

I Samuel

Lesson 14 - Chapter 8 and 9

As we continue in 1st Samuel chapter 8 today, we find that certain tribal and clan leaders of Israel have come to Samuel and announced that they want to be ruled by a king. This of course meant that Samuel would no longer be top dog and neither would his sons (that he had hoped might succeed him) have an opportunity to establish a kind of ruling dynasty of Judges.

Before we re-read a portion of chapter 8, keep in mind that we are entering a section of the bible that the more modern bible critics have labeled as unreliable; and this because we seem to have on the one hand the Lord despising the idea of Israel instituting a monarchy, and on the other hand becoming actively involved in the process and eventually even making our Messiah part of that new ruling class. But also keep in mind that despite these critics' claims, what is actually happening is that we are seeing the stark differences revealed between the God-ideal of a king and a typically man-ordained king.

RE-READ 1ST SAMUEL CHAPTER 8: 7 – end

Samuel went running to the Lord when those Israelite leaders announced their demand for a king and he was undoubtedly surprised and downhearted when Yehoveh told him to go ahead and do what they asked. Further, says the Lord, they are not so much rejecting you as they are rejecting Me.

At Mt. Sinai the people of Israel had agreed that God would be their king. When the leaders argued with Moses and accused him of assuming too much power and behaving like a king, they said that the problem was that since Yehoveh was their king Moses was being arrogant. After Joshua led Israel into Canaan and conquered it and then later died, the people's leaders stated that they had no interest in a new central authority figure because God was their king. The truth is that all of these protests were hollow; they didn't ever seriously see God as their **actual** king, it was more of a pleasant and useful fiction designed to keep the 12 tribal chiefs in power with no one to lord over them. Using the "God is our king" mantra was about the tribal leadership finding a convenient excuse to retain their own personal sovereignty and authority over their respective tribes.

A **Shophet**, a Judge, was God's earthly proxy to administer justice. A Judge was the form of government that the Lord wanted over Israel on an as-needed basis. A **Shophet** was raised up by the Lord to carry out certain instructions that the Lord gave to him, and usually that began with the delivering of one tribe or another from foreign oppression. The position of king was, in God's eyes, already taken; HE was king and a human Judge was His underling. So when these leaders went to Samuel and insisted he appoint a man to become the king over Israel

they were effectively replacing God with a man. And so the Lord tells Samuel in verse 8 that Israel is doing nothing new, it just feels that way because Samuel is directly affected. Israel isn't rejecting Samuel, they're rejecting Yehoveh.

However, says the Lord, a human king is going to rule them very differently than their divine king and so Samuel is to speak to Israel that what they're asking for isn't going to turn out the way they planned. In fact, in verse 9 where most bibles will say that Samuel was to warn the people, that misses the true sense of the meaning. The Hebrew phrase is *ha'ed taid* and it more means to legally declare. The idea is that God has told Samuel to tell these Israelite leaders that when Israel gets this human king a legal relationship between them and that king is being established that is different from the legal relationship that they have had with God up to now. And beginning in verse 10 Samuel outlines just some of these differences. Verse 10 gives us a very interesting word play. It says that the people have *ha sha'al* a king meaning that they have requested a king. Later we find that this king that the people have requested is Sha'ul, which literally means, "the requested one". God has quite a flair for the ironic.

Of course since the whole point is that Israel wants a monarchy modeled after the gentile monarchies typical of the Middle East, then they can expect those same characteristics in their Israelite king. For instance: a national army loyal to the king will be established just as is done by then gentile nations. Naturally this is part of what these Israelite leaders expected and hoped for (a professional army to defend them). And this would not be an army of volunteers (like those who served Moses, Joshua, and the various Judges) who would gather to fight and then go back home afterwards; but rather the army would consist of the young sons of the 12 tribes who would be obligated to serve in the army, full time, at the king's command. Since all modern armies had chariots, then of course some of those conscripted men would have to become human shields to protect the king by running ahead of and behind his royal chariot. He will appoint NOT the best and most able Israelites as his military officers, but rather they will be chosen from this select group who are the king's most loyal soldiers who act as his personal bodyguards. Military leadership ability will be secondary to absolute allegiance to the king.

Of course an army needs food and it needs weapons; so some of these officers will be in charge of fields confiscated in the name of being "for the good of the nation". This nationalized food production for the military will go hand-in-hand with nationalized weapons manufacture. After all, the government comes first since the king comes first. Why does the king come first? Well, who owns all the land of a kingdom? The king. Who owns all the people of the kingdom? The king. Who owns all the livestock and agricultural produce of the kingdom? The king. He merely GRANTS his people a kind of ownership or possession of land and animals as long as it serves his purposes. But that grant can be undone or modified (and often is) whenever it serves the national interest (meaning the king's interest). This is effectively how the Lord operated over Israel all these past years. But now a man would assume that position and Israel would trust in a human king to care for them, guide them, protect them, and establish justice for them.

But it's not just the males who will be conscripted for government service, so will the women of Israel have to serve. They will be required to serve the king and his court by making perfume, and cooking for them for example. And of course since the size of a king's court has much to

do with his status (and in the king's eyes the status of his kingdom), and since Israel has a large population, Israel's king will necessarily need a large court. And if the king of Israel is to retain the courts loyalty they too will need to be properly supported and rewarded. And that will happen primarily by the king taking his citizens' vineyards, and orchards, and fields and giving them to important members of his government. But it doesn't stop there. What the king doesn't outright confiscate, he taxes. And this is to support those in his government who aren't of sufficient status to receive the land, fields, and groves the king has taken from his subjects.

Please note: this tithe that is spoke of here (technically one tenth but usually quite a bit more) is NOT the same tithe that is to go to the support of the Levitical Priesthood; this is in addition to it. After all, now that the government has established an army, a system of taxation, a bureaucracy to oversee it and an infrastructure to support it then taxes will be needed (does any of this sound at all close to home?). And what loyal citizen wouldn't want to help with that duty?

You see, in the gentile human way of kingdom-government the king takes from everyone for himself and his interests. This is in contrast to the God of Israel as king who demands a tenth, but then uses it entirely to support His servants who are there for the benefit of the people. The divine king gets nothing; the tithe is actually for the people since Yehoveh has no needs or aspirations of wealth and power. An earthly king has no end of needs (or more honestly, wants) and usually no end of ambitions.

But that's not the half of it; because God says that since you Hebrews have decided to replace Him with one of your own, fine. But don't come complaining to Him about the Israelite king they want for themselves because He is not going to rescue them from this man. God-principle: there are some things that we choose that amount to a direct rejection of the Lord and are so offensive to Him that He will allow us to live with our consequences more or less permanently. Don't expect Him to fix it; go to the king you preferred and chose over Him.

Predictably the leaders of Israel weren't swayed by Samuel's argument and so they merely repeated the KEY phrase, "We want a king over us so we can be like all the nations". Many within Israel didn't want to be the set-part people anymore. They didn't want to be a unique people for God but they DID want to be like all the nations. In reality they wanted (and expected to have) it both ways. They wanted to claim Yehoveh as their god and protector and benefactor and extract the benefits of that relationship, but they also wanted to follow the ways of the rest of the world and experience the personal pleasures and advantages of that anti-God lifestyle. I'm sad to say that the greatest portion of Israel today takes the same view. They feel that being "the chosen" has been too much of a burden and that they would be much better off if God chose somebody else for a while. Many have rejected God outright; others simply want it both ways.

The Church on the other hand says to Israel, "We have good news for you, then; God DID choose somebody else (us!)". Both sides are sickeningly wrong. Israel assumes that the cause of their current condition of being under constant duress and pressure for mere survival is because they were chosen; when in fact their condition is due to their abandoning the One who

blessed them by choosing them. The Church wants to claim exclusive chosen status, but then turns around and works like mad to become just like the rest of world in every imaginable way. The Church wants the blessings of salvation, peace, protection, and prosperity from the Lord but at the same time wants the freedom of earthly pleasures, pagan ways of fun and celebration, and above all else to be outwardly indistinguishable from the world. None of this worked very well for ancient Israel and it certainly won't work for modern Israel or for the body of Believers.

In verse 22 the Lord tells Samuel to "harken" to Israel's leaders and set up a king for them. Our CJB says that Samuel should, "Do what they ask". The word that is being rather clumsily translated is one we're familiar with: **shema**. And shema means to listen and obey, or in this case to hear and do. Hear Israel's demand for a king and do it; and this will be with Yehoveh's permission.

Samuel understands now that the direction has been set and there is no use belaboring the point. So he sends the delegation of tribal leaders back to their respective territories to await the Lord working out just who the choice of king would be and how it would be indicated to Samuel.

READ 1ST SAMUEL CHAPTER 9 all

The Lord apparently moved rather quickly to show Samuel the man whom was chosen to be the first king of Israel according to the wishes of the people. And so we are told that there was a man from the tribe of Binyamin named Kish, son of Avi'el (and the genealogy continues in order to well establish the lineage of Saul). Kish is described in verse 1 of our CJB as "a man of substance and brave as well". Other versions say Kish was a "mighty man of valor" or "a mighty man of power". What is being translated is two Hebrew words used to describe the family status of Kish; the first is **gibbor** and the second is **chayil**. **Gibbor** means "mighty" in the sense of being physically strong. **Chayil** means to be very well to do; wealthy and with political influence. So Kish's family was part of the ruling clan of Benjamin, they were the tribal aristocrats.

Kish's son was Sha'ul, meaning "the requested one" (that is, he is the one, the king, provided as an answer to the request for the people of Israel). Sha'ul, Saul, is described as being young and good-looking and that in fact he among the people of Israel was perhaps THE most handsome man of them all. Plus, he was the tallest of all the people. The word for people is **ammim**, and it means God's people (not the people of all nations so he wasn't the tallest man on earth). It is thought that he was around 40 years old at this time, but possibly a tad younger.

Notice that God gave to Israel the exact kind of person with the characteristics that people prefer when left to their own inclinations to determine: he was charismatic, tall, handsome, strong, and part of a prosperous and influential family; outwardly he had everything. The men would all have liked to be like him, and the women would all have liked to be with him. The Lord knew that Israel would take one look at Samuel's anointed king and revel in their newfound hope, certain that they had done the right thing by insisting on having a king like

their neighbors.

Verse 3 begins the background story that explains how it is that God revealed His choice of Sha'ul to Samuel. And it is that several donkeys owned by Saul's father, Kish, vanished and so Saul was sent on a mission to find them and bring them back. He was to take one of the family servants along with him. Actually Saul was to take a **na'ar**, a youth with him. And while the youth may have been a servant, he was likely not a slave, for the term **na'ar** is not usually indicative of a slave, bonded or bought. Some think that this **na'ar** might have been the family of Kish's chief household steward for he will display confidence, wisdom, and a comfortable familiarity with Sha'ul. Further we find that the donkeys were female donkeys, as the Hebrew word **athon** tells us. These were a herd of valuable donkeys and much effort would be spent to find them.

So Sha'ul took the young servant and they went into the Hills of Ephraim to look for the donkeys. After wandering around for a few days time they were becoming discouraged as there was no sign of these lost possessions. In fact they were gone long enough that Saul figured that his father would soon start to be concerned about his and the boys' safety and so didn't want to unduly worry him. Pretty soon they came to the territory of Zuph. Zuph was the family name of a clan of Levites, ancestors of Elkanah and Samuel. Somewhere in this area Sha'ul made the decision to abandon the search but the youthful servant that was with him suggested that they go in to a nearby town and inquire if the local seer might be there and help them find the donkeys. Here we see the term I told you about a few weeks ago as we enter the era of the Prophets of God. And the term is "Man of God" (in Hebrew, **ish elohim**).

Just as the term "**goyim**" changed in its usage and meaning over the centuries from being a generic word for nations (any and all nations) to indicating gentiles, to indicating gentile nations, and then finally to pagans living in the nations, so the term **ish elohim** changed over time in its meaning. In its most primitive form **ish elohim** referred to a holy man of some sort that had a set of mystical abilities. Later it meant a seer much like the Mesopotamian sorcerer Bil'am who could see the future and cast spells or curses; and still later it indicated a Prophet who was not so much a person who held special knowledge or could see the future. Used in the context of 1st Samuel 9 the meaning is more like a seer who had a supernatural ability to know things or perhaps even see the future, apparently a gift given to him through God.

Sha'ul agreed that a seer might be helpful; perhaps he could tell them where to look for the lost donkeys. Since it was customary to pay for a seer's services (that's how a seer made his living) and Saul had no money or other valuables with him, he knew they couldn't approach the seer empty handed (they'd just be turned away). But the youth had a fourth of a shekel of silver of his own and offered it to his master Sha'ul to use to pay for the seer. Sha'ul changed his mind and rather than head home they ventured into the city in the territory of Zuph.

The city was built upon on a hilltop, a rather usual place for a city because it could be more easily defended. When they arrived they stopped at the traditional place to ask for directions, the city well where the women gathered. There they asked some girls if the seer was there, and the girls pointed the way. They also informed Sha'ul and his companion that this seer was about to start sacrificing at the high place (the **bemah**) where the altar was located, but that

they needed to hurry as the ceremony was about to begin. Now we start to see how divine providence is going to play its role; the two travelers arrive just in time for the feast that is going to be hosted by none other than Samuel! It turns out that Samuel is the seer they were seeking but they didn't know it. In this era Samuel was called a Prophet (a **nabi**). In fact back in verse 9 the scriptural narrator explains that the term **seer** (**ra'ah** in Hebrew) was becoming outmoded and now the term **nabi** (Prophet) was in use. Samuel (being a transitional figure) was kind of a cross between a **ra'ah** and a **nabi** (a seer and a Prophet). A Prophet was a man who received God's oracle and then pronounced it either to the people or the king, depending on God's instructions to him. Usually what a Prophet knew of the future was merely part of an overall message from God. A seer on the other hand was a professional holy man and people would come to him and ask him questions (such as the whereabouts of something he lost, or how a certain event might turn out, etc.) and often the seer could provide the answer (for a fee, of course).

Anyway this was a special kind of sacrificial and feast gathering whereby there would be honored guests and after the sacrifice the sacrificed animal would be eaten. Here is where our Torah knowledge comes into play. The term "sacrifice" as used in verse 13 where it speaks of the seer, Samuel, blessing the sacrifice is not wrong per se but it misses an important nuance. The word being used is **Zevah**, and **Zevah** is a particular **kind** of sacrifice. It is the kind that is a voluntary sacrifice, as employed when making a vow or giving thanks to God because of some good fortune. It is also the kind whereby the worshipper gets the bulk of the meat from the sacrifice, as opposed to all the other kinds of sacrifices whereby the priests get to keep the remainder that isn't burned up on the altar. Therefore it is appropriate that the **Zevah** sacrificial animal or animals would become the central meat dish for this sacrifice and banquet for the several dignitaries that were present.

Saul and his traveling companion walked up to the place of the feast and there was Samuel! This was all quite a surprise for Sha'ul and must have had his mind spinning, but Samuel had been expecting him. The day before Sha'ul had come seeking a person to help him find his father's donkeys, the Lord told Samuel that the next day (the day Sha'ul arrived) that he would send him a man from the tribe of Benjamin and this was to be God's choice for Israel's first king. God told Samuel that this Benjamite was to be anointed the **nagid**. Now this is an interesting choice of words since **melech** is Hebrew for king. **Nagid** generally means prince or chief or captain. So is there a problem here? Some think there is; but a little digging into history provides the solution. As it turns out, the term **nagid** was a common one that indicated the king in waiting. In other words it referred to the man who was officially designated as the next king but hadn't yet been coronated. So there is no conflict; Sha'ul was the king-designate (the **nagid**) until the day he was actually anointed king and enthroned whereupon he became **melech** (king). Verse 16 also gives us an interesting tidbit of information: the trouble with the Philistines was beginning to crop up again and Sha'ul would be the one to deal with it. We were told in earlier chapters that as long as Samuel lived the Philistines were subdued. So what we're seeing here is that while peace with the Philistines was still in place while Samuel was judging, there was some saber rattling beginning to occur. Samuel was getting old, the tribal and clan leaders were losing confidence in him, and tension between Israel and the Philistines was building.

One cannot help but wonder if it was perhaps this growing threat of a rejuvenated Philistia coupled with the less-than-vibrant leadership of the aged Samuel that was the trigger that sent some anxious Israelite tribal delegates to confront Samuel and seek his replacement with a king. There was very likely growing doubts among the 12 tribes that Samuel was any longer capable of leading Israel to defend against formidable enemies, nor did he have the energy and influence to call for the tribes to send a militia of troops to fight, and that a professionally trained national army led by a warrior king was perhaps the best possible preparation for what seemed like inevitable war with the Philistines, which would occur in but a matter of time.

When Samuel laid eyes on Saul, the Lord verified that this is indeed the chosen one. Now interestingly Saul didn't seem to know who Samuel was; at least he didn't know what he looked like because Saul walked up to Samuel and asked him if he knew where the seer was staying. When Samuel identified himself as the seer he also invited Sha'ul to sit with him at the banquet table. And then the next morning he'd tell Sha'ul what he hoped to find out (the location of his father's lost donkeys). Where the CJB and most bibles say that Samuel will tell Sha'ul "what is on his heart", this is not at all meant to convey how it sounds to us Westerners. This is not a troubled Saul who will have his inmost feelings exposed. Rather remember that in the bible the function of the heart is what we today know is the brain. Samuel was actually saying (in modern terms) that he'd tell Saul what was on his MIND. And what was on Saul's mind was finding donkeys so he could go home.

So when Samuel tells Sha'ul to stop worrying about the donkeys that they've been found, it is done in a dismissive kind of way. Saul was about to have much weightier things to deal with than a handful of scattered donkeys. Then Samuel breaks the news to Saul by asking him rhetorically "who is it that all of Israel is longing for. Isn't it you and your father's household?" While that may be a very cryptic comment to us, Saul knew instantly what Samuel was suggesting. Every person in Israel knew the answer to "who is it that all of Israel is long for?": it's a king they are longing for.

Sha'ul offers a stunned reply that also embraces typical Middle Eastern grace and humility. He says that he's only a man from Benjamin (one of the smaller tribes), and further his family is one of the least important. From a tribal standpoint Sha'ul's clan is indeed the ruling clan of Benjamin, but his family is but one of many who form this clan and at least in Sha'ul's mind it was not at all the most influential of the clan's families.

The banquet was about to begin. It was taking place inside some kind of structure that was built for the purpose. Samuel led Saul into the dining area and placed him at the table that was reserved for the most important guests (of which 30 were identified as special guests of honor that would sit with Samuel). Samuel ordered the cook to serve Saul the thigh and shoulder (some translations will say "leg"). It doesn't matter; these are all attempting to get across that this was the absolute choicest cut and the one to whom it was served was being shown great honor. The right thigh and leg was reserved for the priests, so it was certainly the left thigh and leg that was given to Sha'ul. Samuel even makes it clear that this was reserved for Sha'ul before Samuel even knew who it was that would receive it, and even that it would be offered in front of this roomful of dignitaries was to serve a divine purpose of announcing that this man was to be Israel's king.

After the festivities Samuel and Saul walked down to the city and went up to a rooftop to talk. No doubt Samuel was speaking to Saul of the great things that would be expected of him, and of the wicked state of the people of Israel that Sha'ul was now duty bound to remedy. The next morning Samuel woke Sha'ul and told him it was time to go. But first, something important had to be discussed and so Samuel told Saul to send his servant on ahead so they could speak in private. Sha'ul was about to be told what it was that God said was to be done. And Samuel would assume the role of God's Prophet who would be the one to deliver the Lord's history changing ruling to the first king of Israel.