Hophni and Phinehas. *The word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no widespread revelation* (1). Another verse of Scripture is an apt comment on those dark days. *Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint* (Proverbs 29:18). Things were soon to change following the call of Samuel. The boy had never before heard the voice of God and when he heard his name being called, he thought that he was hearing Eli. He did not recognise that God was speaking to him. He *did not yet know the LORD* (7) and this was his first encounter with the living God. Though Eli was wrong in so many ways, he was still able to offer good spiritual advice to a puzzled Samuel (8–9).

The Lord told Samuel that Eli and his house had so often despised the Lord that no sacrifice would avail for them. Samuel was afraid to pass on to Eli the terrifying message of judgment that God had given to him (10–16). He told Eli everything when the old priest threatened to put him under a curse. Eli accepted the message, resigning himself to the Lord’s will (16–18).

Samuel grew up *and the Lord was with him* (19) ... *Then the LORD appeared again in Shiloh. For the LORD revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the LORD* (21). What a contrast to the opening verse of the chapter. Through the ministry of Samuel, the word of God was now spreading throughout the entire length of Israel from Dan in the far north to Beersheba in the deep south (20–21; 4:1). How did it all begin? God used the prayers of a humble, broken woman who poured out her soul before him!

We need to recover urgency in prayer and in the faithful preaching of God’s Word if we are to have any hope of blessing or of changing our nation. Pray that God will raise up godly men to pastor the many churches without pastors. Be fervent in prayer and ground yourself in God’s Word. The Lord will honour a faithful people!

Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines?

The Israelites fought against their old enemy, the Philistines and were defeated. The elders of Israel acknowledged that their defeat came from the Lord. They asked, ‘*Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines?*’ (3). There are times when we suffer and are perplexed at God’s dealings with us. We may ask, “Why is God doing this to me?” or, ‘Why has God allowed this to happen?’ There are important lessons in this chapter of Samuel.

- There is no evidence that the elders of Israel sought God in prayer. The Word of God asks, ‘*Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray*’ (James 5:13). Prayer should be a way of life for the Christian. God is our heavenly Father (Matthew 6:8–9) and it is a great privilege to come to him in prayer with our adoration, thanksgiving and requests. **If we do not pray, we are no better than those Israelites.**

- *The word of Samuel came to all Israel* (1), but they do not appear to have sought his advice; it may have been that the prophet was in some other part of the country (cp. 7:16–17). The Israelites failed to consider the warnings that God had given them in the past. The answer to their question, ‘*Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines?*’ (3) is found in Leviticus 26:14–17 and Deuteronomy 28:15, 25. God had warned the nation that if they departed from him, disaster and defeat would come upon them. God had also warned Eli that he would punish his wicked sons, Hophni and Phinehas, and that they would both die in a day (2:34). Eli had failed to deal with his sons and God was about to judge him as he had said (3:10–16).

The elders of Israel were foolish to imagine that taking the ark of the covenant into battle would assure them of victory. They did not see that God was dealing with them in mercy as well as in judgment. There could be no blessing in the nation while the sons of Eli were officiating at the tabernacle and defying God with their wicked and profane ways. The Lord was about to remove them – judgment must *begin at the house of God* (1 Peter 4:17).

The LORD will not forsake his people, for his great name’s sake

Samuel spoke to the nation at the coronation of King Saul and challenged them to testify if he had oppressed or defrauded them. They had to admit that he had never been guilty of these sins and he called on God as witness (1–5). He went on to remind them of the history of Israel. The Lord had been good to them but they had turned aside from him to serve other gods. They had now rejected Samuel, the servant of the Lord, and God had given them a king just as they had demanded (6–13). He urged them to learn the lessons of history. If they and their king feared the Lord, served him and obeyed him, they would know God’s blessing. If they rebelled against the Lord, his hand would be against them as it was against their fathers (14–15).

Samuel then told the people that he would call upon the Lord to send thunder and rain so that they would see that their wickedness was great in asking for a king. The time of the wheat harvest (mid-May to mid-June) was in the dry season. The people recognised that by sending thunder and rain in answer to Samuel’s prayer, the Lord was vindicating Samuel and confirming his word through him. They were filled with the fear of God and of Samuel, and they begged the old man to pray for them. They also acknowledged their sin in asking for a king (16–19).

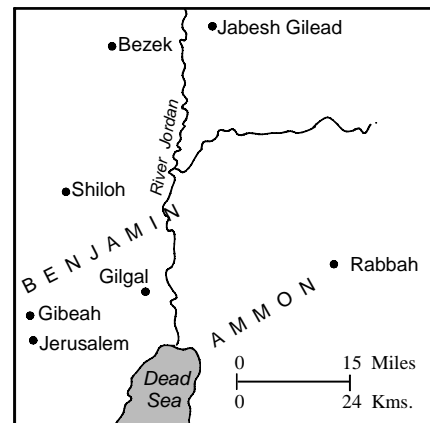
Samuel assured them that the Lord would not forsake them if they served him with all their heart and kept from turning aside to *go after empty things* (idols; 20–22). The statement in verse 22 is also a glorious promise for every Christian: *For the LORD will not forsake his people, for his great name’s sake, because it has pleased the LORD to make you his people.* God’s name is associated with his holy character. For him to fail us or to forsake us would be a denial of what he is. It has pleased God to chose us to salvation, to be his special people and he will never leave us (Hebrews 13:5; 1 Peter 2:9). **How can we be unfaithful to such a glorious and gracious God?**

The Spirit of God came upon Saul

The leaders of Jabesh Gilead weakly promised to serve the Ammonite invaders but Nahash, the Ammonite king, wanted to humiliate them completely. He would put out their right eyes (this would render them unfit for battle while not preventing them from working as slaves). The confident Ammonites willingly gave them seven days respite to see if they could find help in Israel (1–3). Those who compromise with tyrants will find that they will demand more and more.

The people of Gibeah wept when they heard the dreadful news. Jabesh Gilead had enjoyed close ties with the tribe of Benjamin since four hundred of its young women had married into that tribe (Judges 21:12–14). In the meantime, Saul was looking after his herd. *The Spirit of God came upon Saul*, and he was very angry when he heard the news from Gibeah (4–6). He summoned the nation to battle and gathered a great army at Bezek. He then sent messengers to Jabesh Gilead promising help within twenty four hours (7–9). Early next morning, God gave a great victory to Israel and Saul became highly regarded. Some wanted those who had opposed the reign of Saul (11:27) to be slain, but the young king was merciful and acknowledged the Lord's goodness in giving them victory (10–13). Samuel called the people to Gilgal and led them in a joyful coronation of Saul (14–15).

It took the righteous anger of one man to stir Israel into action. Righteous (not sinful) anger can drive us to accomplish great things for God in the power of the Holy Spirit. **Are we too complacent to be angry at Satan or aroused to be zealous for the Lord?**

*Let us bring the ark of the covenant... that it may save us*

We repeat yesterday's reading in order to learn more from these verses. The elders of Israel had asked, 'Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines?' (3). They came to the conclusion that they were defeated because they had not taken the ark of the covenant into battle with them. They said, 'Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD from Shiloh to us, that when it comes among us it may save us from the hand of our enemies.' The Israelites sent word to Shiloh some 22 miles (35 kilometres) away calling for the ark of the covenant to be brought to them.

The ark of the covenant was a wooden box overlaid with gold. It was 2½ cubits in length, 1½ cubits wide, and 1½ cubits in height (Exodus 25:10–11). It had a lid called 'the mercy seat' which was sprinkled with the blood of animal sacrifice on the Day of Atonement. The ark was kept in the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle but was sometimes taken into battle (Numbers 10:34–36) as a sign that God was leading his people.

The Israelites foolishly imagined that if they took the ark (which was a token of God's presence) into the next battle, it would save them (3). The ark had gone before them when they had crossed the river Jordan into the promised land and in the destruction of Jericho. Surely God would never allow the ark to be captured? God would be obliged to safeguard his honour. Dale Ralph Davis comments, 'When we, whether Israelites or Christians, operate this way, our concern is not to seek God, but to control him, not to submit to God, but to use him. So we prefer religious magic to spiritual holiness; we are interested in success, not repentance' (COMMENTARY ON 1 SAMUEL, page 43). **Let us remember the lesson that religious ritual or activity is no substitute for godliness and humble submission to the will of the Lord.**

* A cubit was approximately 17½ inches or 44½ centimetres so the ark measured 3¾ feet long × 2¼ feet wide × 2¼ feet high (111 × 67 × 67 centimetres).

Ichabod ... the glory has departed

The Israelites greeted the arrival of the ark with a great shout (5). The Philistines heard this shout and they were afraid on hearing that the ark was in the Israelite camp, but they rose to the challenge, saying, ‘*Be strong and conduct yourselves like men ... and fight*’ (9; cp. 1 Corinthians 16:13). They again defeated the Israelites and captured the ark and Hophni and Phinehas were slain. The Philistines teach us the lesson that we should never be defeatist in our Christian warfare. God is with us when we walk with him in holiness and obedience to his Word.

Eli was anxiously awaiting news *for his heart trembled for the ark of God* (13). He knew that a superstitious belief in the ark would not save Israel. On hearing of the capture of the ark and of the death of his sons, he fell off his seat and died after breaking his neck (14–18). The tragic news of the capture of the ark, the deaths of Eli and her husband brought Phinehas’ pregnant wife into labour, and she died as she was giving birth. She uttered her last words to name the boy ‘*Ichabod ... The glory has departed from Israel*’ (19–22).

The wife of Phinehas appears to have been a godly woman whose husband should have been a godly man. He was an uncouth and hypocritical wretch, however, who brought misery and disaster upon himself and his family. Dale Ralph Davis writes, ‘Probably she taught more theology in her death than Phinehas had done in his whole life’ (COMMENTARY ON 1 SAMUEL, page 45).

This chapter contains a solemn warning against presumption. The ark was of no avail to Israel because they were not right with God. The glory had departed. We may think that God is with us because we believe the right things, belong to a good church and have all the trappings of Christianity. If we are not walking with the Lord, we are no different from Israel of old. If you are a hypocrite, I urge you to repent of your sin and follow the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and obedience. He will then restore to you the joy of your salvation!

Valiant men ... whose hearts God had touched

Samuel again summoned the people to Mizpah where he reminded them of God’s past dealings with Israel. The faithful servant of God was not afraid to tell the people the truth about themselves. He told them that by demanding a king, they had rejected God who had delivered their ancestors from the Egyptians and from their enemies (19). His words seemed to fall on deaf ears and they rejoiced when Saul was presented to them (24).

Saul appeared to be a reluctant and humble king who hid himself, but the Lord revealed his whereabouts. He was to become so different in later years when he would have killed David whom he perceived as a threat to his throne. He was brought from his hiding place and stood head and shoulders above the people (20–23). Samuel proclaimed Saul as king and explained the rights and duties of the kingship (24–25)

Saul’s beginnings were promising: – the hand of God was upon his life. He was prepared to remain silent in the face of opposition from some rebels who despised him and refused to bring him presents. He left God to vindicate him (27; cp. 11:12–13).

Saul had with him *valiant men ... whose hearts God had touched* (26). This is the great need in our churches today – men and women whose hearts have been touched by God. Such people are loyal to God and his truth, faithful in service, courageous in the face of opposition, and ready to persevere when the going is tough. **We all need the touch of God in our lives if we are to serve him acceptably. Has God touched your heart?**

*He who would valiant be
’Gainst all disaster,
Let him in constancy
Follow the Master.
There’s no discouragement
Shall make him once relent
His first avowed intent
To be a pilgrim.*

(John Bunyan)

Do as the occasion demands; for God is with you

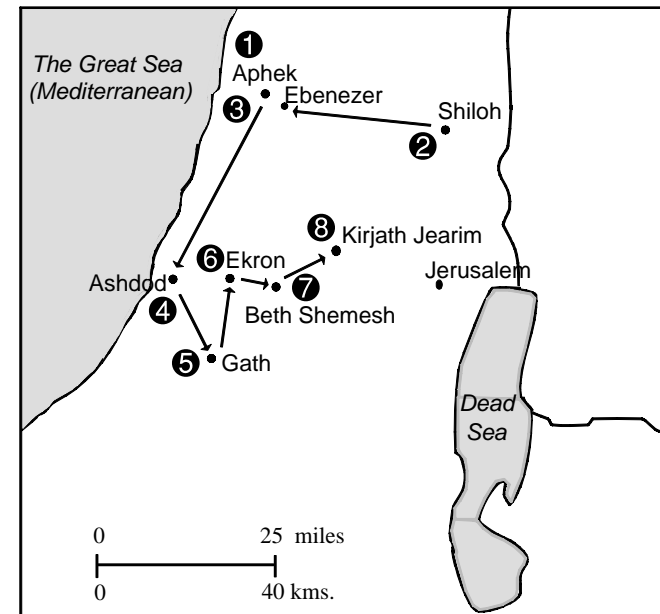
Samuel instructed Saul to send his servant on ahead of them and he then brought to him the word of God (9:27). He anointed Saul and kissed him (1). The kiss here was a sign of respect and loyalty, not of affection (cp. Psalm 2:12). He promised Saul three signs which would confirm that he was God's anointed to lead Israel and that God was with him (7). Saul would meet:

1. Two men by Rachel's tomb, who would tell him that the lost donkeys were found, but that his father was now very worried about him and his whereabouts (2; cp. 9:5).
2. He would meet three men going to Bethel, one carrying three young goats, the other carrying two loaves of bread, and the third carrying a skin of wine. They would greet him and give him two loaves of bread (3-4).
3. A group of prophets with musical instruments at the hill of God (the mention of a Philistine garrison is an indication of the dominion of the Philistines over Israel). The prophets would be prophesying and the Spirit of the Lord would come upon him so that he too would prophesy with them and be turned into another man (5-6).

All these signs were fulfilled that day, exactly as Samuel had prophesied. God gave Saul another heart (9); this means that Saul was changed and given the ability to rule the nation as king. There can be no doubt that the hand of God was upon Saul. Samuel told him that after these signs had been given, he must *'do as the occasion demands (do what your hand finds to do- ESV); for God is with you'* (7). We often fail to use opportunities given to us by the Lord and we forget that he is with us. **Let us be ready to do as the occasion demands, being ready to speak or work for the Lord at all times.**

Saul's uncle was aware that Samuel had been in contact with his nephew and he wanted to know what the prophet had said to him. Saul told him that Samuel had informed him that the missing donkeys had been found but said nothing about his anointing as king (14-16).

Israel's defeat and the loss of the ark of the covenant



1. Israelites are defeated by the Philistines at Aphek (4:1-2).
- 2.. Hophni and Phinehas bring the ark to Ebenezer at the request of the elders of Israel (4:3-5).
3. Israelites are defeated in a second battle. Hophni and Phinehas slain, the ark captured (4:9-11).
4. Philistines take the ark and place it in the temple of their god, Dagon. The image of Dagon is broken and the people of Ashdod plagued (5:1-7).
- 5 & 6. The ark is sent to Gath where the people are also plagued. The same happens when the ark is taken to Ekron (5:8-12).
7. The ark is returned to Israel with gifts on a new cart but without a driver. It arrives at Beth Shemesh where the Lord plagues the people for looking into the ark (6:1-19).
8. The ark is taken to Kirjath Jearim where it remains until David moves it to Jerusalem (6:20 to 7:1; 2 Samuel 6).

The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us

The Philistines knew that the ark of the covenant was a token of Jehovah's presence with his people (4:6–8). When they captured the ark they placed it in the house of their god Dagon at Ashdod. To the Philistines, the ark represented the God of Israel, Jehovah, who had been defeated by Dagon. The joy of the victorious Philistines was short-lived. The following day, they found their idol lying on its face before the ark of the Lord. They set it up again but the next day found it lying on the ground with its head and hands broken off. The Lord visited the people of Ashdod with judgment and struck them with tumours (1–6). Some commentators suggest that God had struck them with bubonic plague, the 'tumours' being swollen lymph glands in the groin, a symptom of this disease. Rats which carry the disease had ravaged the land (6:5).

The worried men of Ashdod recognised that this was the work of Jehovah, the God of Israel, and that he is superior to their god Dagon. They decided, '*The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us*' (1–7). The ark was sent to Gath where God also visited the people with death and destruction. The ark was then sent to Ekron whose inhabitants knew by now that this was no blessing, but would bring disaster to them. Their worst fears were realised and the distraught Philistines were now determined to return the ark to Israel (8–12).

The Israelites had to learn that the ark of God, though sacred, was not a 'magic box' which would guarantee Divine blessing to people who disobeyed the Lord. It was a symbol of the presence of God but he had withdrawn that presence from them. The Philistines had to learn that their god, Dagon, was useless. The fallen, smashed idol says it all – Dagon was a useless god! No head to think or to wisely direct, no hands to help in time of need. *He who sits in the heavens shall laugh* (Psalm 2:4). **Are you trusting in the living God each day?**

I have looked upon my people, because their cry has come to me

Saul came from an influential family in the tribe of Benjamin (1). He is described as being *a choice and handsome young man* (2). His father's donkeys were lost and he sent Saul and a servant to search for the missing animals. Their search was unsuccessful and they eventually came to the land of Zuph, birthplace of Samuel (cp. 1:1). The servant had heard that there was a man of God in the city who was a seer (or prophet). He would surely be able to give them direction; that seer was Samuel (1–14).

The Lord is sovereign over everything that happens, even the loss of the donkeys and in bringing Saul and his servant to Samuel. He told Samuel, '*Tomorrow, about this time I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin.*' Samuel was to anoint him as commander (prince) over Israel and he would deliver the Israelites from the Philistines. The Lord added, '*for I have looked upon my people, because their cry has come to me*' (15–17). The history of Israel is marked by the rebellion and ingratitude of the Israelites toward God, and of his patience, compassion and love towards them. How good is the God to whom we belong and whom we worship!

The Israelites wanted a king so that they would be like all the other nations and Saul appeared to be the ideal man. He had everything going for him to be a godly and successful king. He had the prayers and the counsel of Samuel who was able to tell him all that was in his heart (19). He had the promise of God to help him and to give him victory against the Philistines (16).

The Lord often uses things in his purposes which may seem quite insignificant to us. The loss of his father's asses brought about a sequence of events that were to be life-changing for Saul and very important for Israel. One of the great joys of being a Christian is knowing that God is working all things together for good, even loss (Romans 8:28).

That we may also be like all the nations

Israel's elders rightly wanted good judges, but a more subtle reason lay behind their desire for a king (4–5). God told Samuel to warn the people that they would have cause to regret their clamour for a king (9–18). They were so determined to have a king, however, that they refused to listen to him. They responded by saying, *'No, but we will have a king over us, that we may also be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles'* (19–20). In Eli's time, the Israelites trusted in the ark of the covenant for deliverance in battle, rather than trusting in God (4:3). They were now looking for a king to fight their battles. They had forgotten that the Lord had miraculously helped them in the past (7:8–13). 'Ebenezer' no longer figured in their thinking.

The Israelites wanted to be *like all the nations* (5, 20) but God had chosen them to be different from all the nations (Exodus 19:5–6; Deuteronomy 7:6; 28:1). **The church has often made the mistake of becoming like the world in order to reach the world with the gospel. The world will never be won to Christ by worldly-minded Christians!** We are not to be conformed to this world but be conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29; 12:2; cp. 1 John 2:15–17). We must always trust in the Lord for his blessing on our Christian work, even when success seems to be far away.

The Lord allowed Israel to have their king. He did raise up good kings, notably David, but most of the kings of Israel led the people away from God, especially those of the northern kingdom after the death of Solomon. We read the words, *made Israel sin* time and again (eg. 1 Kings 15:30,34; 16:13,19,26). The words of Psalm 106:15 illustrate Israel's folly. *He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul.* If God says 'No' to any of our prayers, it is for our good.

Who is able to stand before this holy LORD God?

The ark of the LORD had been among the superstitious, idolatrous Philistines for seven months. They now knew that Israel's God was not just a tribal deity and they wanted rid of the ark. The presence of God is a delight to those who love him and obey him, but terrifying to those who do not know him. Their priests and diviners advised them to prepare five golden tumours and five golden rats (an indication that the plague was caused by rats), as a trespass offering, one for each principal Philistine city. These were to be sent to Israel with the ark on a new cart to be drawn by two cows which had never been yoked. The cows did not return to their calves from whom they had been separated but headed straight for Israel. This was a further proof to the Philistines that the plagues had been sent by the Lord. They had also heard of the judgment of God upon the Egyptians in the days of Moses (1–12). They now revered God but they did not repent of their sin.

Beth Shemesh was set apart as a city for the Levites (Joshua 21:16) and the people rejoiced at the arrival of the ark. The Levites offered the cows as a burnt offering to the Lord as well as other sacrifices (13–15). The Lord struck the men of Beth Shemesh, however, because they looked into the ark (19). * Levites knew more than any that the ark was sacred and there was no excuse for this sacrilege (cp. Numbers 4:20).

The men of Beth Shemesh hastily arranged for the ark to be sent to Kirjath Jearim (21). They too were uncomfortable in the presence of God, saying, *'Who is able to stand before this holy LORD God?'* (20).

Thank God for his great salvation! We can stand before God through the merit of our Saviour Jesus, who died to save sinners. **Do you really know the Lord, or are you uncomfortable in his holy presence?**

* The Hebrew of verse 19 is uncertain. Some manuscripts give the number of slain as seventy. In *The Evangelical Quarterly*, October 1943, Dr Oswald Allis argued strongly that the text reads 'And he smote seventy men, fifty (from) a thousand' (that is, 'he slew fifty out of each thousand, seventy out of 1400 men). The English Standard Version of the Bible has the figure of seventy.

Prepare your hearts for the LORD, and serve him only

The ark remained in Kirjath Jearim for twenty years (2). Samuel's teaching during this time (cp. verse 16) bore fruit and *all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD* (2). They now wanted the blessing of God's presence. Samuel promised the Israelites that if they would return to the Lord with all their hearts and put away their foreign gods, he would deliver them from their enemies. He said, '*Prepare your hearts for the LORD, and serve him only*' (3). Repentance is more than saying 'sorry' to God for our sin. It involves forsaking sin and being determined to please and obey God.

The people responded positively to Samuel's preaching. There was an expression of repentance at a great gathering at Mizpah. Water was poured out before God as a token of their hearts being poured out in repentance to God (5–6). When the Lord works, we can be sure that the devil is not far away. The Philistines heard of the gathering at Mizpah and came to attack the Israelites. The people pleaded with Samuel to pray for them which he did (8–9). Dale Ralph Davis writes, 'More and more, God's people must walk the way of desperation — prayer. Once we see this, we will no longer regard prayer as a pious cop-out, but as our only rational activity' (COMMENTARY ON 1 SAMUEL, page 60).

The Philistine army approached as Samuel was offering up a burnt offering, but God gave Israel a miraculous victory at Mizpah. Samuel set up a stone and called it, *Ebenezer*, as a memorial to the help that God had given them (7–13; *Ebenezer* means 'Stone of help'). The Israelites regained the cities that they had previously lost to the Philistines. Are you struggling and discouraged? Think of the ways in which God has dealt with you and helped you in the past. Think of your 'Ebenezers' and take heart. '*Thus far the LORD has helped us*' (12).

Each sweet Ebenezer I have in review

Confirms his good pleasure to help me quite through.

(John Newton)

Samuel prayed to the LORD

Many years had passed since the victory at Ebenezer and Samuel was now old (1). Though he was a great and a godly man, he made a terrible mistake in appointing his two sons as judges. Joel and Abijah were wicked men. They were dishonest and corrupt, accepting bribes and perverting the course of justice (1–3). We see a close resemblance to the story of Eli's two sons. The children of godly men and women sometimes rebel against the Lord bringing much heartache.

Samuel's authority was undermined by the behaviour of his sons. He repeated the mistake of Eli by allowing his sons to continue in their office. The leaders of Israel were concerned for the future; Samuel was old and it was unacceptable that his corrupt sons should take charge of the nation's affairs when he died. They also wanted a king to rule over them in order to be like other nations (5,20). We shall be thinking about this in tomorrow's notes.

Samuel prayed to the LORD because he felt rejected and he was hurt by the request of the people (6). **When others hurt us through ingratitude, unkind words or rejection, we should learn from Samuel.** We are not to nurse our wounds but unburden ourselves to the Lord in prayer. It is very easy to complain to others about our problems and forget to pray. God will give us grace and strength to cope with rejection if we look to him (Hebrews 4:16).

The Lord told Samuel to listen to what the people were saying. They were not rejecting him but were rejecting the Lord just as they had done in the past. Samuel was told to solemnly forewarn them of the dangers of taking a king to rule over them (7–9).