

I Samuel 8-12 Saul, The First King of Israel

Introduction:

During the majority of Samuel's adult life he led Israel as a prophet, priest and judge. In the tradition of the previous judges God called Samuel to lead the people out of chaos, rebellion and oppression, and under his leadership Israel enjoyed relative peace from the Philistines. As we pointed out previously, Samuel served in a way that showed us a foreshadowing of the promised Messiah. He was born in a miraculous manner, dedicated to a unique life, and called to lead Israel out of oppression. Also, like John the Baptizer, Samuel ushered in the king of Israel, Samuel a carnal king and John the King of Kings. As Israel recognizes Samuel's advanced age and diminishing strength as a judge, they begin begging for a king to lead and protect them.

Chapter 8 Israel Demands a King

Vs. 1-3 Samuel has become an old man. He has appointed his sons as judges over Israel, but his sons are corrupt, seeking dishonest gain, taking bribes and perverting justice. The Torah addresses such behavior among judges in more than one place. Exodus 18:21 tells us that judges should be selected who are able men who fear God, those who hate dishonest gain, and those who are capable of judging thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. Deuteronomy 16:18-22 addresses this issue by describing proper judges as: able to provide righteous judgments, those who would not distort justice, who show no partiality and would take no bribe. A bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts the words of the righteous. Justice and only justice is to be pursued so that the people may live long on the land God has given them to possess.

Samuel's sons, Joel and Abijah abandoned these Torah requirements for judges.

Vs. 4-9 The people of Israel use Samuel's old age and the corruption of his sons as reason for Israel now to have a king to rule over them. The elders of Israel gather at Ramah and address Samuel demanding that he appoint for them a king.

Samuel was very displeased with these demands, apparently taking it personally that the people wanted a king to replace him as judge. As Samuel appeals this to God, God speaks to Samuel letting him know that the rejection is not against Samuel, but against God Himself. The people do not want to be ruled by God, they want a man who is king to be their ruler.

God's response to Samuel, *"Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all they have to say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them. Like all the deeds which they have done since the day I brought them up from Egypt even to this day – in that they have forsaken Me and served other gods – so they are doing to you also. Now then, listen to their voice; however, you shall solemnly warn them and tell them of the procedure of the king who will reign over them". (vs. 7-9)*

Vs. 10-22 Be careful what you ask for! Samuel spoke to the people, warning them of the actions and procedures a king will exercise over them, but they refused to listen. Because a king has sovereign reign over all the people of the land, many hard and costly demands will be made on the people. A king will:

- He will take your sons and create an army for himself
- He will take leaders to take care of his own assets over the assets of the people
- He will take men and women to farm his own lands and care for his livestock
- He will require craftsmen to make implements of war, armaments for his armies
- He will take your daughters for perfumers, cooks and bakers
- He will take the best of your fields, your vineyards, your olive groves – and give them to his servants
- He will tax you one-tenth of all your seed and all your vineyard and olive grove produce
- He will take your male servants and your female servants
- He will take your best young men and best donkeys and put them to work for himself
- He will tax you one-tenth of your flocks
- You yourselves will be his servants.

You will cry out to God because of the atrocities of the king you have requested but the LORD will not answer you on that day when you cry out.

One of the consistent characteristics of the Hebrew people from the time they departed Egypt and all through history, even to the time of Jesus in the gospels, they were stiff necked and stubborn. The people refused to listen to the words of Samuel, demanding all the louder that a king should be appointed over them. The desire to be like all other nations with a man ruling as king who would judge the people and lead them in times of war was driving the people's decision making.

After consulting with God, Samuel agreed to appoint a king and dispersed the people to their homes.

Chapter 9 Introduction of Saul

Vs. 1-2 Who was Saul?

- Of the Tribe of Benjamin (other notable Benjaminites: Esther and Mordacai; Saul of Tarsus (Apostle Paul))
- Son of Kish, a mighty man of valor
- Handsome to look at and taller than all his peers

Vs. 3-10 We find Saul being active in just real life situations. His father's donkeys have wandered away and Kish sends his son, Saul, along with a servant to find the lost donkeys. The young men head out and travel through the land of Benjamin, heading north to the land of Ephraim, and circle around to return to the land of Benjamin. The donkeys were not located. As they headed toward home, Saul realized they were in the area where the old prophet (Samuel) lived. At that time he was known as a seer because he had at times heard from God and gave prophesies. This is different from the spiritualist seers associated with dark spirits, such as the witch of Endor consulted by Saul at the end of his career. However, is it not interesting that as a young man his introduction to Samuel, a seer, is to find donkeys; while the day before he is to die, Saul goes to a witch of Endor to conjure Samuel from the dead for advice? This is the day before he is to die and lose his army to the Philistines. (I Samuel 28:1-19)?

Vs. 11-14 Saul and the servant approach the place where they believe Samuel resides and they come to a water well and encounter women drawing water. They inquired of the women the whereabouts of Samuel, the seer, and they advise that he has gone to a sacrifice and a banquet dinner. If they hurry they will find him before the dinner. There is an interesting note here, this passage is often paired or contrasted with Genesis 24:11-15. Eleazar, trusted servant of Abraham has been sent to Haran to find a wife for the promised son, Isaac. He approaches a water well where he meets Rebekah, the future wife of his young master. There is great similarity in the story of Rebekah at the well and these women at the well as Saul is seeking his master Samuel. Both Eleazar and Saul will find their intended object of search.

As instructed by the women, Saul and his servant go to the high place, the place where the altar is located and they meet Samuel coming toward them as he is headed to the high place.

Vs. 15-21 God is in control – a divine appointment. The day before these events God spoke to Samuel letting him know that on the day following he would meet a young man, Saul, who was to be anointed the prince of Israel, to become King Saul in due time. God tells Samuel that *“Saul will be the one who will deliver His people from the hand of the Philistines”*.

As Saul approaches the old man, asking to speak with the “seer” Samuel invites Saul to join him in a banquet at the sacrifices. Saul begins to explain that God has great plans for Saul in the future, he has been chosen from all who reside in Israel.

God spoke to Samuel, *“About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin, and you shall anoint him to be prince over my people Israel; and he will deliver my people from the hand of the Philistines. For I have regarded My people, because their cry has come to me”*. (vs. 15-16)

This is an interesting statement. God is telling Samuel that even though Israel is wrong to demand a king to rule over them, God has regarded their request and is allowing Samuel to anoint a king. This should cause us to think seriously about our petitions to God, to be careful of what we ask for. Jesus prayed in the Garden, *“Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet, not My will but Your will be done”*. (Luke 22:42)

We should never be afraid to ask God for anything. However, just as Jesus demonstrated, we should always seek His will in all matters, and trust His answer in respect to His will, not our own.

Samuel invited Saul to join him at the meal at the high place, following the sacrifices and tells him of what his future is to hold. Saul is shocked.

Vs. 22-27 Saul is taken to the large table and placed at the head of the table of those who were invited, about 30 men. Samuel calls for the best portion, most likely the priestly portion, to be placed before Saul. And Saul ate with Samuel that day.

After the meal they went to Samuel’s house and apparently spoke on the roof all night long. Imagine all that Samuel needed to share with Saul to prepare him for the assignment he was being given. Perhaps they slept some, for at day break Samuel called to Saul on the roof to prepare him for being sent away. Samuel escorted Saul to the edge of the city, had Saul send his servant ahead, so Samuel could proclaim the word of God to him. The Stone Edition of the Tanach (Hebrew Bible) translates this verse (Vs. 27), *“You shall stand here now and I will let you hear the word of the LORD”*.

- Did God speak directly to Saul?
- Did God speak a special word to Saul through the mouth of Samuel?
- Did Samuel speak to Saul through the Torah, God’s written instructions given to His people on Mount Sinai through Moses?

God prophetically spoke of this very day with Moses on Mount Sinai several hundred years earlier as recorded on Deuteronomy 17:14-20:

“When you enter the land which the LORD your God gives you, and you possess it and live in it, and you say, ‘I will set a king over me like all the nations who are around me’, you shall surely set a king over you who the LORD your God chooses, one from among your countrymen you shall set a king over yourselves; you may not put a foreigner over yourselves who is not your countryman. Moreover, he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor shall he cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, since the LORD has said to you, ‘You shall never again return that way’. He shall not multiply wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away, nor shall he greatly increase silver and gold for himself. Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this Torah scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. It shall be with him and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, by carefully observing all the words of this Law and these statutes, so that his heart may be lifted up above his countrymen and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or to the left, so that he and his sons may continue long in his kingdom in the midst of Israel”.

Another prophetic statement from Genesis is interesting to consider with the appointment of Saul to be the first king. In Genesis 49, as Jacob is about to die he calls his sons together and pronounces blessings and prophecies on each of them. For Judah he states that, “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor he ruler’s staff from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes”. (Genesis 49:10) So a question begs to be asked, “Why was Saul, a Benjaminite the first appointed king”? There are two explanations worthy to be considered:

1. The Jewish sages suggest that the Genesis verse does not limit the first king to the tribe of Judah, but once the Davidic reign is established, the scepter will remain with Judah till the Messiah (Shiloh) comes. Jesus is of the Tribe of Judah, the Davidic reign established when David is anointed king.
2. Hosea 13:10-11 sheds light on this topic, “Where now is your king that he may save you in all your cities, And your judges of who you requested, ‘Give me a king and princes’. I gave you a king in My anger and took him away in My wrath”. Hosea gives us a picture of Israel’s perpetual disobedience and wandering spiritually away from God. There is a prevalent idea that Israel’s world would have been very different had they obeyed God and accepted His promises of great blessings as recorded in Leviticus 26. The people demanded a king, so out of anger, God gave them Saul. If Saul had followed God there would have been a different outcome, but as we will see, Saul abandoned God as well. Ultimately, God’s will, will be done. If the people God calls to do His will choose to disobey, God will raise up a new person to do His will.

Chapter 10 Saul Anointed as King

Vs. 1-16 As Samuel and Saul stood on the road, Samuel took a flask of oil and anointed young Saul to be the first king of Israel. However, it was not time to make this declaration and anointing public. Samuel gives Saul several interesting and unusual prophetic statements, perhaps to help Saul understand and confirm what has just happened to him. Perhaps these events are designed to ensure Saul will understand that God is in control and to encourage Saul in putting God first in this whole process of becoming the king.

- As you head home, when you are near Rachel's Tomb, two men will approach you and let you know your father's donkeys have been located
- As you leave that area and approach the oak of Tabor, you will meet three men heading to Bethel to worship God. One will have three young goats; one will carry a jug of wine; one will be carrying three loaves of bread and he will give two loaves to you, which you will accept
- From there you will go to the hill of God (Kiriath-jearim where the Ark is still being kept) where there is a garrison of Philistines. Here you will meet a group of prophets coming down from the Mount, carrying harps, tambourines, flutes and lyres, and they will be prophesying.
- Here the Spirit of God will come on Saul and he will be changed into a man of prophecy, a man different than you are today. God has chosen you and as a king you will have spiritual responsibility as well as national leadership responsibility.
- You shall continue to your home, Gilgal, and wait for seven days. Samuel will meet him there in seven days and offer burnt offerings and sacrificial peace offerings

All these prophetic things came true and occurred just as Samuel has cited. People wondered aloud, "What has happened to the son of Kish? He has joined the prophets and is now prophesying himself". Saul's uncle approached him to find out what has happened. He questioned Saul about what Samuel had said to him. Because Saul was not yet free to discuss the anointing that has occurred he addressed his uncle's questions regarding what Samuel said regarding the missing donkeys.

Vs. 17-19 Samuel called all Israel to Mizpah to hear a special announcement; *"Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, I brought Israel up from Egypt, and I delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the power of the kingdoms that were oppressing you. But you have today rejected your God, who delivers you from all your calamities and your distresses; yet you have said, 'No but set a king over us'! Now therefore, present yourselves before the LORD by your tribes and by your clans"*.

It is important to note that God is allowing the people to have a king rule over them, though this is not His plan. He is the King and Creator of not only Israel, but in truth, all the world.

Vs. 20-27 All the people gathered from all twelve tribes, arranged according to tribes and clans within tribes, to cast lots. The casting of lots most likely was done by inquiring of the Urim and Thummim, the breast plate worn by the High Priest (Samuel). This is the means by which God directed the affairs of His people. (Leviticus 8:8; Numbers 27:18-21; Deuteronomy 33:8) The lot fell to the tribe of Benjamin and within the tribe, the family of Matrite (Saul's family).

Interestingly, Saul hid himself from the proceedings and was not present when the lot pointed to him. Most likely it was modesty that kept him away. The LORD pointed them to the area of baggage where Saul was hiding. The men sought for him, found him and escorted Saul to the center stage. Samuel declared Saul as the chosen one of God to be king, and all the people shouted, ***“Long live the king!”***

There were mighty men who were touched by the anointing of Saul and followed him to his home. At the same time, there were certain worthless men who despised Saul and his anointing, and refused to give him tribute or honor.

But Saul remained silent. While this was a tremendous honor for Saul, the fact that the Spirit of God had come upon Saul and he began to prophesy, it had to be a sobering and bitter/sweet situation as Saul recognized God approved this kingship out of anger with the people. The Israelites had rejected God as King and sovereign leader of Israel, and Saul was now appointed and anointed to be the spiritual, moral and civil leader of the nation. As we had discussed earlier, the nation was not well organized and operated very much as a collection of related tribes and clans united through the priest and judge. Now they will become consolidated into a functional nation under an established monarch.

Chapter 11 Saul's First Challenge

Vs. 1-4 Nahash the Ammonite besieged the town of Jabesh-gilead, a town on the east side of the Jordan River within the lands of the half tribe of Manasseh. This is north east some distance from Ramah and the tribal lands of Benjamin. The men of Jabesh offered to form an alliance with Nahash for peace. Nahash responded by saying he would accept their offer if every man of Jabesh would allow him to gouge out their right eye – thus creating a scourge on the people. The elders of Jabesh asked for seven days to consider this and to communicate with all of Israel. If no one stepped forward to protect the men of Jabesh, then they would agree to the conditions of the pact.

Word came to Saul in the presence of many people and the people began to weep and wail.

Vs. 5-11 Saul's response to the demands of the Ammonites was one of anger. The Spirit of God came over Saul and he very graphically put out a call to war. He butchered oxen, cut

them in pieces, and sent the pieces throughout the land with this message, “Whoever does not come out after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done to his oxen”. The dread of the LORD fell on the people and they came out as one man. 300,000 Israelite men amassed to free their brothers at Jabesh-gilead. Saul led the men into battle and decimated the Ammonites, thus freeing their brothers in Jabesh.

Vs. 12-15 The people rallied behind Saul to such a degree that they sought to find the men who despised Saul (10:27) and wanted to execute them. Saul refused to have the men killed because this was a day of celebration to honor the deliverance God brought on the people.

Samuel invited all the people to meet in Gilgal for sacrifices and worship, and a renewal of the kingdom.

Chapter 12 Confirmation of King Saul

The transition to a king over Israel was not easy and was not simple. God had structured His people to be led spiritually by a High Priest of the lineage of Aaron, the first High Priest and by a judge called and appointed by God as needed. God would be the King of Israel for all time.

Reading through these chapters we see stated over and over that an earthly king is not in God’s plan; however, He knows this day is coming and prophesied about it hundreds of years earlier. In reality, the Kingdom of God was established at Mount Sinai and restated at Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2. Even today God is the King of His Kingdom and we are all subjects to the King. Even in a republic like the USA God is the sovereign King over all of us. Kings and presidents and Prime Ministers of nations today are ultimately responsible to lead in a way that honors the true King, YHVH.

Samuel continues to reiterate these facts and to warn the people about the need to follow God and follow the king. The king should lead the people into paths of righteousness and the people should hold the king accountable to be a man of God.

In this final chapter of this lesson, Samuel cites one more time these truths. He reminds the people of the historical pattern of Israel wandering away from God, getting in trouble with foreign kings, and begging God to save them. Over and over God has responded to His people in need, beginning with Moses and Aaron, then reminding them of all the judges who came forward to give the people relief. Now, they have a king, but above that king, and any king who follows, is the God of Heaven.