

Three Major Themes in 1 Samuel

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ONE: The Life of Samuel

Perhaps the foremost theme in 1 Samuel for most students of the Bible is a close look into the life of Samuel himself who is distinguished as a minister (1 Samuel 2:18; 3:1), a prophet (1 Samuel 3:19-20; Acts 3:24), a judge (1 Samuel 7:6, 15-17; Acts 13:20), a priest (1 Samuel 7:9-10, 17; Psalm 99:6-7), and a seer (1 Samuel 9:9, 18-19; 1 Chronicles 9:22). The record precedes his early life ministering under the tutelage of Eli in the tabernacle to include an insight into his family—led in their devotion through regular worship under the Law of Moses by Samuel’s father, Elkanah, and Samuel’s mother, Hannah, whose desire to have a son is surrounded by both her prayerful request (1 Samuel 1:9-18), which included her vow to “lend” the child to the Lord, and the joyous fulfillment of her solemn promise as she expressed in her prayer upon receiving Samuel (1 Samuel 2:1-10).

TWO: The Transition from Theocracy to Monarchy

Another prominent theme in 1 Samuel is the record of the transition of the nation of Israel from a theocracy to a monarchy, details of which are expressed by Samuel in chapter 8. Never before in Israel had the people been led by an earthly king. In fact, upon their request for one God reveals that He had wanted to be considered their King, and their request for an earthly king in order to be like all the nations around them constituted His rejection as their King (1 Samuel 8:7; 12:12). Samuel is instructed of God to anoint both the first and second kings of Israel launching the 120 year United Kingdom period of Old Testament history. The first king, who served for 40 years, was Saul (1 Samuel 10:1, 24; 11:14-15). The second king, who also served for 40 years, was David (1 Samuel 16:1-13; 2 Samuel 2:1-4).

THREE: The Transition of the High Priesthood

Also in 1 Samuel, there is presented a theme of transition in the priesthood due to Eli’s failure as a priest. The unnamed man of God put it to Eli this way, “Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering, which I have commanded in my habitation; and honourest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people? Wherefore the Lord God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the Lord saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed. Behold, the days come, that I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father’s house, that there shall not be an old man in thine house” (1 Samuel 2:29-31). Many recognize the prophetic call of young Samuel in 1 Samuel 3:9-10, but how often does the weight of God’s message on one so young receive attention? Samuel is told, “And the Lord said to Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle. In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end. For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli’s house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever” (1 Samuel 3:11-14). This comes true when the ark of the covenant is captured by the Philistines and Hophni and Phinehas are killed in the rout and upon hearing the news of their deaths Eli “fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he

died; for he was an old man, and heavy” (1 Samuel 4:17-18). Ultimately during the reign of Solomon, Ithamar’s descendant Abiathar, the great great great grandson of Eli (1 Samuel 14:3), was moved out of the position of joint high priest (1 Kings 4:4) with Zadok, a descendant of Eleazar, (1 Chronicles 24:3) leaving Zadok alone to officiate as the high priest (1 Chronicles 29:22). 1 Kings 2:26-27 informs, “And unto Abiathar the priest said the king [Solomon], Get thee to Anathoth, unto thine own fields; for thou art worthy of death: but I will not at this time put thee to death, because thou barest the ark of the Lord GOD before David my father, and because thou hast been afflicted in all wherein my father was afflicted. So Solomon thrust out Abiathar from being priest unto the Lord; that he might fulfill the word of the Lord, which he spake concerning the house of Eli in Shiloh.”