

KINGS OF ISRAEL I: 1 & 2 SAMUEL

WEEK 2

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OUTLINE

FROM ELI TO SAUL

The Calling of Samuel

The Ark's Journey

Israel Demands King

BETWEEN TWO ANOINTINGS

Introduction to Saul

Saul's Disobedience



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HANNAH'S PLIGHT

Miraculous birth is a common motif in Scripture (Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Manoah's wife, Elizabeth), culminating in Mary. Like many other heroines of biblical history, Hannah is unable to bear children. Like Rachel, she was taunted by her counterpart, Penninah. Unlike Rachel, she resorted to faith rather than conspiracy.

Hannah is invested in having children for far more than competitive purposes—she essentially allows Samuel to be adopted by Eli. The pure desire for children is somewhat alien to modern Americans. Playing your part in the preservation of the family line is a much higher value in traditional cultures and is even commanded by God (“be fruitful and multiply”).

HANNAH'S SONG

The reversal of fortunes (Eli-Samuel, Saul-David, David's own foolishness) and God's sovereign hand over all is captured in the opening song of Hannah.

A	1-2	My strength is in the Lord
B	3	No one is like God
C	4-5	God exalts humble, humbles exalted
X	6-7	God is the Almighty Sovereign
C'	8-9a	God exalts humble, humbles exalted
B'	9b-10a	No one is like God
A'	10b	The King's strength is in the Lord



SAMSON AND SAMUEL

A natural question is why so much detail about Samuel's *birth*? We don't even get so much about David. Consider these parallels with Samson:

1. Both are born miraculously and are Nazirites from birth.
2. Both of their mothers play a more prominent role than their fathers.
3. Both are judges and play essential roles in defeating the oppressive Philistines (cf. Judges 13:5; I Sam 7).

The author of our text is likely pointing to these parallels deliberately. Samson is the last judge mentioned before the chaos found in the epilogue to Judges. Samuel is what Samson should have been.

Samuel is similar to John the Baptist (not necessarily as prophetic type). He prepares the way for the Davidic king, guiding people back to the LORD.

ELI'S SONS

Eli's sons steal the tasty fat portions and sleep with the temple maidens. It's noteworthy that the narrator went the extra step to say their sin was "very great before the LORD." Why is this especially bad?

1. The Levites' "portion" is the Lord (Deut 10:9)—they get to serve God instead of get a portion of the land. Aaron's descendants while serving eat the bread of the presence and the sacrificial meat. Eli's sons disdain both privileges.
2. If no one else knows the law and God's teaching, at least the priests should. Here they openly defy it (Lev 3:16-7; Lev 21:13-4).
3. Eli's sons are holding God's prescribed pathway to reconciliation in contempt (cf. Gal 1:6-9).

A persistent theme in I & II Samuel is ungodly sons and passive fathers. Ironically, Jonathan is often rebuked by Saul in spite of his untainted record.

SAMUEL'S CALL

A few brief remarks on Samuel's literal call:

1. Apparently Samuel heard God in a semi-audible fashion. While Eli could not hear God's voice, Samuel confused it for Eli's voice.
2. God's word goes from being rare (3:1) to available to His people (3:19ff), because a man of integrity appears. This has a couple implications:
 - ▶ God may withhold revelation for a time depending on the receptivity of His people and/or strength of the existing leadership (Amos 8:11; cf. Matthew 13:10-17).
 - ▶ God is committed in the long term to His people, and he's searching for people who will serve him (II Chron 16:9; cf. Luke 10:2).



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SYMPATHETIC MAGIC

After a defeat, the Israelites resort to bringing the Lord of Hosts (term has military connotations) into battle. God makes it very clear by permitting the ark to be captured by the Philistines that He will not be manipulated. (What are ways that we try to manipulate God?)

The Israelites profane His sacred ark, so God profanes the sacred people (cf. Exodus 19:6) through defeat and the shame of the captured ark. Yet! Ironically, He will not be profaned in the eyes of the Philistines:

- ▶ Their god Dagon falls down in “reverence” to the LORD. After ignoring this, they set him up for having his head, and arms knocked off.
- ▶ The city of Ashdod gets a deadly plague. They pass it to Gath with the same effect. Gittites try to send the ark to Ekron, the citizens of which refuse it a home. (The descriptions sound like Bubonic plague.)



PHILISTINE UNBELIEF

Philistine's discover through divination that the Lord is behind the plague. They set up a plan to test this.

The manner of transport is so designed to assure that plague is due to I AM, not to chance. Using a new cart (i.e., one never subjected to the profane and so fit for sacred service), two cows that have never been yoked (i.e., normally incapable of pulling together) and with their calves taken away (i.e., against nature the cows will bind themselves to the cart), the cows must go directly to the Levitical city of Beth Shemesh. In the execution of the plan, the cows proceed to the ark's own territory while lowing (i.e., against their own inclination). (Waltke, 631)

Why do think the Philistines never repent to follow the God of Israel?

Note: God does not show favoritism towards the Israelites and judges them for profaning the ark (again) when it returns.



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THREE PARTIES AT ODDS

The narrative of Israel requesting a king exhibits a number of surprises:

- ▶ Samuel's sons turn out to be rotten, perverting justice, much like Eli's (cf. also David's sons.)
- ▶ God sees the people's request as a rejection of His leadership, even though it's obvious that Samuel's sons are part of the problem.
- ▶ God "gives in" and supplies a king, rather than refuse and judge, or even supply an alternative (cf. God's response to Miriam in undermining Moses).



GOD AND HUMAN KINGS

There is a temptation based on this section of I Samuel to view the monarchy as an aberration. Bruce Waltke argues that kings are actually at the theological center of Scripture:

[T]he irruption (breaking in from without), not eruption (breaking out from within), of the kingship of the holy, merciful, and only God best accommodates all of the blocks of the Old Testament. (Waltke, 144)

Do you agree? Why or why not?

GOD AND HUMAN KINGS

Do you agree? Why or why not?

1. How would we explain Jesus' eschatological (final, unending) kingdom?
2. Adam and Eve are to have dominion over the earth—they are co-regents (kings) with God.
3. The language of kings within Israel appears very early (Gen 17:6; Gen 49:10, Deuteronomy 17:14ff; cf. 1 Sam 4:4, Exodus 25:22).

Perhaps the negative slant on monarchy here is its initiation by a grumbling people, rather than as a gift from God.

*At the center of the biblical message is the good news that God is breaking into his corrupted creation to destroy the gates of Hades and deliver its captives into the realm of his blessed rule.
(Waltke, 147)*



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THE CHOICE OF SAUL

There are a number of puzzles raised by the story of Saul, especially before David appears.

1. Saul is chosen by God (1 Sam 9:15-16) but exactly fits the description undermined by God in the selection of David (1 Sam 16:7).
2. The errors committed by Saul that bring him under judgment seem less severe than the egregious failures of David.
3. God regrets [repents of] making Saul king and yet when Saul “repents,” Samuel says God does not “repent” like men.

How do you account for some of these?

THE CHOICE OF SAUL

1. Saul is chosen by God (1 Sam 9:15-16) but exactly fits the description undermined by God in the selection of David (1 Sam 16:7).
 - ▶ Saul's main role in God's plan is as a warrior (1 Sam 9:16) which he mainly fulfills.
 - ▶ He also provides a dark portent for later kings (cf. 1 Sam 12:17-9).
2. The errors committed by Saul that bring him under judgment seem less severe than the egregious failures of David.
 - ▶ There are abundant clues (later) of Saul's deep-seated unbelief.



THE CHOICE OF SAUL

3. God regrets [repents of] making Saul king and yet when Saul “repents”, Samuel says God does not “repent” like men.
 - ▶ There is no formal contradiction since God never promised an eternal kingdom to Saul.
 - ▶ The Hebrew words (regret, repent) have the same root. This suggests that the tension is deliberate—inviting meditation. Cf. Gen 6:6.
 - ▶ When we know what’s going to happen, we still have an emotional response—surprise is not essential to pathos.
 - ▶ Even knowing what we’ll do, God honors our free will and responds in light of it, not by undermining it. (Cf. Minority Report).

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SACRIFICE AND REBELLION

When we look at Saul's rejection, the fundamental issue is his fear of man over God:

- ▶ In Ch.13, when his troops begin to run away, he tries to force God's hand with an unauthorized sacrifice.
- ▶ His response to Samuel exhibits defensiveness and rationalization of his actions, rather than repentance or a humility of heart.
- ▶ In Ch. 15, he admits that he "listened to the voice of the people" rather than "obey the voice of the LORD".
- ▶ When confronted by Samuel, he lies twice! Even after telling the truth, he says, "please honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel."
- ▶ Both (early) episodes of Saul's disobedience are similar to the magical thinking of Hophni and Phinehas: manipulate or negotiate with God to avoid obedience or to direct future outcomes.



SAUL'S UNBELIEF

Here is a catalogue of episodes showing Saul's paper-thin faith:

- ▶ Saul's discomfort with his anointing: why me?, hiding in baggage, silence before detractors. (Cf. 1 Sam 15:17, "small in your own eyes.")
- ▶ On numerous issues, Saul's weak on godly values and insecurely compensates by severity on trifles. Examples?
- ▶ Neurotic military leadership—no food/rest for his troops, threat of murder for his son who just saved Israel
- ▶ Endless paranoia concerning David, even threatening his godly son, killing a priest
- ▶ He reaches his spiritual nadir by visiting the witch at Endor—desperate to the point of undermining even his own rulings, much less God's!

Saul is a tragic figure, a man whose downfall was preventable.

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