

The Weight of the Crown

A Summary of Samuel

1 Samuel 2:1-10

Mark Vroegop

And Hannah prayed and said, "My heart exults in the LORD; my horn is exalted in the LORD. My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in your salvation. "There is none holy like the LORD: for there is none besides you; there is no rock like our God. Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth; for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed. The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble bind on strength. Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger. The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn. The LORD kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up. The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor. For the pillars of the earth are the LORD's, and on them he has set the world. "He will guard the feet of his faithful ones, but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness, for not by might shall a man prevail. The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; against them he will thunder in heaven. The LORD will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed" (1 Sam. 2:1-10).

"The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble bind on strength" (1 Sam. 2:4).

From the beginning of our journey through 1 & 2 Samuel, I've suggested to you that 1 Samuel 2:4 is the golden thread that is woven through these books. Through the lives of Hannah, Samuel, Saul, and David, we've seen the greatness of God. I'll say it again: 1 & 2 Samuel is not about Hannah, Samuel, Saul, and David; it's about God.

The things that human beings think are "bows of the mighty" continue to fail. They get broken. And it is the person who is overlooked, weak, or not very influential who is uniquely empowered by the Lord. "The feeble bind on strength." Eugene Peterson says it this way in *The Message*: "The weapons of the strong are smashed to pieces, while the weak are infused with fresh strength" (1 Sam. 2:4). God works in ways that often cut across the grain or even go the opposite direction of how we normally think.

But that's not only true for people individually, that's also true for groups of people and an entire nation. Since people make up nations, their "issues" end up affecting the culture of an entire nation. So it's not just that individual people put their trust in "the bows of the mighty," entire nations do as well. If you trace the story of humanity, this is very common. In fact, it's so common that it almost feels like a biblical principle—our bows need to be mighty. And then we end up putting our trust in the "bows of the mighty." Maybe you're familiar with the historical statement: "peace through strength." I get what

that means historically and how it can be true at one level. But 1 & 2 Samuel invite us to consider what happens when “peace through strength” becomes a bit idolatrous. 1 & 2 Samuel show us that fear can lead us down false paths. These books point us to something we find in the New Testament about the upside-down nature of might, power, and strength:

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil.2:5-11).

That’s a crown with a different kind of weight to it.

First and Second Samuel help us see ourselves, our culture, our groups, and our nation through a helpful, clarifying, and convicting lens. The book makes us pause and say, “Wow, that seems familiar! What lessons do I need to learn?” And the reason is because we, as humans, are not very creative with our history. The names, dates, nations, and technology may all be different. But we are not very creative sinners. The Devil knows us too well.

I think this book makes us a bit more sober-minded. Hopefully it makes us less confident in our age and also less panicked. Because the real story isn’t about any of the characters in 1 & 2 Samuel. Nor is your story, my story, the story of our church, or the story of our country the main story. The main story is about God, his glory, being reconciled to him through the death and resurrection of Jesus, and our longing for our true King to return.

Let’s take a quick journey with the main characters and remind ourselves how their story and God’s story connect together. Let me highlight some key points from our sermons.

God and Hannah

The story about King Saul and King David begins with a mistreated, grieving, and misunderstood woman. She desperately wants a child.

What an intriguing way to start a book about the national and bumpy transition from the judges to the kings of Israel. First Samuel begins, not with a survey of the national scene, a battle, or political intrigue; it begins with an obscure family and a woman who is not able to bear children. First Samuel begins in a deeply personal way—with a barren woman crying out to God in desperate prayer. And when God answers her prayer, she dedicates Samuel to the Lord:

And she said, “Oh, my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who was standing here in your presence, praying to the LORD. For this child I prayed, and the LORD has granted me my petition that I made to him (1 Sam. 1:26-27).

What a gift and what courage Hannah possesses to give her only child back to God. Samuel will lead the nation through the beginning stages of their gray-zone moment, when things are complex and confusing.

The image of Hannah alone at a festival, harassed and accused while her heart is breaking, is hard to read. And yet we see how God was still at work. Pain, sorrow, and struggle is often where God works. Over time God's ways become clear and evident. But for now, we need to embrace crisis as the place that God can use.

It reminds us that we tend to overemphasize the big forces, the big movements, the powerful means of change. But the record of the gospel is often the opposite. It's the unseen, the small, and the quiet means by which God often works. So let us not neglect the small and unseen ways in which God is at work.

God and Samuel

While the priesthood has become corrupted by Eli's two sons, Samuel hears directly from God, learning that God is about to bring judgment on the house of Eli (1 Sam. 3:11-14). When Israel tries to use the ark as a good luck charm (remember "Thou are useful!"), the ark is captured. Eli and his sons are killed.

Samuel will grow into one of the most renowned judges and spiritual leaders in the history of Israel. He'll navigate the transition of the spiritual gray zone from the era of the judges to the era of the kings. God will sovereignly use him to bring reform and spiritual renewal. He's one of the best prophets in biblical history. And yet his sons will also be corrupt (1 Sam. 8:3). The people will reject his leadership and ask for a king, saying to him, "Behold, you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations" (1 Sam. 8:5).

Even when Samuel warns them that a king will take and take and take (1 Sam. 8:10-18), they insist:

But the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel. And they said, "No! But there shall be a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles" (1 Sam. 8:19-20).

Samuel will have to adjust and adapt as he follows God's leading. He'll be the one to anoint Saul in 1 Samuel 10. But he'll also be the one to confront Saul: "And Samuel said to him, 'The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you'" (1 Sam. 15:28). Yet he's also the one who visits Jesse's home to anoint the next king and hears:

But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7).

He plays his role as a transitional prophet. He's the last judge of Israel. He's rejected. He anoints a bad king. But he also anoints King David.

God and Saul

Saul is a complicated and conflicting person. He seems reluctant and resistant to taking the role as king. And while his reign starts out with a few victories, the reign of Saul is marked by compromise, paranoia, and rejection.

He doesn't wait for Samuel and offers an unlawful sacrifice (1 Samuel 13). And after refusing to follow God's clear command when he defeated Amalek, Samuel tells Saul that he has been rejected by God. From there, Saul continues to take a dark turn, seeking to kill David. He pursued David, perhaps for as long as eight years.

Despite David sparing his life twice, Saul refuses to end his pursuit of David. After Samuel's death and since the Lord wouldn't answer him in prayer, Saul turned to the witch of Endor (1 Samuel 28). Samuel appears, telling Saul that he will die the next day.

On Mt. Gilboa and with the Philistines fast approaching, Jonathan is killed and Saul takes his own life. His armor is taken as a trophy and placed in a Philistine temple. His headless body is fastened to the wall at Beth Shan. So ends the reign of the first king of Israel, a time characterized by fear, disobedience, compromise, and chaos. God gave the people what they wanted. It was a disaster.

God and David

We first learn about David as he's being overlooked when Samuel visits his father. It was assumed that he wouldn't be God's choice for king. And when David volunteers to fight Goliath, his brothers are indignant. But David has bold faith: "Then David said to the Philistine, 'You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied'" (1 Sam. 17:45). However, even after the defeat of Goliath, his life is complicated.

He serves in Saul's palace for several years, but Saul's maniacal jealousy put him in constant danger. He runs for his life, hiding in caves in the wilderness. Yet it's in this season that he writes some of his best psalms: "O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water" (Ps. 63:1). He spares Saul's life two times. He's mercifully stopped from killing Nabal, and he is spared from being associated with the Philistines in the attack that kills Saul and Jonathan.

When he's finally recognized as king, the entire nation doesn't align with him. But over time, all the tribes of Israel follow him. And in a celebration of bringing the ark to Jerusalem, Uzzah is killed for touching it. Yet God makes an eternal covenant with David, establishing the throne of David forever (2 Samuel 7). David's response captures his heart: "Who am I, O Lord GOD, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far?" (2 Sam. 7:18).

But as good as David is, he fails terribly with his sexual sin, abuse of power, and murder. The consequences are severe with not only the death of a baby, but also ongoing conflict in his house. He takes no action after the rape of Tamar. This leads his son Absalom on a path that leads to a full-scale

coup. After Absalom is killed, David is restored to the throne. Second Samuel concludes with a psalm (it's Psalm 18), along with a statement about good authority: "When one rules justly over men, ruling in the fear of God, he dawns on them like the morning light, like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning, like rain that makes grass to sprout from the earth" (2 Sam. 23:3-4).

The last story in 1 & 2 Samuel is about an ill-advised census that leads to a plague. The location where the plague stops and where David offers sacrifices will become the location of the future temple. And so we see that 1 & 2 Samuel is not about Hannah or Samuel or Saul or David; it's about God.

God and You

As we bring this book to a close, here are five truths about God that we've seen and that apply to our lives.

1. God is central.

I've described this book multiple times as a gray-zone book—the overlap of two eras. It's a time that is confusing and contradictory. And yet those seasons (which we are presently living through) remind us to keep our eyes and hearts fixed on our future king and the centrality of God. "He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor. For the pillars of the earth are the LORD's, and on them he has set the world" (1 Sam 2:8).

We need to remember to bring the king into our chaos. Confusing and contradictory times refine our focus on the centrality of God.

2. God is working.

We have the benefit of seeing how the story plays out in Hannah, Samuel, Saul, and David's lives. We have seen how God works in surprising ways through a barren woman, a little boy, and an overlooked shepherd. Gray-zone moments create wilderness experiences. We have to keep in mind that God is working in ways that we don't see. Mark Sayers says:

"The gray zone frightens us. It reminds us of the primal chaos in a world that threatens to overwhelm us. It carries echoes of the wilderness, exposing our lack of control over the world and shattering our illusions and our idolatrous belief that we can live a life without pain. Yet scripture reframes the role of the wilderness for us. The in-between gray zone of the wilderness is a recurring theme within the Bible. Without God, wildernesses, both literal and figurative, are terrible places. With God, they become tools in our savior's hands. Schools of spiritual growth."¹

¹ Mark Sayers, *A Non-Anxious Presence: How a Changing and Complex World Will Create a Remnant of Renewed Christian Leaders*, (Chicago: Moody Publishers: 2022).

3. God is holy.

First and Second Samuel are filled with many examples of God's holiness being neglected: Hophi and Phineas, Saul's unlawful sacrifice and partial obedience, and Uzzah and the ark along with David's abuse of power, sexual sin, and murder.

"The wilderness reveals the direction of our hearts. Our character is indeed shown in moments of challenge. Outside the protective walls of our strongholds, we find out who we are. Do we grumble, wishing to return to Egypt, or do we praise in the desert? Do we rebel or depend? Do we starve or eat manna? Do we build a golden calf or follow the pillar of cloud?"²

4. God is gracious.

With all the chaos and uncertainty, it reminds us how desperately we need God's help. This book is a call to sober-mindedness—to embrace the reality that we can't make it without him.

He said, "The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge, my savior; you save me from violence. I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies" (2 Sam. 22:2-4).

"Wilderness is a place of testing. We don't usually associate testing with spiritual growth . . . It is more akin to an intense process of spiritual growth in which God seeks and forms people after his own heart, people who want what he wants, who wish to be shaped by him. Set apart for his purposes."³

5. God is worthy.

This book starts and ends with heartfelt worship. The crown is "weighty." But there's something more weighty here. It's God. It's the power and purity of another King who will sit on the throne of David. First Samuel began with these words from Hannah: "There is none holy like the LORD: for there is none besides you; there is no rock like our God" (1 Sam. 2:2).

And it ends with these words from David

For this I will praise you, O LORD, among the nations, and sing praises to your name. Great salvation he brings to his king, and shows steadfast love to his anointed, to David and his offspring forever (2 Sam. 22:50-51).

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

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