

Lecture #5 – Exposition of I Samuel 8-11

Chapter 8 – The People Demand a King

vs. 1-5 – The Request for a King

Samuel's two sons are named in vs. 2 – Joel ("Jehovah is his God"¹) and Abiah ("father/worshipper of God"²).

It is interesting to note that Samuel, like Eli, had two sons that strayed from their father's example. Could it be something he learned from Eli? B.H. Carroll notes:

“Samuel was old. He had made his sons judges, as Eli had done in the case of his sons. These sons were unworthy to hold office: ‘They did not walk in Samuel's way, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment.’ Samuel had no right to make judges, nor to appoint his successor; that was Jehovah's prerogative. He had retained these sons in office, though unworthy, and had so far followed Eli's example.

“Nepotism has always been repugnant to the people.”³

In my Bible college training, Bro. Jeff Fugate used to say, “If you lose your family, you lose your ministry.”⁴

There are three reasons given for wanting a king: (1) Samuel's old age and the evil character of his sons meant leadership problems were likely to come soon, (2) a desire to be like the nations around them, and (3) to have a leader in the day of battle (later in vs. 20)⁵. All three of these are rejections of God. It was God that lifted up fitting and capable leaders. It was God that uniquely ruled over His people. It was God that delivered in the day of battle. It is obvious that the people were rejecting the *Theocracy* (direct rule of God) for a *monarchy* (rule of a king).

vs. 6-9 – Samuel and the Lord

Samuel, a man of prayer, took his concerns straight to God in prayer. We would do well to do the same.

Edersheim writes concerning the demand for a king:

¹ Strong's H3100

² Strong's H29

³ *An Interpretation of the English Bible: The Hebrew Monarchy*, by B.H. Carroll. p. 41. Emphasis original.

⁴ This is an oversimplification for emphasis. God can continue to use anyone though not in the same way as before such a tragedy.

⁵ Also, could refer to the Philistine threat (I Samuel 9:16) or the incursion by Nahash (I Samuel 12:12)

“Keeping in view that there was nothing absolutely wrong in Israel's desire for a monarchy (Deuteronomy 17:14, etc.; comp. even Genesis 17:6, 16; 35:11), nor yet, so far as we can judge, relatively, as concerned the time when this demand was made, the explanation of the difficulty must lie in the motives and the manner rather than in the fact of the ‘elders,’ request. In truth, it is precisely this - the ‘wherefore’ and the ‘how,’ not the thing itself, - not that they spake it, but ‘as they spake it,’ which was ‘evil in the eyes of Samuel.’ Israel asked ‘a king’ to ‘judge’ them, such as those of all the nations. We know what the term ‘judge’ meant in Israel. It meant implicit reliance for deliverance from their enemies on an individual, specially God-appointed - that is, really on the unseen God. It was this to which the people had objected in the time of Gideon, and which they would no longer bear in the days of Samuel. Their deliverance was unseen, they wanted it seen; it was only certain to faith, but quite uncertain to them in their state of mind; it was in heaven, they wanted it upon earth; it was of God, they wanted it visibly embodied in a man. In this aspect of the matter, we quite understand why God characterized it as a rejection of Himself, and that in reference to it He directed Samuel to ‘bear strong testimony against them.’”⁶

God is here about to begin working in a new way with Israel. As we saw in Lecture #2, the coming of the kingdom was no surprise to God. From the promises to Abraham in Genesis 17:6 to the regulations in Deuteronomy 17:14-20, God had already woven the request for a kingdom into His plans for Israel. God would use the kingdom to continue preparing for the coming Messiah.

The prophet Hosea, writing almost 400 years later, gives us further insight into God’s actions:

“O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help.
I will be thy king: where is any other that may save thee in all thy cities? and thy judges of whom thou saidst, Give me a king and princes?
I gave thee a king in mine anger, and took him away in my wrath.” (Hosea 13:9-11)

Many commentaries⁷ identify the king in Hosea 13:11 as referring to Saul or the establishment of the monarchy.

vs. 10-18 – Samuel’s Message

Samuel here delivers one of the greatest political lectures ever given. He tells them *exactly* what a king will do, and it is not going to be what the people want. If the people would only follow God directly there would be no need for a king and the burden of his rule.

John Davis summarizes Samuel’s warning of what a king would do:

“In the context of verses 11 through 18, five serious problems are cited by Samuel. They are as follows: (1) A military draft would be established (v. 11-12). (2) The people of the land would be put in servitude (v. 13). (3) There would be widespread land confiscation (v. 14). Such land confiscation was common among kings of the ancient Near East. These lands were many times given to successful warriors for their own private use. (4) There would be taxes (v. 15). (5) There

⁶ *Bible History: Old Testament* by Alfred Edersheim. Book 4, p. 33-34

⁷ J. Vernon McGee, B.H. Carroll, John Gill, A.C. Gaebelain, and Adam Clarke, to name a few.

would be the loss of personal liberty (vv. 16-17). Samuel warned the people that whatever success might be achieved by the appointment of a king at this point would be purely temporary, and the day would come when the people would cry out for freedom from such rule (v. 18).⁸

Note – “to ear” in vs. 12 means to plow.⁹

vs. 19-22 – The People’s Choice

There is a parallel here to when Israel arrived at Sinai. God gave Moses an overview of the Law (Exodus 20-24), the people heard it (Exodus 24:3), and the people covenanted to follow all that the Lord said (Exodus 24:3, 7). Here in I Samuel, God gives them an overview of what is ahead (vs. 10-18), the people heard it (vs. 19), and the people chose to have a king (vs. 19-20). God did not force this on the people. He let them know what would happen. They heard and understood the words of God. They chose to have an earthly king.

Note in vs. 21 that Samuel is acting as a faithful mediator in prayer. He is not injecting his own will or opinion into the matter as he delivers to God only what the people said. Nothing more, nothing less.

Chapter 9 – Saul’s Entrance

vs. 1-14 – Saul’s Search

We are first introduced to Saul’s father, Kish (“a bow”), a member of the tribe of Benjamin.¹⁰ Kish is the son of Ner¹¹ (“light”), the son of Abiel (“father of strength”), the son of Zeror (“bundle”), the son of Bechorath (“first-born”), the son of Aphiah (“refreshed”)¹². Kish is described as a physically strong man.

Saul (“desired”)¹³ is described in vs. 2 as the type of physically imposing individual that people would naturally follow. He is about 40 years of age¹⁴. It is generally agreed that the average height of a man in Bible times was around 5 feet tall. If Saul was head and shoulders above that height, he is likely around 6 feet 6 inches tall. He certainly *looked* like a king.

I think it is indicative of Saul’s character that he attempts his search in his own strength while only reluctantly turning to God in the end.

⁸ *Israel: From Conquest to Exile* by John J. Davis and John C. Whitcomb. p. 202-203.

⁹ <https://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/ear> - accessed 8-26-22

¹⁰ A tribe that was nearly wiped out in civil war in Judges 20. Reese dates that war to 1419 B.C.

¹¹ Ner is named in I Chronicles 8:33. Hebrew does not have the precise terms for family members like we have. *Son* basically means “descendent”, and can be applied to sons, grandson, great-grandsons, etc.

¹² These name definitions taken from Smith’s Bible Dictionary.

¹³ Smith’s Bible Dictionary

¹⁴ *The Reese Chronological Study Bible*, p. 382

“Little did he know how the search would end and that he would soon become the head of the nation, which had gone more astray than the lost asses (Isaiah 1:3).”¹⁵ – Gaebelein.

The “fourth part of shekel of silver” is not a coin by any standard. Coins as we know them (precious metals minted and marked with consistent value) were first struck in Lydia around 650 B.C.¹⁶ The first coins minted around Israel were under Persian authority around 400 B.C.¹⁷ Before that time, precious metals used in trade were not standard sizes or weights, and they would be weighed at every transaction (Genesis 23:16, Jeremiah 32:9). ¼ shekel would be about 2.85 grams, worth roughly \$1.70.¹⁸ For comparison, a pre-1964 American silver dime weighs 2.5 grams.

Gaebelein comments:

“Verse 9, containing a parenthetical statement, is not a gloss by a later hand, as the critical school maintains. The difference between seer and prophet is an interesting one. A prophet is one who speaks for God being moved by God; he is the mouthpiece of the Lord. The term seer suggests the knowledge the prophet had. The people were more concerned about the seer than the prophet. Thus Saul shows the state of his heart. He does not seek God, nor the prophet as the man and mouthpiece of God; only the seer.”¹⁹

As Saul arrives at what is almost certainly Samuel’s hometown of Ramah, he finds that they are about to have sacrificial feast at “the high place”. John Gill comments on what is happening here:

“whether it was the new moon, or some festival they observed, though the tabernacle was not there, is not certain; at which, besides the offerings required, freewill offerings and peace offerings were brought by the people, on part of which they feasted with their friends; and very probably, as Samuel was acquainted by the Lord that he who was to be king of Israel would be with him that day, he might add to the sacrifices of the people, to make the entertainment the more grand and liberal; since he had a principal concern in ordering the guests, and dividing the portions, as well as blessing the food, which indeed he might take upon him, as being judge, priest, and prophet: this was an high place where this sacrifice or feast was; for Shiloh being destroyed, and the tabernacle removed elsewhere, and that being in one place, and the ark in another, and they not together, no distinction of places was made, none being yet chosen, all were fit; and particularly high places, which were always reckoned the most proper for divine service and sacrifice.”²⁰

vs. 15-27 – Samuel and Saul

Samuel honors (and marks) Saul by: (1) sitting him in the place of honor at the feast, (2) giving him the shoulder of beef which symbolized strength and government²¹, and (3) communing with Saul.

¹⁵ Annotated Bible by A.C. Gaebelein. E-Sword module.

¹⁶ <https://coinsite.com/what-was-the-first-coin/> - accessed 8-26-22

¹⁷ *A Treasury of Jewish Coins*, by Ya’akov Meshorer. p. 1.

¹⁸ <http://coinapps.com/silver/gram/calculator/> - accessed 8-26-22, silver valued at \$18.91/ounce.

¹⁹ *Annotated Bible* by A.C. Gaebelein. E-Sword module.

²⁰ *John Gill’s Exposition of the Bible*. E-Sword module.

²¹ See usage in Isaiah 9:6

Concerning the “top of the house” in vs. 25, it was quite common for homes to be build with flat roofs which would be used as an extra story. Sometimes gazebo-like structures would be built on them. It is common in Scripture to find people on the roof of their homes (II Samuel 11:2, Nehemiah 8:16, Jeremiah 19:13, Acts 10:9).

Chapter 10 – Saul is Chosen

vs. 1-8 – Saul’s Anointing and Confirmation

Anointing with oil pictured the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. It was used in consecrating prophets, priest, and kings into their respective offices.

Saul is somewhat timid when we first meet him. God arranges three separate events to confirm His choice of Saul. Saul will: (1) meet messengers from his father, (2) meet three men and receive gifts from them, and (3) meet a company of prophets and prophesy with them.

vs. 9-13 – Saul and the Prophets

We find three times that the Spirit “came upon” Saul (I Samuel 10:10, 11:6, 19:23). Other cases are seen with Balaam (Numbers 24:2), Othniel (Judges 3:10), Gideon (Judges 6:34), Jephthah (Judges 11:29), Samson²² (Judges 13:25, 14:6, 19; 15:14), David (I Samuel 16:13), Saul’s unnamed messengers (I Samuel 19:20), Amasai (I Chronicles 12:18), Ahazariah (II Chronicles 15:1), Jahaziel (II Chronicles 20:14), Zechariah (II Chronicles 24:20), and perhaps Isaiah (Isaiah 61:1)²³ and Ezekiel (Ezekiel 2:2, 3:24, 11:5)²⁴. In contrast, the Spirit will “rest” upon the Messiah (Isaiah 11:2).

Lewis Sperry Chafer on the work of the Spirit in the Old Testament:

“The Spirit came upon men for the accomplishment of divinely appointed undertakings reaching even to mechanical tasks and to works of art. Especially to be observed is the fact that there was no provision for, and no promise of, an abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of any Old Testament saint. In this truth is to be seen one of the most differentiating features of the Spirit's relationship in the Mosaic age, as compared to the present age. The term *sovereign* best describes the Spirit's relation to men of old. He came upon them and departed according to His sovereign good pleasure. In no instance did the faith of men determine the Spirit's actions.”²⁵

Saul’s actions with the prophets are remarkable in that he, who by all evidence was only casually religious, joins in the ministry of the prophets as if he were one of them and trained as they had been. It is assumed by many to involve music because of the mention of instruments in vs. 5, perhaps joining in singing songs he had hitherto not learned.

²² The Scripture records that the Spirit came upon Samson on more occasions than any other individual.

²³ This reference is obviously Messianic (Luke 4:16-21) but can be read also as the words of the prophet himself.

²⁴ The phrasing is a little different, but the concept appears the same.

²⁵ *Systematic Theology*, by Lewis Sperry Chafer. Vol. 6. p. 71.

“Is Saul also among the prophets?” became an idiomatic expression of the time, essentially meaning someone was found to surprisingly (in a good sense) out of place. Keil and Delitzsch describe it as “a proverb which was used to express astonishment at the appearance of any man in a sphere of life which had hitherto been altogether strange to him.”²⁶

vs. 14-16 – Saul Hides His Anointing

Saul had been personally convinced of his selection to be king. It seems likely that he thought no one would believe him, or perhaps he awaited the upcoming public ceremony at Gilgal.

vs. 17-27 – Saul is Chosen

Samuel calls Israel to gather at Mizpeh, the site of the great revival in I Samuel 7. There he causes the leaders of the tribes and families to pass before him until he ceremonially chooses the individual Saul. But Saul is nowhere to be found.

Edersheim writes on the actions of Saul:

“Even this seems characteristic of Saul. It could have been neither from humility nor modesty - both of which would, to say the least, have been here misplaced. It is indeed true that this was a moment in which the heart of the bravest might fail, and that thoughts of what was before him might well fill him with anxiety. Saul must have known what would be expected of him as king. Would he succeed in it? He knew the tribal and personal jealousies which his election would call forth. Would he be strong enough to stand against them? Such questions were natural. The only true answer would have been a spiritual one. Unable to give it, Saul withdrew from the assembly. Did he wonder whether after all it would come to pass or what would happen, and wait till a decision was forced upon him? The people, at any rate, saw nothing in his conduct that seemed to them strange; and so we may take it that it was just up to the level of their own conceptions, though to us it appears very different from what a hero of God would have done.”²⁷

Gaebelein comments:

“Why did he hide? Some say it was humility and modesty. It was not that, but rather fear of the responsibility he was now to assume. And that revealed lack of confidence in God of whose power he had received such evidences. All foreshadows the coming failure of the people’s king.”²⁸

Edersheim observes on the choice of Saul:

“In fact, what they really wanted was a king who would reflect and embody their idea of royalty, not the ideal which God had set before them. And no better representative of Israel could have

²⁶ https://biblehub.com/commentaries/kad/1_samuel/10.htm - accessed 8-28-23

²⁷ Bible History: Old Testament by Alfred Edersheim. Book 4, p. 49. Emphasis added.

²⁸ Annotated Bible. E-Sword.

been found than Saul, alike in appearance and in military qualification; nor yet a truer reflex of the people than that which his character and religious bearing offered. He was the typical Israelite of his period, and this neither as regarded the evil-disposed or 'sons of Belial,' nor yet, of course, the minority of the truly enlightened, but the great body of the well-disposed people. If David was the king 'after God's own heart,' Saul was the king after the people's own heart. What they had asked, they obtained; and what they obtained, must fail; and what failed would prepare for what God had intended."²⁹

Note that Samuel, the outspoken critic of the monarchy, is the one to lead its formation. It is he that writes down something like a constitution for the kingdom.

Andrew Wood suggests the following concerning the book and its content:

"This writing (Vulg. *legem regni*) was probably placed with the copy of the Law beside the Ark (Deut. 31. 26, 'for a witness' or protest against any breach. It was the constitution – probably based on Deut. 17. 14-20, and possibly embodying conditions prescribed by the elders (cp. 2 Sam. 5.3) – a charter establishing and defining the king's position, in relation to Jehovah and the people, as a viceroy sitting upon the throne of the kingdom of the Lord over Israel (1 Chr. 28. 5). The other contents of 'the book' we may gather from Ex. 24.7; Deut. 28.61; Ex. 17.14; Josh. 24.26."³⁰

Chapter 11 – Rescue of Jabesh-Gilead

vs. 1-3 – Nahash besieges Jabesh-Gilead

The Ammonites were descendants of Lot through the incestuous relationship with his daughters (Genesis 19:37-38). Their territory was west of the Jordan River and Israel was not supposed to claim it (Deuteronomy 2:19). Despite the kinship through Abraham, the Ammonites were not allies of Israel. There were brutal and vicious people (I Samuel 10:2, Amos 1:13).

Nahash means "serpent"³¹.

Jabesh-Gilead (*Jabesh* means "dry", and *Gilead* means "hard rocky region")³² is located on the Trans-Jordan plains. The Ammonites appear to have wanted to take this area from Israel (Judges 11:13), making incursions there in Judges 10:6-18. Perhaps this attack was revenge for Jephthah's victory roughly 60 years prior.³³

Saul likely had a personal connection to Jabesh-Gilead. Four hundred of the surviving Benjaminites from the civil war of Judges 20 were given wives from Jabesh-Gilead (Judges 21:12-14).³⁴

²⁹ Bible History: Old Testament by Alfred Edersheim. Book 4, p. 47. Emphasis added.

³⁰ *The Hebrew Monarchy* by Andrew Wood, 1896. p. 10.

³¹ Smith's Bible Dictionary

³² Smith's Bible Dictionary. Gilead is also defined as "hill of testimony" (Easton's).

³³ Reese dates Jephthah to 1170-1152 B.C. and the Nahash's invasion to 1095 B.C.

³⁴ See *Kingdom of Priests* by Euguene Merrill, p. 181 & 199, and *Israel: From Conquest to Exile*. p. 208-209.

We must remember that the people of this time lived by a very different moral code than modern civilization. Such mutilation as Nahash endeavored would cause an uproar today, but it was not unknown in the era of the Judges (see Judges 1:7). Beyond the humiliation, the act of plucking out the right eye was to disable them from effective military service. Loss of that eye would affect depth perception, make use of the bow by right-handed archers nearly impossible, and make it so their vision would be blocked if holding a shield in their left hand.

Nahash likely allowed the messengers to go out to either shame Israel for not coming to rescue Jabesh-Gilead or to entice Israel into a larger fight.

vs. 4-11 – Battle of Jabesh-Gilead

Note the place of Saul in vs 5. Even though he was chosen and anointed king he is still doing the work of a herdsman. There is no crown, no palace, no throne. Samuel was almost certainly still the primary leader for the nation.

The Spirit moves Saul to action, perhaps because such a bold response was not in his nature. His threat of slaying the oxen of those that do not answer his call is severe, and none can mistake it. It is fitting for the times and would affect the moral and immoral. Was this threat from Saul's human nature or was it divinely guided? God was in it as "the fear of the LORD fell" and not "the fear of Saul".

Note in vs. 7 that Saul gives as authority both himself and Samuel. He is either acknowledging that his kingly authority is not autocratic or that the name of Samuel would add weight to the order.

At Bezek, ("lightning")³⁵, 300,000 men of Israel and 30,000 men of Judah gather in response to the call. Some say Judah's number is given separately because of the quality of the soldiers, honed in battle against the Philistines³⁶. We will trace this fault line until it finally divides the kingdom under Rehoboam.

The strategy of the attack is brilliant. The people of Jabesh-Gilead feign surrendering so that the Ammonites surely let their guard down. Saul's forces attack from three directions before daybreak, catching the Ammonites completely by surprise. The ensuing rout is complete by midday.

The people of Jabesh-Gilead will not forget the actions of Saul on this day.

This first victory of Saul at the outset of his reign is the highwater mark of his reign.

³⁵ Smith's Bible Dictionary. It is about 20 miles west of Jabesh-Gilead on the west side of Jordan.

³⁶ For example, see John Gill on I Samuel 11:8.

vs. 12-15 – Saul's Kingdom Commences

The people wholly embrace Saul as their king after this resounding victory. Samuel calls the to assemble at Gilgal (“rolling”)³⁷, a highly significant place in Israel’s history.³⁸ The celebration there includes the people formally proclaiming Saul as their king and a great feast.³⁹

Scroggie observes three stages to the establishment of Saul as king: his anointing at Ramah (I Samuel 9:1-10:16, his appointment at Mizpeh (I Samuel 10:17-27), and his acclamation at Gilgal (I Samuel 11).⁴⁰ It is here that Saul’s reign truly begins.

³⁷ Easton’s Bible Dictionary

³⁸ Joshua 4:19-20, 5:10; I Samuel 7:16

³⁹ Only portions of this sacrifice are burned (3:4-5,9-10,14-15) and the rest is eaten by the offerer and the priests (7:15-20,29-34).

⁴⁰ The Unfolding Drama of Redemption by W. Graham Scroggie. Vol. I, p. 242.