



+ This Sunday at Magdalen Road church we started a new series in the book of 1 Samuel. In this book the people are now settled in the land that God has promised them and so the big question is how will they apply the law as they put down roots? We will see a number of themes and ideas, particularly from Deuteronomy, working their way through the book as they are implemented.

We said this was a key time for the nation firstly because it's pivotal moment in their history

1. For example a particular concern is that of leadership as the monarchy is established. Leaders especially are needed as they settle to help the people of God apply the word of God so they reflect the character of God and the nations looking in want to worship this God..
2. Another concern is that of worship. No longer other people a travelling pneumatic community Setting up and down the tabernacle to worship, now they are settled and hence wanting to establish the priesthood and a temple to worship in.
3. The final key theme is that of life -the people of God, as they live out the word of God, in front of a watching world show that living out Gods good word is where life is found. Trusting gods word does not make life grey but rather its life as it was meant to be lived.

The second reason this is a key time for the nation is because the people are in such a bad state. We zoomed in again on the theme of leadership and analysed the people through the lenses of prophets priests and kings.

Firstly in terms of prophets, see 3v1 the word of the Lord is rare at this time! God is not speaking much to his people.

Perhaps he is not speaking much to his people because of the state of the priesthood. In 2v12-22 we get a snapshot of the priesthood as we encounter Eli's scoundrel sons. They are abusing their power and taking advantage of people both in greed and in sexual terms.

We've already seen that there is no monarchy (kings) but the final verse in the book of

Judges reveals that anarchy comes when people simply do as they see fit.

And so we come face-to-face with the prophet Samuel. We noted that the people need the word of God foundationally and so the prophet comes to speak Gods words to the rebellious people first. Because the prophet is so important so his mother Hannah is in sharp focus for our section this morning. Hannah is painted as a faithful woman of God in stark contrast to the other individuals at this point whether Eli the priest (who can't tell the difference between a faithful and a drunk woman), and Elkanah Hannah's husband who seems not to have stuck up for her or thirdly his other wife, Peninnah, who continually teases and mocks Hannah due to her being barren.

Hannah's beautiful faith is in contrast to their ugliness. As we zoom in on her, the big idea to take away is that 'God's ways are not our ways'. We noted 2 particular ways this works out here:

1. **Surprise!** Hannah is left-field! She's not the mother we would have expected. Elkanah is a no-one living in nowhere-ville with 2 wives (never seen in a positive light in scripture) and one of them is barren. But it's from here that God's plan begins. She is not 'strategic' or the kind of way that we would change a nation, but God does. We noted Hannah's parallel with Mary (and hence Jesus) who again was not what we would have expected. We thought about why this truth does not thrill us as we perhaps should expect. Partly perhaps its due to familiarity, but also partly due to our culture that 'expects' the unlikely nobodies to be the winners (just watch an episode of X-Factor!).
2. **Switch!** Hannah's song in Chapter 2v1-11 (see also Mary's song about Jesus in Luke 1v46 onwards) outlines the topsy-turvy nature of God's kingdom. It's clear that she knows this God well (v1-2) but also the way that he works in humbling the proud and exalting the humble. This culminates in a v11 where she foresees a king who will be anointed and who will bring in this kingdom. It partially is seen in Samuel (1 Sam 16) but will finally be seen in Christ. We finished by noting the manifesto of Christ's kingdom in the Beatitudes from Matthew 5v2 onwards.

As always here a few questions to start your group off..

We began by talking about 'the dying art of leadership' in our culture. Do you agree with this statement? How important is leadership? Why is it so important in 1 Samuel? Why does it matter particularly at this stage in God's story in the bible?

Why do you think God appoints a prophet first in 1 Samuel?

Do you agree that Hannah is contrasted with the other characters in these verses? What do we see about them and the spiritual state of the nation?

Why do you think God chooses her to be the person from whom change will begin? Why does God often work through weakness? How do we feel about that?

In Hannah's song in chapter 2 what do we see of her relationship with God? What do we see of the nature of God's kingdom?