



Unlocking the Bible (14)



Taking Stock: 1 Samuel (a)

In the last issue we reviewed the story of the Old Testament up to the end of the Book of Ruth. That was a convenient point to do so as it marked the transition between one regime and another. But, such a change of regime is not just a factual thing: it has great significance - and some practical implications.

Up until now the story has been of the distinctive People of God, brought into being through Abraham and known as "the children of Israel". Throughout their existence they had been looked after and led into distinctive experiences of God and into demonstrating a different way of living summed up in the statement: "*you shall be to me a people; and I will be their God.*" The story of the Patriarchs, with deliverance through the Passover, sustenance through the wilderness and entry into the Promised Land bears witness to that distinctiveness as a "holy nation".

However, weariness in the wilderness and weakness in Canaan meant that this was a difficult role to maintain. The apparently easier practices of the surrounding nations were tempting compromises. 1 Samuel opens by saying that, "*the Word of God was rare in those days*". Against that background Hannah, like Ruth before her, made a significant choice - she prayed for a child whom she would give to the Lord to lead the people aright after a period of decline. That child was Samuel the prophet:

This book, which bears his name, highlights the significant contribution he made to their distinctiveness. Having responded to the call of God in the Temple, he led the people well but the prospect of what would follow him was not good. The people rejected this way of being led by God and "*asked for a king to rule over us that we might be liken all nations*" - the very antithesis of what they were supposed to represent. Their trust was in a strong ruler rather than in the might of God. The rest of 1 Samuel goes on to trace what happened.

But, before launching into a review of that period, covering Saul and David's early life, it is worth taking stock again and to ask: What challenges might this have for us? For example: Where do we stand? Is our life modelled on the world or on trust in God? What evidence is there of our being "the people of God", led by Him, responding to His call and commands, obedient to His Word, faithfully trusting Him to guide and enable us? What practical place do prayer, Bible teaching, spiritual nurture, witness, and spreading the Gospel occupy? To what extent is or behaviour motivated by spiritual principles? If the answers to these questions veer towards the negative then perhaps we need to take stock and, like Hannah, seek the Lord and commit ourselves, like Joshua, to say: "As for me, and my house, we will serve the Lord. Otherwise it will be a case of Ichabod! (*the glory has departed*)"

We will trace what happened in the rest of the books of Samuel next time.