

THUS SAYS *the* LORD

**GOD SPEAKS THROUGH
HIS SERVANTS THE PROPHETS**

VOLUME I: A KINGDOM DIVIDED

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BEHOLD, THE DAYS ARE COMING, says the LORD,
when I will make a new covenant
with the house of Israel and the house of Judah,
not like the covenant which I made with their fathers
when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt,
my covenant which they broke,
and I showed myself their Master, says the LORD.
But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel
after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them,
and I will write it upon their hearts;
and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.
And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother,
saying, "Know the LORD," for they shall all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD;
for I will forgive their iniquity,
and I will remember their sin no more.

—*Book of Jeremiah* 31:31–34



THUS SAYS *the* LORD

GOD SPEAKS THROUGH HIS SERVANTS THE PROPHETS

VOLUME I: A KINGDOM DIVIDED

1 SAMUEL 1:1–28

1 ¹ There was a certain man of Ramathaim-zophim of the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah the son of Jeroham, son of Elihu, son of Tohu, son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. ² He had two wives; the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah. And Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children.

³ Now this man used to go up year by year from his city to worship and to sacrifice to the LORD of hosts at Shiloh, where the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests of the LORD. ⁴ On the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and daughters; ⁵ and, although he loved Hannah, he would give Hannah only one portion, because the LORD had closed her womb. ⁶ And her rival used to provoke her sorely, to irritate her, because the LORD had closed her womb. ⁷ So it went on year by year; as often as she went up to the house of the LORD, she used to provoke her. Therefore Hannah wept and would not eat. ⁸ And Elkanah, her husband, said to her, “Hannah, why do you weep? And why do you not eat? And why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?”

⁹ After they had eaten and drunk in Shiloh, Hannah rose. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the LORD. ¹⁰ She was deeply distressed and prayed to the LORD, and wept bitterly. ¹¹ And she vowed a vow and said, “O LORD of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your maidservant, and remember me, and not forget your maid-

servant, but will give to your maidservant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head.”

¹²As she continued praying before the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. ¹³Hannah was speaking in her heart; only her lips moved, and her voice was not heard; therefore Eli took her to be a drunken woman. ¹⁴And Eli said to her, “How long will you be drunken? Put away your wine from you.” ¹⁵But Hannah answered, “No, my lord, I am a woman sorely troubled; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the LORD. ¹⁶Do not regard your maidservant as a base woman, for all along I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation.” ¹⁷Then Eli answered, “Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition which you have made to him.” ¹⁸And she said, “Let your maidservant find favor in your eyes.” Then the woman went her way and ate, and her countenance was no longer sad.

¹⁹They rose early in the morning and worshiped before the LORD; then they went back to their house at Ramah. And Elkanah knew Hannah his wife, and the LORD remembered her; ²⁰and in due time Hannah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Samuel, for she said, “I have asked him of the LORD.”

²¹And the man Elkanah and all his house went up to offer to the LORD the yearly sacrifice, and to pay his vow. ²²But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, “As soon as the child is weaned, I will bring him, that he may appear in the presence of the LORD, and abide there for ever.” ²³Elkanah her husband said to her, “Do what seems best to you, wait until you have weaned him; only, may the LORD establish his word.” So the woman remained and nursed her son, until she weaned him. ²⁴And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, along with a three-year-old bull, and ephah of flour, and a skin of wine; and she brought him to the house of the LORD at Shiloh; and the child was young. ²⁵Then they slew the bull, and they brought the child to Eli. ²⁶And she said, “Oh, my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who was standing in your presence, praying to the LORD. ²⁷For this child I prayed; and the LORD has granted me my petition which I made to him. ²⁸Therefore I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he lives, he is lent to the LORD.”

And they worshiped the LORD there.

1 SAMUEL 2:22–3:20

2²²Now Eli was very old, and he heard all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who served at the entrance to the tent of meeting. ²³And he said to them, “Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all the people. ²⁴No, my sons; it is no good report that I hear the people of the LORD spreading abroad. ²⁵If a man sins against a man, God will mediate for him; but if a man sins against the LORD, who can intercede for him?” But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for it was the will of the LORD to slay them.

²⁶Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the LORD and with men.

²⁷ And there came a man of God to Eli, and said to him, “Thus the LORD has said, ‘I revealed myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt subject to the house of Pharaoh. ²⁸ And I chose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to go up to my altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me; and I gave to the house of your father all my offerings by fire from the sons of Israel. ²⁹ Why then look with greedy eye at my sacrifices and my offerings which I commanded, and honor your sons above me by fattening yourselves upon the choicest parts of every offering of my people Israel?’ ³⁰ Therefore the LORD the God of Israel declares: ‘I promised that your house and the house of your father should go in and out before me for ever’; but now the LORD declares: ‘Far be it from me; for those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed. ³¹ Behold, the days are coming, when I will cut off your strength and the strength of your father’s house, so that there will not be an old man in your house. ³² Then in distress you will look with envious eye on all the prosperity which shall be bestowed upon Israel; and there shall not be an old man in your house for ever. ³³ The man of you whom I shall not cut off from my altar shall be spared to weep out his eyes and grieve his heart; and all the increase of your house shall die by the sword of men. ³⁴ And this which shall befall your two sons, Hophni and Phineas, shall be the sign to you: both of them shall die on the same day. ³⁵ And I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind; and I will build him a sure house, and he shall go in and out before my anointed for ever. ³⁶ And every one who is left in your house shall come to implore him for a piece of silver or a loaf of bread, and shall say, “Put me, I beg you, in one of the priest’s places, that I may eat a morsel of bread.”’”

3 ¹ Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. And the word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision.

² At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim, so that he could not see, was lying down in his own place; ³ the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down within the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. ⁴ Then the LORD called, “Samuel! Samuel!” and he said, “Here I am!” ⁵ and ran to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call; lie down again.” So he went and lay down. ⁶ And the LORD called again, “Samuel!” And Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call, my son; lie down again.” ⁷ Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. ⁸ And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am for you called me.” Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. ⁹ Therefore Eli said to Samuel, “Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, ‘Speak, LORD, for your servant hears.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

¹⁰ And the LORD came and stood forth, calling as at other times, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant hears.” ¹¹ Then the LORD said to Samuel, “Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel, at which the two ears of every one that hears it will tingle. ¹² On that day I will fulfil against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from be-

ginning to end. ¹³And I tell him that I am about to punish his house for ever, for the iniquity which he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them. ¹⁴Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be expiated by sacrifice or offering for ever."

¹⁵Samuel lay until morning; then he opened the doors of the house of the LORD. And Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. ¹⁶But Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son." And he said, "Here I am." ¹⁷And Eli said, "What was it that he told you? Do not hide it from me. May God do so to you and more also, if you hide anything from me of all that he told you." ¹⁸So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. And he said, "It is the LORD; let him do what seems good to him."

¹⁹And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. ²⁰And all Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was established as a prophet of the LORD.

1 SAMUEL 28:3-19

28 ³Now Samuel had died, and all Israel had mourned for him and buried him in Ramah, his own city. And Saul had put the mediums and the wizards out of the land. ⁴The Philistines assembled, and came and encamped at Shunem; and Saul gathered all Israel, and they encamped at Gilboa. ⁵When Saul saw the army of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly. ⁶And when Saul inquired of the LORD, the LORD did not answer him, either by dreams, or by Urim, or by prophets. ⁷Then Saul said to his servants, "Seek out for me a woman who is a medium, that I may go to her and inquire of her." And his servants said to him, "Behold, there is a medium at En-dor."

⁸So Saul disguised himself and put on other garments, and went, he and two men with him; and they came to the woman by night. And he said, "Divine for me by a spirit, and bring up for me whomever I shall name to you." ⁹The woman said to him, "Surely you know what Saul has done, how he has cut off the mediums and the wizards from the land. Why then are you laying a snare for my life to bring about my death?" ¹⁰But Saul swore to her by the LORD, "As the LORD lives, no punishment shall come upon you for this thing." ¹¹Then the woman said, "Whom shall I bring up for you?" He said, "Bring up Samuel for me." ¹²When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice; and the woman said to Saul, "Why have you deceived me? You are Saul." ¹³The king said to her, "Have no fear; what do you see?" And the woman said to Saul, "I see a god coming up out of the earth." ¹⁴He said to her, "What is his appearance?" And she said, "An old man is coming up; and he is wrapped in a robe." And Saul knew that it was Samuel, and he bowed with his face to the ground, and did obeisance.

¹⁵Then Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?" Saul answered, "I am in great distress; for the Philistines are warring against me, and God has turned away from me and answers me no more, either by prophets or by dreams; therefore I have summoned you to tell me what I shall do." ¹⁶And Samuel said, "Why then do you ask me, since the

LORD has turned from you and become your enemy? ¹⁷The LORD has done to you as he spoke by me; for the LORD has torn the kingdom out of your hand, and given it to your neighbor, David. ¹⁸Because you did not obey the voice of the LORD, and did not carry out his fierce wrath against Amalek, therefore the LORD has done this thing to you this day. ¹⁹Moreover the LORD will give Israel also with you into the hand of the Philistines; and tomorrow you and your sons shall be with me; the LORD will give the army of Israel also into the hand of the Philistines.”



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THE LORD ANNOUNCES HE IS ABOUT TO DO A NEW THING

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The *First Book of Samuel* 3:1–14 recounts the LORD’s first conversation with Samuel, who is only a boy at the time. It is easy to miss the magnitude of what the LORD is announcing he is about to do. Early salvation history fails to identify specific priests, prophets, or kings. It appears the core attributes of obedience, trust, and love that later will define these groups originally were intended to be firmly embedded in the hearts of all those called to love and serve the LORD. As humanity continues to fall short of the mark, the LORD separates these core attributes into three roles.

The first separation occurs during the Exodus from Egypt when the LORD responds to his people’s worship of the golden calf by establishing the priesthood. From then on, priests are intended to serve as intermediaries reconciling sin through ritual sacrifice. Once the descendants of Jacob arrive in the land of Canaan, judges are given political and spiritual authority to serve as military leaders and to model righteousness. Priests continue to deal with sacrifice for sin.

The *Books of Samuel* and the *Books of the Kings* describe the establishment of monarchs to replace the judges. This positions political authority firmly with the kings. In anointing Saul as king, Samuel relinquishes the political authority associated with his role as a judge. He is, in fact, the last of the judges. The kings, however, prove incapable of ruling in a manner pleasing to God. In the blasphemous behavior of Eli’s sons can be seen evidence that the priesthood is failing as well.

To counteract this, the LORD beefs up the role of the prophets, who are answerable only to God, the ultimate king. Samuel is first to hold the newly defined office of prophet, retaining the spiritual authority he held as a priest and exercised as a judge. The prophets speak for God. Because they have the power to appoint and reject earthly kings, they are able to hold these kings accountable.

Abraham Heschel, in his book *The Prophets*, astutely defines a prophet as one who has sympathy with God. Heschel, a Jewish scholar, nevertheless misses what Christians understand to be the most important activity of the Old Testament prophets—pointing the way toward the coming of Jesus.

In the book of *Deuteronomy* 18:15, Moses promises: “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you . . .” In the *First Book of Samuel* 2:35, God promises to raise up a faithful priest, and in the *Second Book of Samuel* 7:12–13, he promises to raise up David’s offspring through whom an eternal kingdom will be established. While the Gospels emphasize Jesus’ role as king, the concept of the promised Messiah also encompasses the roles of priest and prophet—three roles of Jesus that Christians also share.



THE POWER OF THE PROPHETS

A handful of people prior to Samuel have demonstrated prophetic abilities, but it is through Samuel that the LORD inaugurates the office of prophet. The *First Book of Samuel* 10:1 describes Samuel anointing Saul as king, and the *First Book of Samuel* 13:14 describes the prophet rejecting Saul as king. Still acting on instructions from God, Samuel anoints David as Saul's successor. Prophets can make or break a king, and they can authorize or prohibit wars. Answerable only to God, the prophets' personal holiness gives them the final say in matters of righteousness and religious law. This also gives them the authority to hold kings and the people spiritually accountable.

CLASSIFYING THE PROPHETS

Categorizing the individuals who have spoken for God throughout salvation history is a daunting task. Scripture itself is unclear about what constitutes a prophet. The most common Christian classification divides the prophets into major (*Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Baruch, Ezekiel, and Daniel*), minor (*Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*), and other (Moses, Samuel, Elijah, and more). Although Daniel is a prophet, the writing in *Book of Daniel* usually is considered to be apocalyptic literature.

The Hebrew Bible is divided into the law, the prophets, and the writings, with the books of the prophets further divided into former (*Joshua, Judges, First and Second Samuel, First and Second Kings*) and latter, sometimes labeled "classical" or "canonical" to reflect that entire biblical books are attributed to their authorship (*Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the 12 so-called minor prophets*).

We expect the major prophets to be more significant than the minor ones, but a prophet does not start in the minors and get moved up. Neither do the major prophets sound happier notes than the minor ones. The distinction is based on the length of their books. Some extraordinary prophets are classified as "other"—Elijah, for instance, who often is chosen to represent all of the prophets.

1 Read the *First Book of Samuel* 1:1–8, which describes Samuel’s father Elkanah as an Ephraimite even though the *First Book of the Chronicles* 6:16–27 lists his family lineage among the descendants of Levi. Elkanah is a Levite by birth but an Ephraimite based on the territory in which he lives. Where does Elkanah take his family to offer annual sacrifices to the LORD? What happens during this journey each year that causes Elkanah’s wife Hannah to weep?

2 Read the *First Book of Samuel* 1:9–11. To whom does Hannah turn in her distress? What does Hannah promise to do if her prayer is heeded? How is Hannah’s vow similar to the Nazirite vow described in the book of *Numbers* 6:1–21? What are the main differences between a Nazirite vow and Hannah’s vow?

3 Read the *First Book of Samuel* 1:12–18, in which the priest Eli observes Hannah praying and concludes that she is drunk on wine. After he learns otherwise, what might explain why Eli includes his own request that God grant Hannah’s petition? What does Hannah’s reaction to Eli’s support suggest about her character?

4 Read the *First Book of Samuel* 1:19–28, which includes details surrounding Samuel’s birth. The book of *Genesis* records that the Old Testament patriarchs Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph also were born to mothers thought to be barren. If necessary, refer to the *Gospel According to Luke* 1:5–80 to learn which major New Testament figure was born under similarly unusual circumstances. What might these parallels suggest about the type of life that Samuel will lead?

BANDS & SCHOOLS OF PROPHETS

Roving bands or schools of prophets appear in the *Books of Samuel* and the *Books of the Kings*. It is easy to recognize that these prophets are not of the same caliber as Samuel and Elijah, but their presence in the Scriptures raises questions.

In the *First Book of Samuel* 10:5–13, Saul encounters one of these groups just after he has been anointed. To make matters more confusing, Samuel predicted the encounter as well as that the Spirit of the LORD would come upon Saul, who would then join the group in their “prophesying.” Saul indeed participates in the group’s ecstatic prayer induced by rhythmic singing and dancing.

Such religious enthusiasm can seem odd to present-day Christians, but a number of these groups were well established in Samuel’s time. Members appear to have made their own independent choices to join—as opposed to being called by the LORD—and they were not empowered to speak for God.

The prophetic groups in Israel differ from those in neighboring nations because they encourage the descendants of Jacob to act righteously and not to succumb to pagan religious influences.

CHRISTIAN CONNECTION

CALLED TO BE PROPHETS

It is easy to think that nothing similar to Samuel’s call to become a prophet is likely to happen to any of us. Paragraph 1268 in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, however, teaches that all Christians share in Christ’s prophetic mission. A common denominator in the call of the Old Testament prophets is that God inflicts himself on those he has chosen. This includes such major figures as Abraham and Moses. In the present day, God also inflicts himself on Christians, calling us to sympathize with his desires and to speak for him in our current world.

12 TRIBES

SAMUEL rules as judge

approximately 1062–1050 BC

UNITED KINGDOM

SAUL is anointed first king

SAMUEL is prophet
1050–1010

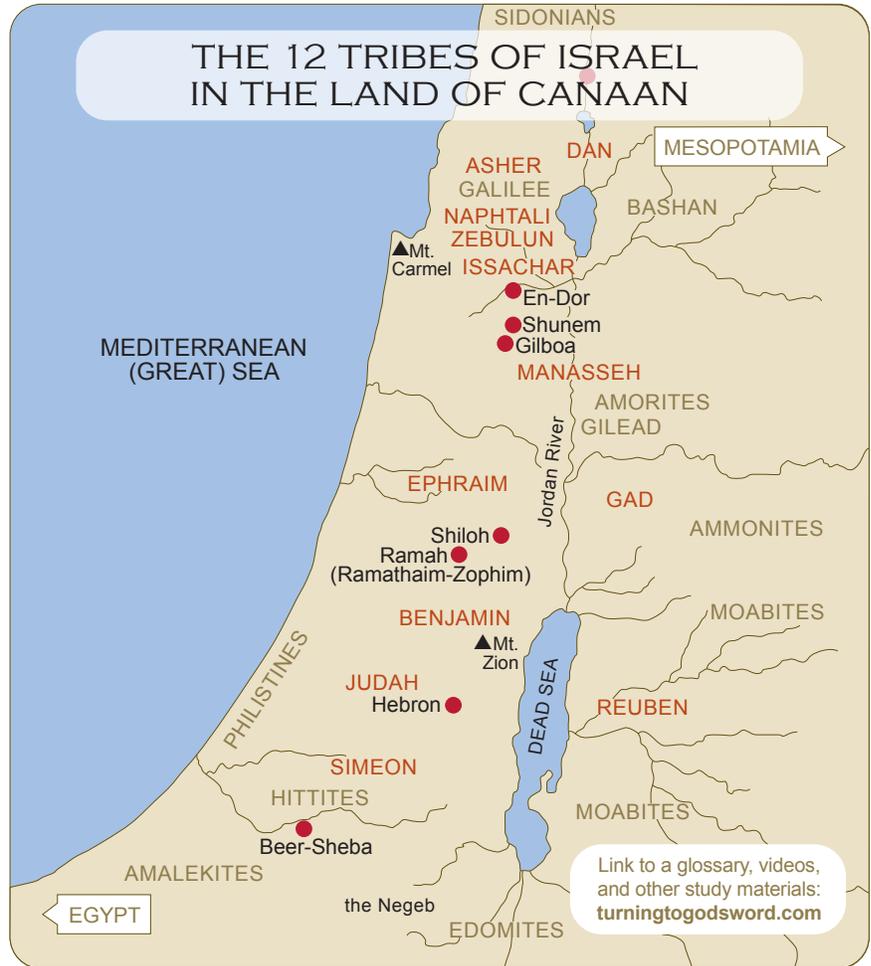
Dates for all time lines are approximate. Scholars disagree about how to handle calendar differences and deal with coregencies.

A FAILED PRIESTHOOD

In the *First Book of Samuel* 3:10–14, the message the LORD delivers to the young Samuel concerns the fate of the priestly line of Eli. God gives Samuel information, and Samuel's role is to speak to Eli for the LORD.

Shiloh, home of the ark of God, was a major religious center for the descendants of Jacob. A failure of the priesthood there represents a serious failure indeed. Although it appears that the priesthood may be about to become irrelevant, the extinction of Eli's family does not extend to his young charge, Samuel.

As an adult Samuel is able to combine the authority of the priesthood with the political and spiritual authority of the judges, but he relinquishes his political power when he anoints first Saul and then David as king.



Link to a glossary, videos, and other study materials: turningtogodsword.com

5 Read the *First Book of Samuel* 2:22–26. Of what specific evil does Scripture suggest it is that Eli accuses his sons? Why might this be considered a serious sin? According to the biblical text, what is the reason that Eli's sons refuse to listen to him? Compare the description of the boy Samuel in the *First Book of Samuel* 2:26 with the description of the boy Jesus in the *Gospel According to Luke* 2:52. How do these descriptions differ?

6 Read the *First Book of Samuel* 2:27–36. In what way does the description of the sins of Eli's sons given by the unnamed man of God differ from the way Eli characterized their sins? How does the man suggest that Eli has been complicit in those sins? Compare what the man foretells will happen to Eli's house with events described in the *First Book of Samuel* 4:1–10; 21:1–9; and 22:6–20.

7 Read the *First Book of Samuel* 3:1–9. What in the biblical text supports the idea that Shiloh once was the Israelites' main worship center? Consider why the biblical text mentions that the word of the LORD was rare in those days. What might cause Samuel to mistake the LORD's voice for Eli's voice? What might explain why Eli does not tell Samuel he suspects the LORD is calling the boy?

proph·et

one who speaks for God

The Greek word προφήτης (*prophetes*) comes from the word πρόφημι (*prophemi*), a combination of a verb meaning “to speak” and the prefix *pro-*, which can mean either “before” in the sense of time, or “in front of” in a spatial context. As a mouthpiece for God, the **prophet** is called to appoint, counsel, and—when necessary—reject kings; to authorize war, which involves invoking divine aid; and to teach and model righteousness for the king and the people.

8 Read the *First Book of Samuel* 3:10–20. What might be the thing to which God alludes when he calls Samuel, and why is he telling a young boy? How does what God tells Samuel differ from previous accounts about Eli and Eli’s sons? Consider how the punishment of Eli’s house might be related to what God is planning. Why might Samuel be afraid to tell Eli what God said?

9 Read the *First Book of Samuel* 28:3–14. Why does Saul want to talk with Samuel even though Samuel is dead? What does this imply about the kind of relationship that Saul had with Samuel when Samuel was alive? Why does Saul need to disguise himself when visiting the medium at En-Dor? How does the medium recognize Saul? In terms of Christianity, what is relevant about Samuel’s spirit rising from the ground rather than descending from heaven?

10 Read the *First Book of Samuel* 28:15–19. What does Saul want Samuel to tell him? What does this indicate about the relationship between kings and prophets? Which of his previous prophecies concerning Saul does Samuel affirm are coming to pass now, and why? How does the new information that Samuel tells Saul cement Samuel’s reputation as a spokesman for the LORD?

EARLY PROPHETS

In the book of *Genesis*, several major figures are described possessing some of the traits and abilities associated with the prophets. These include Enoch (5:24), Noah (9:24–27), Abraham (20:1–7), Jacob (49:1–33), and Joseph (50:24–26). In the book of *Exodus*, Aaron (7:1) and Miriam (15:20) appear. In the book of *Numbers* there are the 70 elders (11:24–25) and Balaam (22:15–20). Moses is described as a prophet in the book of *Deuteronomy* 34:10–12, and Deborah is named as a judge and a prophetess in the *Book of Judges* 4:4.



THE TWO EARS OF EVERYONE WILL TINGLE

Because there are so many references to prophets and false prophets in the Bible, much confusion exists about who actually speaks for God. The new thing introduced by the LORD in the *First Book of Samuel* 3:1–14 should help cut through the fog, but most commentary related to that passage focuses on details regarding Samuel’s age and that he is sleeping near the ark when God calls him.

It is of little help that the LORD fails to spell out exactly what he is announcing. It usually is assumed that God is referring to the call of Samuel as a prophet, but that seems to be only part of it. Preceding books in the Old Testament identify a number of other important figures as prophets, and there also are unnamed men of God functioning as prophets. To complicate things even more, Samuel often is identified as the first prophet, calling into question how it is that Moses can be considered a prophet by writers in both Testaments.

Prior to the time of Samuel, the Israelites looked to God as their king, and the LORD provided priests to make sacrifices for sins. A series of judges arose

to deal with other spiritual matters and political concerns. When Samuel anoints Saul as king, Saul receives the political authority that Samuel held as a judge—but Samuel retains his spiritual authority. Concurrent with establishment of the monarchy comes establishment of the office of prophet to provide a check on the power of the king.

Advising kings is not a prophet’s only function. A prophet is called by the LORD because the prophet responds to many things in the same way that God does. The prophet sympathizes with the LORD and is answerable only to God. The prophet’s spiritual authority rests on his own righteousness, and this allows him to instruct the king as well as all of the people regarding moral behavior. When Moses gives the law, he is fulfilling one role of a prophet.

Each of the prophets mysteriously points toward the coming reign of the Messiah, who in the person of Christ will fulfill all three roles of priest, prophet, and king. This is the miraculous new thing that the LORD announces—a thing that God assures Samuel will make everyone’s ears tingle.

