

May Teaching Theme: The Characters in Samuel 1-4

讲员 Speaker: Elder Yin / Pastor William R. Horne

题目 Topic: Samuel

经文 Scripture: 1 Samuel 1-4

Monthly Theme: As we continue under our year's theme, "Rebuild," we will spend the month of May looking at the key characters in 1 Samuel 1-4. Those characters include Elkanah, Hannah, Eli, Samuel, Hophni & Phinehas. We will see what we can learn from the life of these characters stories.

五月 May: 撒母耳記中的人物 The Characters in Samuel 1-4

May 1st – 以利加拿 Elkanah

May 8th – 哈拿 Hannah (Mother's Day)

May 15th – 以利 Eli

May 22nd – 撒母耳 Samuel

May 29th - 何弗尼 & 非尼哈 Hophni & Phinehas

Resources:

[Sermon Video](#) (Elder Yin)

[Sermon Video](#) (Pastor Will)

[Sermon Slides](#) (Pastor Will)

[Bible Project: 1 Samuel Overview](#) (English)

[Bible Project: 1 Samuel Overview](#) (Chinese)

Primary Claim: When rightly understood, we are all called to engage in "prophetic ministry." Samuel's story provides us with a model.

Discussion Questions (Pastor William R. Horne)

- (1) Read 1 Samuel 3, 7, & 8 together. What observations do you make, and what stands out to you? How would you summarize the passage? What do we know about Samuel? (Also, recall your previous reading from chapters 1-2).
- (2) When you hear the word "Prophet" or "Prophecy," what comes to mind? How do the following definitions help us better understand "prophetic ministry" and our call to participate in it?
 - (a) "Prophets spoke the truth about the present reality and what would happen if people did not change their behavior and return to Yahweh's ways." - *The Prophets* in The Lexham Bible Dictionary.
 - (b) "The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us." - *The Prophetic Imagination* by Walter Brueggemann.
- (3) Share your reflections on the 5 Calls of "Prophetic Ministry" from Samuel's life. How do we see each of these in Samuel's life, and how can we better live them out in our day?
 - (a) "Prophetic Ministry" call us to **Resist the Evil of Our Surroundings** (1 Sam 2-4).

- (b) “Prophetic Ministry” call us to **Keep Ministering Even in the Midst of Chaos** (1 Sam 2-3).
- (c) “Prophetic Ministry” call us to **Risk Speaking Truth to Power** (1 Sam 3).
- (d) “Prophetic Ministry” call us to **Look for Opportunities to Bring People Back to God** (1 Sam 7).
- (e) “Prophetic Ministry” call us to **Resist the Pressure to Be Like Everybody Else** (1 Sam 8)

Important Notes (Pastor William R. Horne):

Notes on Q1: There is quite a lot we could learn from Samuel’s story, both positive and negative, and we certainly do not have time to examine his life story in every detail. What is unique about Samuel is he is what you call a “bridge character” in the Biblical story. He is the last of the judges and the first of the prophets. He is instrumental (even if he didn’t want to be), in the move of Israel to a monarchy under kings. He is also a confusing character, as there were no clean lines at this chaotic time between roles and who played what roles. So, Samuel is found playing a plethora of roles throughout his story, even multi-roles simultaneously. He is called a prophet, a judge, a war leader, a national leader, a seer, a king-maker, and even at times, a priest. So, in many ways, he is like Moses, who also wore many similar hats as he led the 12 tribes of Israel. Both also both Moses and Samuel had remarkable childhoods, being nurtured in their earliest years by mothers of faith but raised during their formative years in environments other than their own homes. Both disavowed the corrupt elements of the environments in which they were raised. (Bergen, R. D.)

Notes on Q2: When many of us hear the word “prophetic ministry,” it might immediately make us feel uneasy, as we have seen the harm and abuse of those who claim to be prophets. And that is a fair feeling, as the title “prophet” has more often been used incorrectly, if not abusively, in our time and context. And when we hear the word “prophecy” or “prophetic,” it often brings to mind images of people predicting the future. But, the true prophets we encounter in the Hebrew Scriptures were not that interested in “predicting the future” but were primarily anticipating the punishment of evil and/or a better life on earth for God’s people.

Prophets spoke the truth about the present reality and what would happen if people did not change their behavior and return to the ways of God. Certainly, there are times when God used prophets to paint pictures of a future he would bring about, including frameworks for understanding the future Messiah as the Suffering Servant we know as Jesus. But, the primary concern of those acting in the prophetic again - was to call their original audience to realign themselves with God’s will, ethics, and justice. And usually, this call was to those in power within the nation and the religious institutions of the day. And it is this primary focus that should shape our understanding of “prophetic ministry” today. Yes, there are those in the Scripture and throughout Church history who have been called to a particular task and office of “prophet.” But, we as the people of God are all called to engage in the work of “prophetic ministry” at some level. We are to be people who speak the truth about the present reality and call people to change and find transformation found in King Jesus and the ways of his Kingdom.

We saw last week that Eli failed to act in the “prophetic” by allowing wickedness to flourish in Israel through the life of his sons. And in this opening section of the book of Samuel, that young Samuel is juxtaposed to Eli and Eli’s sons as the one who rightly speaks the truth and engages in “prophetic ministry.” And God, as he often does, uses the socially powerless Hannah to overturn and transform the social order through her son, the Prophet Samuel.

Notes on Q3:

(1) “Prophetic Ministry” calls us to Resist the Evil of Our Surroundings (1 Sam 2-4)

- Throughout the early portion of this story, we find the narrator juxtaposing and comparing the young Samuel to Eli’s wicked sons, Hophni and Phinehas. While Hophni and Phinehas were stealing from worshippers coming to Shiloh, the text says, **1 Sam 2:18**, “But Samuel was ministering before the Lord—a boy wearing a linen ephod.” An ephod was a sleeveless garment that those of the Levites were authorized to wear - revealing that Samuel was functioning, even at a young age, in the priestly role that Hophni and Phinehas failed to fulfill.
- While Hophni and Phinehas blasphemed against God, neglecting the sacred for their own gain, the text says, **1 Sam 2:21**, “...Meanwhile, the boy Samuel grew up in the presence of the Lord.” The same phrase, “presence of the Lord,” is used to describe Moses when he received the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments from God himself.
- While Hophni and Phinehas were abusing the women at the tent of meeting, the text says, **1 Sam 2:26**, “And the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor with the Lord and with people.”
- See throughout this section, before Samuel even partakes in “prophetic ministry,” young Samuel is depicted as walking with God and resisting the evil of his surroundings. It is a time when “everyone did what was right in their own eyes,” including evidently those serving in the tent of meeting. Yet, Samuel refused to conform to the patterns of the wickedness in his environment. He resisted the dominant culture in favor of creating a better one, space, and life shaped by the ethics of the LORD. If we are going to engage in “prophetic ministry,” pointing others to the alternate way of King Jesus, then we must first resist the dominant way of a world that doesn’t know Jesus.
- **Questions:** What places have we adopted the ways of the dominant culture around us,
- where Jesus way is better?

(2) “Prophetic Ministry” calls us to Keep Ministering Even in the Midst of Chaos (1 Sam 2-4)

- In this opening section of the book of Samuel, we see repeated over and over again that Samuel was doing one thing - ministering. He was not only resisting the evil of his surroundings, but he was doing the work of the ministry, even in the midst of chaos. When things are hard and chaotic, much like the last couple of years dealing with a global pandemic, it is easy to shut it all down and wait for the chaos to end. Or, in an effort to “resist the evil of our surroundings,” we often fall for the temptation to disengage those around us, those who are not like us. Young Samuel resists the evil of his surroundings while still ministering in it.

- **Questions:** Are there spaces in your life that you have chosen to disengage from “ministering”? How can we resist evil in our surroundings while staying engaged, acting as a witness in them?

(3) “Prophetic Ministry” calls us to Risk Speaking Truth to Power (1 Sam 3)

- Young Samuel was entrusted with the word of the LORD and received a message concerning judgment upon Eli and his family. (1 Sam 3:11-14). Now that Samuel has received this word, he now must act in the prophetic - speaking truth to power - the truth about the present reality and what would happen if people did not change their behavior and return to the ways of God. Now, Samuel could have kept quiet about this truth for fear of how Eli would respond and what that would mean for his life at the temple. He could have chosen to look the other way like Eli himself did when his sons were harming others. And Samuel almost does keep silent. The text tells us that “He was afraid to tell Eli the vision.” He was scared. Young Samuel felt the same emotion we often encounter when we need to speak hard truth when we need to engage in caring confrontation. He was afraid. And yet, Samuel does eventually speak that hard truth to Eli; even under some compulsion from Eli, Samuel does gather enough courage to speak the truth about the present reality.
- **Questions:** What places have we let the fear of confrontation keep us from engaging in “prophetic ministry”? Are there places where we have chosen the path of Eli - looking the other way - rather than acting on a truth spoken to us?

(4) “Prophetic Ministry” calls us to Look for Opportunities to Bring People Back to God (1 Sam 7)

- Prophetic ministry is not just critical, but it also energizing - in the sense of energizing people to experience the goodness of God. See, the ultimate heart of any prophetic encounter can never be judgment alone but a longing for people to return to God and experience the freedom, justice, and compassion he offers. The prophet looks for opportunities to bring people back to God. Samuel does just that when we enter chapter 7 of the narrative. In 1 Samuel 4, the battle between the Philistines and the Israelites had begun. And if you recall from last week, early in this battle, the ark of the covenant is captured, and Eli and his sons die. Later in the battle, the temple at Shiloh itself is destroyed.
- Now, if you don’t pay attention, you will miss it. But, between 7:1 and 7:2, there is a twenty-year gap. This also means when we arrive at 7:2, there have been more than twenty years since Eli’s death. After twenty years of war, the Israelites finally turned back to the LORD. And the narrator is careful to make clear that the deliverance from the Philistines only came about after Israel repented and returned back to God. The movement of Israel’s heart was the key to their freedom. And it is here that the now-adult Samuel sees an opportunity. (Read 1 Sam 7:3-4).
- **Questions:** Where are the opportunities around you to help people return to God? Where are the idols in your life that you need to put away to serve King Jesus alone?

(5) “Prophetic Ministry” calls us to Resist the Pressure to Be Like Everybody Else (1 Sam 8)

- Now, this sounds very similar to the first call, but I want to look at it from a different angle, from later in Samuel's story. Prophetic Ministry calls us to not only resist the evil of our surroundings but also calls us to resist the need to "people please." In 1 Samuel 8, we witness the movement from Israel being led by judges to establish a monarchy. As you read the story in 1 Samuel 8, you see the key motivation for the people of God to move to a monarch is they wanted to be like everyone else.
- A hindrance to participating in "prophetic ministry" is the desire to be like everybody else, to please others over speaking the truth. Often this reality in our present context looks like us seeking to please our political or cultural tribe - only speaking what they deem as true - rather than exploring the Scriptures and walking with and learning from those in the body of Christ who are not like us, whose experience is different than ours.
- **Questions:** Where are the places that we have chosen to please people over speaking the truth? Where are the places we "just want to be like everybody else" instead of what God is calling us to be?