

I Samuel

Lesson 13 - Chapter 8 Continued

We completed our detour last week and return to 1st Samuel chapter 8 today. Recall that the reason for our detour was to deal with the entire underlying substance of the series of 4 books consisting of Samuel and Kings. The substance I'm speaking of is the establishment of a human king to rule over Israel, and the modern bible academic's view of it that these books have been corrupted over the centuries to the point that we really can't take them at face value, let alone literally.

The issue is that bible critics of various disciplines point to the seeming contradiction that the Holy Scriptures are at once saying that the Lord approves of Israel having a king, and the Lord does NOT approve of Israel having a king. And I told you that the choices that the most respected of modern bible academics give us to explain this difficulty is either that God changed His mind from NOT wanting a king over His people to not only acceptance of a king but also making a monarchy the center of His plans of redemption from this point forward; or the holy texts were dishonestly redacted and substantially changed to bolster some Israelite's king's status (likely King David). I reject both of those choices and one of the several lessons I hoped to achieve from our detour was to demonstrate to you was that the actual theological issue addressed in Samuel and Kings was not IF there should be a king but rather what KIND of king should rule over Israel. And my goal was not to establish a new doctrine but rather to demonstrate that all one has to do is accept the rather typical way that such deep mysteries are presented to us in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation and all becomes clear. And that mystery is based on the God-principle of duality whereby a spiritual ideal (in this case of a king) produces a physical shadow that is hazy and incomplete and oft times imperfect.

The brilliant German bible scholar C. F. Keil wrote the following thought concerning the anointing of Saul as the 1st king of Israel and the error that his contemporary colleagues made in misjudging the entire issue of Israel and the monarchy. This excerpt was written in the mid-1800's in his exemplary commentary on the books of Samuel that has become foundational reference material for more recent commentaries:

“Modern critics, however, have discovered irreconcilable contradictions in the history (of Saul and Israel) simply because instead of studying it for the purpose of fathoming the plan and purpose which lie at the foundation, they have entered upon the inquiry with a twofold assumption: 1) that the government of Jehovah over Israel was ONLY a subjective ideal of an Israelite nation, without any objective reality; and 2) that the human monarchy was irreconcilably opposed to the government of God. Governed by these axioms, which are derived NOT from the Scriptures but from the philosophical view of modern times, the critics have found it impossible to explain the different accounts in any other way than by the purely external hypothesis that the history

contained in this book has been compiled from two different sources, in one of which the establishment of the earthly monarchy was treated as a violation of the supremacy of God, whilst the other took a more favorable view."

What Professor Keil just said is that modern bible critics have turned the bible study process on its head. Whereas the purpose of studying the Holy Scriptures ought to be discovering God's plans and purposes, the new way of academic thinking begins with the assumption that the bible is inherently faulty and thus their purpose for bible study is to try to uncover possible discrepancies as a team of lawyers might do as they pour over a large contract or settlement agreement trying to either find or close loopholes. I agree wholeheartedly with Professor Keil, but also that there was a predictable, obvious and traceable reason why bible scholars after the Enlightenment Period (that began less than 100 years before Keil's career as a bible scholar) came to the assumptions and conclusions that they did. And the reason was that Christianity had recently adopted a new (and thoroughly gentile European) way of discovering truth in the Scriptures and it was by means of establishing Systematic Theological doctrines that in turn established a rigid orthodoxy; and should anyone object to the terms of that denomination's orthodoxy they were considered heretical and/or ignorant.

That newly invented questionable means of establishing bible truth meant that (in general) a single best answer to every complex question of Christian doctrine was required, and when each of those doctrines were connected and interlocked a high and impenetrable defensive wall was constructed to protect the agreed-to orthodoxy. Thus when we examined but 4 of the scores of theological subjects encountered in the New Testament, we found numerous verses that dealt with each of those 4 subjects but each verse tended to offer a little different perspective on the matter. Modern Systematic Theology (which is the basis upon which essentially every Christian branch and denomination is built today) wants to accept but ONE BEST perspective for each subject and then to relegate the remaining perspectives to lesser relevance or even outright irrelevance. So I demonstrated to you that such a systematic method was inherently flawed and was historically not the way that the ancient Hebrews nor the Jews of Jesus' day nor the 1st generation of the Church viewed as the correct way to discover biblical truth.

Therefore I gave you an alternative method to study and perceive God's Word that I call the "Sheepfold Method". Simply it means that we ought to take each and every verse that examines a certain perspective on a theological subject and use them as fence posts that mark the outer boundaries of a sheepfold. Each verse (each post) that offers its unique perspective of a theological issue is necessary and generally equal in weight and relevance. When we have examined and accepted as valid every biblical perspective available concerning each theological subject we find that there is formed an area of truth and harmony with God for a Believer to operate safely within, rather than a wall of denominational orthodoxy (of which about 3000 different walls exist today) on which one can but stand on one side or the other. The Sheepfold forms a safe and secure area that Believer can wander around inside in full liberty, where every corner of it basks in the light of divine truth, and also in full compliance with the principles and patterns of God's Laws and Commands at every spot he or she might choose to stand. But every fence post that is removed weakens the structure by denying a recorded Scriptural truth. Crossing over the Sheepfold and trying to operate outside of it is

dangerous as outside of it is error that has been created by manmade philosophies and doctrines.

The Sheepfold Method (as I call it) is how you have been taught in Torah Class since the first days of our existence and it is how we will proceed for as long as the Lord wills this ministry to be useful for His purposes. I strongly recommend that if you didn't hear the previous lesson that explains the process more thoroughly that you listen to it on a CD or on our website because I certainly don't have the time to repeat it today.

Let's read 1st Samuel chapter 8.

READ 1ST SAMUEL 8 all

The first half-dozen words of Samuel chapter 8 establish the setting for what will follow. And the setting is that many years had passed since the time when God defeated the Philistines who crossed into Israelite territory to attack the Hebrews as they met at Mitzpah to confess their sins and repent. The middle-aged Samuel, who admonished Israel, judged Israel and led them in both civil and religious affairs, was now quite elderly. And in his old age he appointed his two sons to be judges. This is not to say they were on par with Samuel; in fact the place where they did their judging shows that they were of substantially lower status than their father. Verse 3 explains that not only were they of lower status but also they were lesser men. They didn't follow Samuel's godly ways; rather, more like Eli's sons Hophni and Pinchas, they were corrupt and only sought personal gain.

Their names completely belied their true character. *Yo'el* means *Yah is El* (or God is the highest God), and *Aviyah* means, "My father is God". We see that they operated out of Be'er-Sheva, which was located at the southernmost end of Israelite controlled territory, a considerable distance from Samuel's family home in Ramah, and an equally considerable distance from the circuit that Samuel traveled in the heart of central Canaan to perform sacrificial ritual and to decide civil judicial cases at Bethel, Gilgal, and Mitzpah. Was Samuel trying to establish a dynasty of sorts in naming his own sons as Judges? In other words was it Samuel's intent that upon his death one of these sons would take over as a kind of national judge of Israel? Perhaps. But as in all human affairs there were likely a number of considerations at play. First, since Samuel was a Levite, his sons would have been Levites by birthright; so being judges by birthright (in the current rather odd arrangement by which Israel was now being governed by Samuel who was prophet/priest and judge) might have seemed completely logical. On the other hand, Samuel was behaving mostly as a Shophet, a Judge, not a Levite whose job was to work at God's sanctuary. Second, since the two boys operated out of Be'er-Sheva it would not have given them great visibility or public presence if Samuel envisioned one of them becoming his successor as the next "national" judge. On the other hand where they were located was in an area that probably needed a judge because Samuel couldn't judge every area of Israel by himself. Third, the people of Israel were likely comforted by Samuel apparently setting up a visible line of succession so that when he died Israel wouldn't be left leaderless; because when a leadership vacuum existed it usually wound up in clan warfare as the means to determine who would rule. On the other hand Israel had been in the land going on 400 years, and they were more than ready to attain nation status like their

neighbors (we'll talk about that shortly).

Verse 3 (concerning the behavior of **Yo'el** and **Aviyah**) is variously translated as “turning off to pursue riches”, or “turned aside after lucre”, or “were bent on gain”, or some such thing that seems to indicate that these sons of Samuel were more businessmen than administrators of Torah justice. But that's not really the case. The Hebrew word that is being translated to describe their greedy attitude is **besa** and **besa** distinctly means **ill-gotten** gain. So it is not only that they were more interested in money than judging, it's that they were inherently dishonest in their dealings, bullied those they had power over by requiring bribes, and acquired their wealth in all sorts of unsavory ways. It seems as though even though Samuel personally witnessed what went on with Eli and his 2 worthless sons (who died as a result of God's curse on them), the same fate followed Samuel and his family. By the way, please note something: whether Old or New Testaments we must always remain balanced to understand that we are getting but the tiniest bits of information that these authors (at God's inspiration) found to be most important and relevant because large blocks of time flies by and many details are simply never addressed. For instance, we never read of Samuel having any love interest, let alone finding a wife. Yet out of the blue we suddenly find him with two adult sons. Therefore we have no choice but to assume that Samuel indeed did get married; at the same time we must also NOT assume that these 2 sons represent Samuel's ONLY children as that would have been an unusually small family. Barring some problem, Samuel probably had at least some number of daughters and could well have had other, but younger, sons. It's just that none of this was important to the story and so wasn't recorded.

An aged Samuel along with two sons who had bad reputations as his likely successors worried the tribal and clan leaders; they didn't think Samuel had the ability to lead them anymore (it was still a constantly dangerous world and frail leadership made them feel vulnerable). So in verse 4 we seen that these tribal leaders formed a committee and journeyed to Ramah to make their concerns known to Samuel. And here in verse 5 we get the pivotal words that will have such immense impact on Israel's future: “Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations”. Sh'mu'el was not only taken aback by this demand but the passage says he was “displeased”.

We have a lot to discuss here because as I said a couple of weeks ago, due to the usual way this section of the bible is taught the sea change that is coming for Israel goes right over our heads. Let me see if I can frame this for you. What if it was becoming clear that Americans in general wanted, and were demanding, to abolish our Constitution, do away with the Congress, Judiciary, and Executive branches of government, and instead to become a Communist State resembling WWII Russia? Is that not a radical change that would forever altar our lives in ways that we have no ability to even fully envision? Such a change would alter the balance of power in the world, destroy capitalism and personal wealth and liberty, and generally move us into a new way of life that would be 180 degrees out of phase with how things are today. That's the stuff of nightmares and that is also the enormity of what Israel was about to entertain. Don't even think that just because several leaders of Israel who undoubtedly had personal agendas and private reasons for their approach to Samuel with the request for Israel to have a king that such a desire represented the view of all of Israel. While some wanted a king others did not.

Since context is everything when studying the bible let's begin by understanding just what Israel was at this point in history. While we'll see some reference in Scripture to these Israelites as a "nation", that was merely a common way of speaking and not technically true (even for that time). Rather, the word "nation" by this point in history had become a term that referred to gentile countries. The way the Judges of Israel operated throughout the era of the Judges is indicative of the reality that the 12 tribes were fractured and not a union that formed an entity called Israel. Each **Shophet** (Judge) invariably dealt with the troubles of one tribe (his own), not all 12. Even Samuel had influence mostly over the tribes who occupied central Canaan, and held much less sway over those to the north and the south. I've used the term "loose confederacy" to describe the organization of Israel but the truth is that the emphasis ought to be more on "loose" than "confederacy".

Let me say this in another way: there was no such country or place or nation called Israel in Samuel's era. There WERE many sovereign gentile countries in existence that surrounded them, but Israel wasn't considered as among them. Rather they were just a huge conglomeration of independent families and clans that recognized a common ancestor in Jacob, and that also recognized a common God served by a common priesthood. In terms of organization and cohesion Israel had gone backwards over the past 4 centuries; the situation was quite different before the era of the Judges because before then Israel was an identifiable and fairly unified group. Out in the Wilderness they were closer to a nation than at any other point in their history up to era of the Kings. They had a respected leader over all the tribes in Moses; they had a functioning governmental system and a God-appointed successor for Moses in Joshua that allowed for a relatively seamless transition of power. The 12 tribes lived together, marched together, worshipped together, fought enemies together, and shared resources and hardships together during their 40 years out in the Wilderness.

When Moses died and Joshua led them over the Jordan, the splintering of the 3 million Hebrew refugees from Egypt had already begun. Two of the tribes (Reuben and Gad) decided they didn't even want to enter into the Promised Land, and about ½ of the clans that formed the tribe of Manassah felt the same way. So even though they did send a contingent of troops to fight alongside their tribal brothers who entered Canaan, the split was visible and irreconcilable. After the land of Canaan was sufficiently brought under Israel's control and then Joshua died, the sense of national unity with a common goal (inheriting the land God promised to Abraham) that had existed for around 80 years or so (that common goal being to attain their land inheritance) evaporated rapidly. After that time no friend or foe outside of the land of Canaan would have spoken of those 12 tribes as "Israel" as though they were one unified group of people; rather they would have spoken of dealing with the individual clans and tribes who were Israelites but at the same time no longer had thoughts of centralized loyalty or authority.

Now as Westerners this is kind of hard for us to wrap our minds around. Tribalism is such a different animal than any form of governance or societal organization that the modern West knows or understands. Even though our evening news is filled with tribal conflicts throughout the Middle and Far East, we have a hard time picturing what an extremely different way of life that tribalism is, and how it embodies a mindset that is light years from ours. But let me see if perhaps I can draw you a mental picture of it that might help you to both grasp why the concept

of Israel having a king was so radical, and at the same time expose why it is that a remote corner of our world today is so prominent in our news but leaves us scratching our heads to understand it all. And that corner of the world is Pakistan.

I'm choosing Pakistan as an illustration because it makes a truly wonderful and timely analogy to the situation of the people of Israel at the time of Samuel. And let me begin by saying that there was no universally accepted "Israeli" government at the time of Samuel, and that this is more or less the situation with Pakistan today even though we hear of the so-called Pakistani government nearly daily. Depending on who you talk to, Pakistan either does or does NOT even have a functioning central government today. The West continues to pretend that Pakistan actually has a government that speaks for its citizens but nothing could be further from reality. The central government exists only so long as some of the more powerful tribes of Pakistan are given special privileges and autonomy. Others of the tribes are fighting to control this self-styled so-called government of Pakistan, while others are ignoring it and still others are battling the very concept of a central government as an affront to Islam since Islam is rooted in tribalism and not monarchy or democracy.

Perhaps the most important characteristic of a typical earthly nation for it to be recognized by other nations as a sovereign and unified country is a national army. There is a Pakistani national army but its loyalties are hopelessly split among this barely operating central government and their own clan, and their particular sect of Islam. Every action at every level requires a negotiation. Loyalties form, disintegrate and reform based on any given situation. Groups, who are literally fighting in the streets today, can find themselves fighting shoulder to shoulder tomorrow, only to go back to fighting one another days later. In the end there's the Pakistani government entity that Western governments talk to, but they have very little power. Then there's the Pushtan tribe of 25 million who wield a huge army of militants who also generally have no interest in a central government unless they control it. Then there's the Taliban who is really a group of radical Sunni Muslims who absolutely do not want a central government unless it is a theocracy that they alone run. They would just as soon wipe out the current government; wipe out the other non-Sunni tribes and clans of Pakistan, as well as the nations of Israel, India, the USA, and any other Muslim resistant nation. Confusion? You bet. But this kind of confusion and instability is the normal and comfortable state of affairs because Pakistan is at its heart tribal.

Again, this was the situation of the tribes and clans of Samuel's era that were loosely called Israel. A large group of Israelites were satisfied with the current arrangement and yet others longed for a national structure that they felt would bring them more prosperity, stability and security; these are those who wanted a king like their neighbors. Monarchies inherently diminish tribalism.

So taking that picture along with us of what Israel amounted to at this time, the tribal leaders who came to Samuel must have wielded a lot of influence among some of the more important tribes or Samuel would have sent them packing. But Samuel knew they were serious and determined and that the form of leadership of the tribes of Israel was going to change radically one way or another.

What bothered Samuel was threefold: 1st, these men were insinuating that Samuel could no longer handle his duties to lead Israel and so he felt rejected after all these years of serving his fellow Hebrews and putting them before himself. 2nd, these men didn't want Samuel's sons to lead them and so his family's influence would end upon his death. And 3rd, these leaders wanted to adopt a whole new form of governance that used their heathen neighbors as its model. As God's prophet this greatly troubled Samuel.

Let there be no doubt: what these Israelite tribal leaders had in mind was a monarchy that looked identical to all the other monarchies in existence. Verse 5 says, "make us a king to judge us like all the nations"; "like all the nations" is not a redundant or throw away phrase. "Like all the nations" is the key phrase that the bible critics who speak of supposed Scriptural contradictions in Samuel and Kings refuse to see for what it actually is: a description of the KIND of king that the confused and corrupted Israelite people want, but it's NOT the ideal type of king that God wants or will eventually install first over Israel, then over all true Believers, and eventually over all mankind who remain after Armageddon.

A good question for us might be: why did these Israelite leaders demand a king (something they never had) instead of a new Judge? Why not just ask for a younger version of Samuel? After all things had gone quite well since Samuel had judged Israel; their major enemies had been held at bay, Israel was generally prosperous, so what was it that they felt was missing? God had uniquely called Israel to be His special and set-apart people; God was to be their spiritual king, judge, law giver, protector, sustainer, deliverer, and more. Everything that Israel needed Yehoveh was prepared to provide. The other nations (by definition, all gentile nations) did not have this advantage; they were on their own. They reaped whatever their human hands sowed. But now a goodly portion of God's own people were ready to exchange perfect divine glory for status in the eyes of the world as defined by the world.

What status did these Israelite leaders seek that they didn't currently have? Nation status. The world had defined a nation and it was an admired thing. It consisted primarily of a tract of land, a capital city, a king to rule over all of his subjects and a bevy of minions to serve him, and a standing, uniformed, national army to project the king's power whether it be upon his enemies or upon a portion of his own citizenry who might dare to be reluctant to bow down to all of his demands upon them. These Israelite leaders who approached Samuel with their own demands wanted to submit to the world's definition of a nation. They were very willing to give up a far higher and incomparable calling to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, a status conferred upon them by Yehoveh. Identity with the world became more important than identification as the chosen people of God. I've beat you up sufficiently on this issue in the last few weeks not to again spend time drawing the parallel between Samuel's Israel and modern day Christianity; but the parallel is appropriate and until we each as followers of Messiah take courageous action in our own lives and families to NOT follow the herd, all we have to do to know the result of adopting pagan practices into our worship and observances, and to lusting after the ways and pleasures of our secular world, is to read Israel's history in the bible. Enough said.

But there is one other reason that Israel wanted a king; it was natural for humans to eventually desire a single human person to rule over them and care for them. God created mankind to

want a king. Of course that king was to be the Lord alone. Men of every age at every level eventually seek to exceed the divinely appointed boundaries, limits, and God-principles set down for us. That is our major downfall and it won't end, really, until a new heaven and earth replaces the present one. We read that even during the 1000 year reign of Messiah our King Yeshua will HAVE to rule with an iron rod (meaning unbending leadership that will tolerate not the slightest trespass). And this is because men will still be flawed men (complete with evil inclinations) even with the very presence of God in the Flesh before us, and the horrors of Armageddon just behind us, and starting with a new world population of nothing but worshippers of the God of Israel.

Israel's demand for a "king like their neighbors" was merely a culmination of a long history and series of events and transitions that proved that even followers of God would succumb to their human natures. Even followers of God would in time prefer their own human aspirations to God's provision. But let me end today's lesson with this question: should Samuel have been surprised by this demand for a king? Should he have felt that it was terribly wrong? Did he not know that in fact Moses said this would happen and it was going to be permitted by God?

READ DEUTERONOMY 17:14 – 20

We'll conclude chapter 8 next time.