

HEBREWS CHAPTER 11 – HEROES OF FAITH

**Lesson #19**

**SAMUEL**  
**Hebrews 11:32**

***“And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets....”***

Samuel is one of the more prominent biblical characters. The name “Samuel” means “asked of God,” and recalls his mother Hannah, and the circumstances of the divine gift to her of a son. (I Sam. 1) His name occurs 108 times in the first 15 chapters of I Samuel; 24 times in the last 16 chapters, as he is now an old man, and his death is recorded in 25:1 and 28:3. No mention is made of him in 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel. His name appears 142 times in the Bible. Samuel dominates the first three chapters of 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel but slowly fades into the background when the spiritual condition and political affairs of Israel continue in a down-ward spiral and he reaches old age.

Outside of 1st Samuel his name is found in 1 and 2 Chronicles (six times); Psalms 99:1; Jer. 15:1 and in the New Testament in Acts 3:24 & 13:20 and in Hebrews 11:32. This shows how highly he was esteemed in his own time and in subsequent ages. His mention in Hebrews 11 as an example of faith in action is the capstone to a holy and illustrious career. In Jewish history Samuel is looked upon as a father figure. He is considered second only to Moses (Jer. 15:1) and is highly revered.

Samuel was the last and greatest of the judges and the first of the prophets. He anointed two kings, Saul and David, by God’s direction, and thereby inaugurated the Israelite kingdom and the Davidic line. The life and labors of Samuel never knew a dull moment and there is much that we could focus upon to our profit. However, it is Samuel’s faith that is the subject of this study.

When, in what circumstances and how was Samuel’s faith demonstrated? By using the word F-A-I-T-H as an acrostic, let us study the acts of Samuel’s faith:

**F - Faithfulness to God in Ministry;**

**A - Attentiveness to God’s Voice;**

**I - Intercession for God’s people;**

**T - Truth-telling to Power;**

**H - Heralding of Divine Warnings.**

**F – Faithfulness to God in Ministry.**

Samuel started as a young boy who was dedicated to the Lord (I Sam.1:28) and was raised in the House of the Lord, serving Eli, the priest. The record of his early life in the Temple clearly reveals his training and service:

- I Sam. 2:11 – “... *the child ministered to the LORD before Eli the priest.*”
- I Sam. 2:18 – “*Samuel ministered before the LORD, even as a child.*”
- I Sam. 2:21 – “...*the child Samuel grew before the LORD.*”
- I Sam. 2:26 – “*And the child Samuel grew in stature, and in favor both with the LORD and men.*” (This statement is reminiscent of what is said about the boyhood of Jesus in Luke 2:52 - “*And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.*”)
- I Sam. 3:1 – “*Now the boy Samuel ministered to the LORD before Eli.*” (In each of the above references the word “*child*” or “*boy*” in the Hebrew is the same and is used for a child, male or female, from infancy to adolescence.)
- I Sam. 3:19 – “*So Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground.*” The statement means “*his words proved to be true*”; “*his words were weighty with authority*”; “*let none of his words fail.*” Here we see that he is now more mature and begins to speak for God.
- I Sam. 3:20-21 – “*And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel had been established as a prophet of the LORD. Then the LORD appeared again in Shiloh. For the LORD revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the LORD.*” Here we are to understand that Samuel is now mature and recognized and respected by the people as a full-fledged prophet of God.
- I Sam. 7:15-17 - “*And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. He went from year to year on a circuit to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah, and judged Israel in all those places. But he always returned to Ramah, for his home was there. There he judged Israel, and there he built an altar to the LORD.*”

When Samuel had matured and his public ministry had begun, he called the people, who had turned away from God, to turn back to Him. His words were:

*“Then Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying, ‘If you return to the LORD with all your hearts, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths from among you, and prepare your hearts for the LORD, and serve Him only; and He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines.’ So the children of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtoreths, and served the LORD only.”* (I Sam.7:3-4)

Throughout his life Samuel served the Lord, rendering twenty years of distinguished, sacrificial and faithful service. He stood up and spoke out for God among people who were bent on turning away from God. The period of the judges was a time that scripture characterizes as a time when “*every man did what was right in his own eyes*” (Judges 17:6).

The background for such a self-centered and rebellious attitude is reflected in these words: “*The word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no widespread revelation.*” (I Sam.3:1) Others translations read: “*The word of the Lord had become dear*”; “*revelations from God were rare*”; “*prophecy was not widespread.*”

The political and spiritual life of Israel was perhaps at its lowest. Sadness gripped the people as they had no recognized prophet. The priesthood under Eli and others had

fallen into very deep corruption. In this time of darkness God raised up a young boy, Samuel who became His servant and mouthpiece to the spiritually starved nation. This was the spiritual and cultural context in which Samuel was born and in which he served God and the people of Israel. He was God's voice of wisdom and warning in decadent times.

Samuel was a holy man of God. When he was old, he challenged the people to find fault with him if they could. Here are his words and the people's reply:

*"I'm old and gray, and my sons are still here. I've led you faithfully from my youth until this very day. Look at me! Do you have any complaints to bring before GOD and his anointed? Have I ever stolen so much as an ox or a donkey? Have I ever taken advantage of you or exploited you? Have I ever taken a bribe or played fast and loose with the law? Bring your complaint and I'll make it right." "Oh no," they said, "never. You've never done any of that—never abused us, never lined your own pockets." "That settles it then," said Samuel. "GOD is witness, and his anointed is witness that you find nothing against me—no faults, no complaints." And the people said, "He is witness."*

(I Sam.12:2-5 *The Message*)

His holy life is testimony to his faith. There is no charge of sin in scripture against Samuel. He is highly respected and revered. Unlike many of God's servants throughout history, there is no fault, failure or flaw recorded in Samson's character. He was a man of faith, a holy man of God whose manner of life, ministry and message reflected his close walk in communion with God.

## **A – Attentiveness to God's voice.**

From an early age Samuel had a sensitive ear to hear the voice of God speaking to him. When but a boy in the temple God spoke to Samuel. One night God called to him four times before Samuel realized it was God not Eli the priest calling to him. The first three times he heard the voice of God he went to Eli. (I Sam.3:4-8) The fourth time Samuel answered as Eli had instructed him saying, "*Speak, for Your servant hears.*"(I Sam.3:10)

It is interesting as well as instructive to review the different times and occasions when God spoke to Samuel. Let us take note of the pattern which unfolds in I Samuel:

3:4 – "*...the LORD called Samuel. And he answered, "Here I am!"*"

3:6 – "*Then the LORD called yet again, "Samuel!" So Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me."*"

3:8 – "*And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. So he arose and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you did call me." Then Eli perceived that the LORD had called the boy.*"

3:10 – "*The LORD came and stood and called as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!"*"

- And Samuel answered, "Speak, for Your servant hears."*
- 3:11 – *"Then the LORD said to Samuel...."* (He told him that he was going judge Eli's sons.)
- 8:7 – *"And the LORD said to Samuel...." "So Samuel told all the words of the LORD to the people who asked him for a king."* (Saul)
- 9:15 – *"Now the LORD had told Samuel in his ear...."* (That Saul was coming to him.)
- 16:1 – *"Now the LORD said to Samuel How long will you mourn for Saul...."*
- 16:7 – *"The LORD said to Samuel do not look at his appearance...."* (David)
- 16:12 – *"And the LORD said, "Arise, anoint him; for this is the one!" Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him...."* (David)

Faithfully, Samuel served God from an unusually early age. From the moment in the temple when Samuel recognized God's voice, he kept himself always ready and attentive to the instructions of that voice. The person who lives by faith must have keen spiritual ears. Spiritual sensitivity is necessary to hear God speaking. Seven times in the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, Jesus says, *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."*

I am not necessarily talking about the appendages on the sides of our heads when I speak of attentiveness to the voice of God or of having *"ears to hear what the Spirit says to the churches."* I am referring to that internal spiritual apparatus that is imparted to us when we become children of God that enables us to hear that "still small voice" of God speaking to us. It is the awakened conscience, the capacity to discern God's voice, among all the other voices, that vie for our attention. Only persons of faith have the ability to perceive when God is speaking. Samuel had keen spiritual auditory receptivity. Do you?

Christians ought always to be attentive to the voice of God, always submissive to His will. He does not speak to us aloud as He did to Samuel in the temple, but He speaks to us through His written message to us, His holy Word. Every time we read His Word we hear His voice and we should be ready, as Samuel was, to say, "Speak, for your servant hears." God still speaks to those who take time to listen!

Thomas a` Kempis summed it up well when he wrote, "Blessed indeed are those ears which listen, not for the voice sounding without, but for the truth teaching inwardly. Consider these things, O my soul, and hear what the Lord your God speaks."

## **I - Intercession for God's people.**

Samuel was a man of prayer and perhaps his faith is best demonstrated in his prayers. Samuel's parents were praying parents. His mother, Hannah, prayed for a son before he was born (1:11-12 & 27) and praised God afterward in prayer for him. (2:1 ff) Samuel was born in answer to prayer and he lived in dependence upon prayer for his power in ministry. Some of the recorded times when he prayed are:

I Samuel 7:5 - *"And Samuel said, "Gather all Israel to Mizpah, and I will pray to the LORD for you."*

- I Samuel 7:8 – *“So the children of Israel said to Samuel, “Do not cease to cry out to the LORD our God for us, that He may save us from the hand of the Philistines.” The people knew Samuel to be a man of prayer.*
- I Samuel 7:9 – *“Then Samuel cried out to the LORD for Israel, and the LORD answered him.”*
- I Samuel 8:6 - *“Give us a king to judge us.” So Samuel prayed to the LORD.”*
- I Samuel 12:23 – *“Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you.”*

In I Samuel 12:17-19 we see an example of the prayer power of Samuel. We read: *“Now therefore, stand and see this great thing which the LORD will do before your eyes: Is today not the wheat harvest? I will call to the LORD, and He will send thunder and rain, that you may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which you have done in the sight of the LORD, in asking a king for yourselves.” So Samuel called to the LORD, and the LORD sent thunder and rain that day; and all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel. And all the people said to Samuel, “Pray for your servants to the LORD your God, that we may not die; for we have added to all our sins the evil of asking a king for ourselves.”*

Samuel was a man of prayer. He was a prophet and a prophet’s prayers right wrongs, saves people, and heals situations. However, we do not need to be prophets in order to pray. We can and should pray everywhere (I Tim. 2:8); about everything (Phil.4:6) and always (Luke 18:1).

## **T- Truth-telling to Power.**

It takes faith to stand up for righteousness and rebuke kings who have the power of life and death. Speaking God’s truth to persons in power requires courage which faith supplies. Samuel, on several occasions, confronted King Saul about his sinful behavior.

Exhibit “A” – When King Saul presumptively and disobediently intruded into the ministry of a priest and offered a burnt offering on the altar which was forbidden to all except priests, Samuel confronted him saying, *“What have you done?”* (I Sam. 13:11) *“You have done foolishly.”* (I Sam. 13:13) *“Your kingdom shall not continue.”* (I Sam. 13:14)

Exhibit “B” – Again, when God told Saul to completely annihilate the Amalekites, he only partially obeyed, saving some of the loot. Samuel confronted him and said, *“For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, And stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king.”* (I Sam.15:23)

Speaking truth to power is the right thing to do, however, it takes boldness, which faith provides, and often results in retaliation and rejection by those in the seat of power. There are many glaring examples of truth-tellers suffering as a result of faithfulness to God. Here are a few listed below:

- In Jeremiah chapter 26 we read about the prophet Jeremiah being mobbed in the temple for telling the people the truth: *“Now it happened, when Jeremiah had made an*

*end of speaking all that the LORD had commanded him to speak to all the people, that the priests and the prophets and all the people seized him, saying, "You will surely die! Why have you prophesied in the name of the LORD, saying, 'This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate, without an inhabitant?'" And all the people were gathered against Jeremiah in the house of the LORD." (Jer.26:8-9)*

- In the same chapter, Urijah spoke the same message and was killed. It is recorded: *"Now there was also a man who prophesied in the name of the LORD, Urijah the son of Shemaiah of Kirjath Jearim, who prophesied against this city and against this land according to all the words of Jeremiah. And when Jehoiakim the king, with all his mighty men and all the princes, heard his words, the king sought to put him to death; but when Urijah heard it, he was afraid and fled, and went to Egypt. Then Jehoiakim the king sent men to Egypt: Elnathan the son of Achbor, and other men who went with him to Egypt. And they brought Urijah from Egypt and brought him to Jehoiakim the king, who killed him with the sword and cast his dead body into the graves of the common people." (I Sam.26:20-23)*
- Again, Jeremiah gave God's message and suffered for it. This is the account: *"Thus says the LORD: 'This city shall surely be given into the hand of the king of Babylon's army, which shall take it.'" Therefore the princes said to the king, "Please, let this man be put to death, for thus he weakens the hands of the men of war who remain in this city, and the hands of all the people, by speaking such words to them. For this man does not seek the welfare of this people, but their harm." Then Zedekiah the king said, "Look, he is in your hand. For the king can do nothing against you." So they took Jeremiah and cast him into the dungeon of Malchiah the king's son, which was in the court of the prison, and they let Jeremiah down with ropes. And in the dungeon there was no water, but mire. So Jeremiah sank in the mire." (Jer. 38:3-6)*
- Coming to the New Testament we have these words of Jesus: *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate...."* (Matthew 23:37-38) And then, the ultimate rejection: *"And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him...."* (Luke 23:33)
- Later, Stephen charged the Jewish leaders saying: *"You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it." (Acts 7:51-52) "Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city and stoned him." (Acts 7:57-58)*

What is the point of listing these acts of terror against the tellers of truth? To show that people who have true faith must stand up and speak out when "truth is forever on the scaffold, wrong forever on the throne...."

## H - Heralding of Divine Warnings.

Samuel was a judge in Israel for 20 years. His presence was intimidating, his message weighty. He rebuked Israel for their sins and warned of God's judgments. He upheld God's standards before the people and sometimes his pronouncements concerned things the people did not want to hear. For example, when Samuel went to Bethlehem to anoint David the next king of Israel, I Samuel 16:4 says that: *"When he arrived at Bethlehem, the elders of the town trembled when they met him."*

Israel had a propensity for drifting away from the Lord and following false gods that the heathen nations around them followed. Samuel was always a correcting voice, calling them back to the true God. Sometimes they listened and turned back to the Lord as the following shows: *"Then Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying, 'If you return to the LORD with all your hearts, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths from among you, and prepare your hearts for the LORD, and serve Him only; and He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines.' So the children of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtoreths, and served the LORD only."* (I Sam. 7:3-4)

When the leaders of Israel came to Samuel and demanded that they have a king like the other nations around about them, Samuel warned them that they would suffer under a king. Samuel was given a message by God to communicate to Israel:

- The king will take your family (8:11-13),
- your fields (8:14),
- your farmhands (8:16),
- your flocks (8:17a) and, finally,
- your freedom (8:17b).

They rejected Samuel's warnings as the following verses reveal: *"Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, 'No, but we will have 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.'"* (I Sam. 8:19-20)

In his farewell speech, Samuel again challenged the people to love and serve the Lord. (I Sam. 12:7-25) Among his final words are these: *"...if you do not obey the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then the hand of the LORD will be against you, as it was against your fathers."* (I Sam. 12:15) And, *"But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king."* (I Sam. 12:25)

Samuel was a faithful judge leading Israel, a true prophet of God who lived by faith and repeated God's message to people who were resistant to it.

### CONCLUSION

We have been studying the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of Hebrews and the "Heroes of Faith." Samuel is mentioned as being one of the examples of a person of faith. In reviewing Samuel's life and ministry we have seen that his life of faith was an anchor for the drifting nation of Israel; a beacon for God in a dark time in the history of the nation and a voice proclaiming God's message and condemning evil.

People of faith in our day are to have the same godly influence in our society. Jesus called us “salt” (Matt.5:13) and “light” (Matt.5:14) We are to be salt in a decaying society and light in a darkened society. May we have the faith to meet the challenge before us as Samuel did in his day.

***“WITHOUT FAITH IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO PLEASE GOD”***

Hebrews 11:6

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