

KINGDOMS

Week 3: I Samuel Chaps. 8-10

I. Framework:

- Our reading portion for this week places us at the doorstep of arguably the biggest change in the history of Israel since the exodus from Egypt: the beginning of the ill-fated monarchy.
- We find Samuel still hard at work, but advanced in years. His two sons are an unsettling reminder of Eli's children. Jo-el ("YHWH is God") and Aijah ("YHWH is my Father") are judges in Beer-sheeba and, much like Hophni and Phineas defiled sacrifices to God, Samuel's sons defile justice before God. They are guilty of wrongful gain, accepting bribes, and setting aside sound and righteous verdicts for corrupt ones.
- The elders of the various tribes, having no confidence in Samuel's legacy to govern Israel, request that a king be placed over them.

II. Talking Points:

A. Chapter 8:

- The elders and people request a king to be placed over them based on the following logic:
 1. So they can be like all the other nations (8:5)
 2. To judge them (8:5, 6, 20)
 3. To lead the army in battle (8:20)
- It is interesting that they choose the word judge (Heb. "rule, govern <mainly in a judicial sense>") instead of reign ("rule, as in royalty with a king or queen) that Samuel uses in his rebuke (8:11). Israel had not experienced the type of rule that an absolute monarch would bring and perhaps they are naïve in their request. This may be the reason they ignore Samuel's warnings.
- Additionally, they have seen in the past that their armies are inferior to those of the Philistines and that the Ark of the Covenant did not help them. Instead of returning to a system of seeking God's counsel and blessing before battle, perhaps they think new leadership will overcome their enemies.
- It should not be surprising that they reject God's authority. During the exodus from Egypt and after settlement in Canaan, God's chosen people spurned Him and chased after false gods and religion. By requesting an earthly monarch, they reject God and God's chosen system of leadership (judges, elders). This was predicted by Moses (Deuteronomy 17:14-20) and Hosea reminds his audience of their choice centuries later (Hosea 13:10-11).
- Samuel obeys God and warns the people what a king will do (8:11-18):
 - ✓ Enact and enforce military conscription
 - ✓ Put their skilled workers and artisans to work in the king's fields and workshops
 - ✓ Exercise eminent domain over their lands with no due process or compensation
 - ✓ Introduce taxation and place levies on goods.
- The Lord allows them to choose their fate. Samuel declares, however, that God will not hear their cries of regret later (8:18).

B. Chapter 9:

- In contrast to the epic stories from the ancient world of how men become kings, the introduction of the future first king of Israel is unremarkable. Those who rose to power would have stories of being chosen by the gods in a vision, claims of being descendants of demigods, or that they themselves were the children of a god and human mother. Saul, on the other hand, is discovered while on a search for wayward farm animals.
- Based on the narrative we are given, we can see these attributes of Saul:
 - Genealogy/family: Strong and wealthy, but not necessarily large and significant (compare 9:1 and 9:21)
 - Physical: Tall and handsome
 - Mental: Sketchy and indecisive (see next bullet)
- Saul's wise and focused, albeit un-named, servant seems to be the more level-headed and decisive of the pair. He is reluctant to abandon the search, knows Samuel's abilities and location, and finds the solution regarding a tribute to bring Samuel.
- The gift they are to give Samuel for his service? One quarter of a shekel of silver. This amounts to about 0.10 ounces, or \$2.00 in 2013 U.S. units of measure and prices. It is common in the Ancient Near East to bring gifts to prophets or seers for their services (cf. I Kings 14:1-16; II Kings 8:7-15).
- A recurring scene of the Hebrew Scriptures: encountering women at a well a crucial time. Recall the stories of Abraham's servant finding Isaac's bride Rebekah (Genesis 24:10-31), Jacob meeting Rachel (Genesis 29:1-12), and Moses meeting Zipporah (Exodus 2:15-21).
- The response of the women to Saul and his servant's inquiry regarding the seer is interesting. Their response could be described as verbose compared to most of the concise dialog in the narrative. They say the same thing three times (ESV): Samuel is "just ahead of you", "as soon as you enter the city you will find him", and

“you will meet him immediately”. There are theories in both modern scholarship and ancient Jewish commentaries: women are simply talkative (misogynistic sage in the Talmud), they are smitten by Saul’s good-looks, or they see the confusion in the faces of Saul and his servant (Alter, 284).

- Samuel, asked by the people to find a king, has the future king delivered to him. He is made aware of this fact by God (9:15-17). The people choose to HAVE a king, but God’s decided just who would BE king.
- Samuel’s conversations with Saul in 9:19-27 are interesting:
 - Samuel is aware of the situation regarding the lost animals without being asked about it. This establishes Samuel’s credibility as a seer to Saul, causing the latter to heed Samuel’s future declarations.
 - He declares that all the “desire” of Israel is on Saul and his family. Just how Saul interprets this is not entirely clear. Could he have possibly deduced that Samuel meant to make him king? Saul does not seem to be that intuitive or up to speed on current events.
 - In his commentary on this passage, Ronald F. Youngblood points out that Saul’s response is not unlike others called to service (cf. Moses in Exodus 3:11, 4:10 and Jeremiah in Jeremiah 1:6) by respectfully making excuses why the calling is a mistake. Youngblood also notes that the small size of Saul’s tribe (Benjamin) may be due to the massacre in Judges 20:42-48. His reference to a diminutive clan size reminds of us Gideon in Judges 6:15 (Youngblood, 102)
 - Samuel sits Saul at the highest place of honor at the meal and gives him the choicest cut of meat, a portion normally reserved for the priests (cf. Leviticus 7:32-34).
 - Verse 25 in some English translations differs from the Septuagint (LXX). The reading from the LXX seems to be more realistic: “And he came down from Bama (lit. “high places”) into the town and they spread a bed for Saoul on the roof” (NETS). Compare II Samuel 16:22; II Kings 4:10; Nehemiah 8:16. See also comments on this by Alter (287), *JSB* (578) and Youngblood (103).
 - Why the clandestine nature of Saul’s anointing?

C. Chapter 10:

- We see yet another Hebrew word used to describe Saul’s role: *nagiya*, typically translated “ruler” (NETS), “commander” (NKJV), or “prince” (ESV).
- As a surely flabbergasted Saul prepares to depart, Samuel informs him of three upcoming encounters:
 1. He will meet two men by Rachel’s tomb (mother of Benjamin) who will tell Saul two things. They will confirm Samuel’s words regarding the lost donkeys. They will also confirm Saul’s concern from 9:5 that Kish’s concerns have shifted from the donkeys to his son and servant.
 2. At the oak of Tabor, Saul will meet three men going up to worship God at Bethel. These men have three goats and three loaves of bread. Since Saul and his servant are completely empty-handed (no food or money based on 9:7-8), these men will give Saul two loaves of bread to sustain him.
 3. At the Hill of God (Gibeath-elohim), Saul will meet a group of prophets coming down from a place of worship, playing instruments and speaking under the influence of the Spirit of the Lord. This same Spirit will come upon Saul and he will begin speaking by inspiration as well. Saul will be “turned into another man” (ESV). The Hebrew word translated “turned” means “changed, turned over, transformed”.
- After encountering these signs, Saul is to proceed to Gilgal and wait 7 days for Samuel to arrive. When Saul turned to leave, God changed Saul’s heart. The signs come to pass, and at Gibeah, men who knew Saul were amazed and make a statement that both begins Saul’s journey and signals it’s end (cf. I Samuel 19:24).
- Saul’s uncle is present and begins to inquire just how all this came to pass. He is curious as to just what Samuel told them (perhaps piqued by the sight of Saul prophesying). Saul does not disclose what Samuel revealed about Saul’s kingship. Perhaps because they were in a city with a Philistine garrison?
- Samuel gathers the people together at Mizpah and after another (briefer) reprimand about having a king, proceeds to single out Saul by the casting of lots. Take time to review the role of the ephod, Urim and Thummim in determining things in Exodus 28:28-30; Numbers 27:21, I Samuel 14:41-42; 23:4-12. The lot falls to Saul (ironically, his name means “asked of”), but he is nowhere to be found. The Lord reveals to them that their future military leader and monarch is hiding among the baggage.
- Despite his shyness/cowardice, the people see a tall, handsome man, and as is typical with people who do not examine their leadership for inner qualities, they exclaim “Let the king live” (NETS).
- It is unknown what exactly Samuel records in the book regarding the duties and rights of the king. Some claim that Samuel is placing regulations and limits on the king as directed by God, while others think he was recording the divine warnings previously told to the people regarding rule by monarchy.
- The last item of interest is the reaction of two different groups to the institution of the monarchy. The “men of valor” (ESV) or “valiant men” (NKJV) have hearts touched by God and follow Saul. The less scrupulous members of society, perhaps those that benefitted under the crooked judicial practices of Samuel’s sons are not pleased with the arrival of what will surely be tighter regulations and rule of law.