



WEEK ONE: SAMUEL AND NOAH

The aim of this series is to show that God called, and still does call, people of all ages and backgrounds. The examples we shall use are not chronological although the first four studies are in the Old Testament and the last two in the New Testament.

Do we expect God to respond personally to us, or do we think that is only for important people or in exceptional circumstances? Are we then “God botherers”? Each of us is called by God, in diverse ways but we remember from our study of Isaiah 55, that God sees things differently from how we see them, and that he is sovereign.

Read 1 Samuel 1:1-18

This first reading gives the context for this story of Samuel. Hannah, (married to Elkanah, who has a second wife, Peninnah), is distraught at her inability to conceive. In those days it was considered a punishment from God for a woman to be barren. What made it worse was that Peninnah had no problem conceiving children. However, each year Hannah went up with Elkanah and the family, to Shiloh where they made their offerings to God. In Genesis 49:10, Shiloh is used as a Messianic prophecy: *The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a Lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes.*” An English interpretation of the word is: “to whom dominion belongs,” “whose is the kingdom, “he whose right it is to reign.”

- What was the vow Hannah made to God?
- Of what did Eli accuse her?
- What good news did he give her in verse 17?

Verses 19-28 of that chapter tell us of the birth of Samuel and how Hannah fulfilled her vow. In the NKJ it says: “*For this child I prayed*” (verse 27)

It is well worth taking the time to read chapter 2: *Hannah’s Prayer*. It’s words are such an encouragement for us today.

The second part of chapter two tells of the wickedness of the sons of Eli because they did not follow God’s laws. The NKJ versions calls them ‘corrupt’, meaning the opposite of honest and law-abiding. It also says that they did not know the Lord. A man of God came to Eli with a warning of God’s anger at the behaviour of his household.

- Do we live our lives in line with God's standards?

Read 1 Samuel 3:1-18

In verse 7, it tells us that Samuel didn't yet know God in a personal or direct way. He was eleven years old when he had this encounter with God.

It's often difficult for us as adults to realise when God is calling to us, so it is not surprising that Samuel did not understand who was speaking to him.

- Notice how quickly Samuel responded to the voice.
- How difficult do you think it was for Samuel to tell Eli all the words God had spoken?
- Do you think he understood the message he gave to Eli?
- God had already sent a man to speak to Eli. Why then did God need to call Samuel to give him the message.
- What does it tell us about this young boy?
- What does it tell us about the spiritual state of Israel?

The NLT says in 1 Samuel 3:19-20: *"As Samuel grew up, the Lord was with him, and everything Samuel said was wise and helpful. All the people of Israel from one end of the land to the other knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the Lord."*

- What reasons can you give for this wonderful testimony regarding Samuel?
- How well do we know God and his voice?

Samuel was both a judge and prophet of God who led Israel for over forty years. Samuel also anointed the first king of Israel, Saul, and his successor David. His role as a prophet began when he was 13 years old, and God had anointed him for this position. By the time Samuel had become a grown man he had become an important public figure and people knew him to be a prophet of God.

Read Genesis 6:5-22

There are some similarities between these two accounts. In Samuel's time, God was angry with the behaviour and lack of spirituality of the people of Israel despite all he had done for them. The time in which Noah lived was also considered by God to be corrupt. Verses 11-12 tell us: *"Now the earth had become corrupt in God's sight, and it was filled with violence. God observed all this corruption in the world, and he saw violence and depravity everywhere."* (NLT)

It calls to mind the scripture: *"History merely repeats itself. It has all been done before. Nothing under the sun is truly new."* (Ecclesiastes 1:9 NLT)

Noah, however, found grace in the eyes of the Lord (verse 8). He was described as a righteous man, the only blameless man living on the earth at the time. He consistently followed God's will and enjoyed a close relationship with him (verse 9).

This call from God must have seemed very strange to Noah. Talk of destroying the earth and how Noah was to build an ark. In the words of the Tennessee Ernie Ford song:

*The Lord said Noah there's gonna' be a flood
there's gonna be some water and there's gonna be some mud
Take off your hat Noah and take off your coat
Get a Ham, Shem and Japheth, and build yourself a boat.
Noah said Lord I don't believe I could
The Lord said Noah get some sturdy gopher wood
never know what you can do till you try
Build it 50 cubits wide and 30 cubits high.*

The refrain for each verse being: *Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.*

The dimensions of the ark were roughly 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high, with a capacity exceeding that of 500 railroad stock cars. Also, its bargelike shape made it difficult to capsize.

- God gave Noah specific instructions as to who was to go into the ark, and the animals and birds that he was to take in, and the food he was to take with them. (chapter 7)
- There is no indication that Noah questioned these instructions. How might we respond if God asked us to do something way outside of our comfort zone?
- How open are we to hearing from God?

According to Genesis 7:24, the earth was submerged under water for one hundred and fifty days, or around five months. Scripture gives no indication as to conditions inside the ark during that time, but it can hardly have been a pleasant experience. Genesis 8 tells of the miraculous deliverance and how the first thing Noah did when he had got everyone out of the ark was to build an altar to the Lord.

God made a covenant saying: *“Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done. “As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.” (Genesis 8: 21-22)*

Noah had fulfilled God's call on his life and now God was rewarding mankind and living creatures, with an important covenant. And in chapter 9:8-17, he promised:

“This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come:

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him:

“I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth. I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.”

And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life.

Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth.”

So, God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth.”

As we shall see in the coming studies, God deals with each call in a unique way and for a different purpose. Our God is not a ‘one size fits all’ God, but he knows each one of us: *“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.”* (Isaiah 43:1) and *“See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands”* (Isaiah 49:16).

- God’s call for you will be different from that of others in the group. Don’t worry if you feel you don’t know what it is, pray, listen, and wait, until God makes it plain.



Prayer:

Help me to listen, prepare and wait for your call. When it comes, help me to fulfil your plans for my life. Amen