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Establishing the Kingdom : 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel 1-4

Israel lives in the Promised Land as a loose coalition of tribes unified ethnically and in their faith in God. As a loose coalition, there was no consistent ruler to enforce adherence to the Law, and thus the cycle of idolatry-oppression-deliverance-rest that God enacted through his judges repeated. Acting as the final judge (while also operating within the office of priest and prophet), Samuel acted to deliver Israel from Philistine oppression until, at last, a more organized system of monarchy was required for Israel's survival, although this came at great risk. The first king, Saul, operated with great authority and to significant military success, but eventually fell victim to pride manifested in his disobedience of Samuel and, ultimately, God. Samuel searches for a new king whom he finds (and anoints) in David. David finds himself in Saul's court, and eventually as the target of Saul's jealousy. No longer operating in the Spirit, Saul hunted David while also continuing to fight the Philistines, without God's favor. This eventually results in Saul's defeat and his taking his own life. Into the vacuum left by Saul's death, David ascends as king.

Sections

- 1 Samuel 1:1-4:1a — Early stories of Samuel
- 1 Samuel 4:1b-7:2 — Ark as centerpiece of Israelite life
- 1 Samuel 7:3-15:35 — Beginnings of the monarchy featuring Saul
- 1 Samuel 16-2 Samuel 4 — David's entrance and rise to power

Literary Styles of Note

- Narrative — Throughout
- Poetry / Song — 1 Samuel 2

Concepts

- Monarchy — Rule of a nation by a central king who established a ruling dynasty.
- Theocracy — Recognition that God is the true king in order to fight the absolutist tendencies of other monarchs and so as not to elevate the king to divine status. The king is viewed as God's representative charged with the responsibilities of enforcing (and embodying) the covenant.

Purpose

- Establishes Samuel's authority as priest and prophet.
- Establishes the dominance of the Philistines in battle, who ultimately overwhelm Israel's armies and capture the Ark of the Covenant. God is more than capable of taking care of himself, and so plague followed the Ark into Philistine possession, leading them to return it with golden offerings.
- Describes the judgeship of Samuel, Israel's final judge. Samuel leads Israel to repentance and then miraculous defeat of the Philistines.
- Details the request by Israel's elders for a king.
- Explains Saul's ascent to king.
- Allows Samuel, in his farewell address, to highlight the good and the bad of Saul's career, and to admonish the people concerning the implications of the quest for a king.

- Details the early, good qualities of Saul as king, followed by his disobedience and exceeding his authority.
- Shows the rise of David as heir to the throne, and Saul's murderous envy of his fame.
- Establishes David's respect for the office of king and character — twice he could have killed Saul by refused. He respected and revered Saul because he was God's anointed leader.
- Tells of the death of Saul by his own sword after he was wounded in battle.

Notes

- It was the intention that all firstborn sons be devoted to the priesthood. However, Israel substituted this practice by using the entire tribe of Levi instead. Hannah, on the other hand, devoted Samuel (her firstborn) quite literally, choosing not to use the Levi-replacement practice.
- The audible calling of Samuel by God brings to mind the burning bush and Moses. Indeed, Samuel's rise ushered in a new era of prophetic activity, continuing through Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel.
- The golden tumors and rats that the Philistines sent back with the Ark were probably symbols of that which plagued them: the bubonic plague.
- Though no record exists in Samuel, Shiloh (the home of Israel's shrine and of the Ark) was probably destroyed in a Philistine raid. It's mentioned as a warning in Jeremiah. When the Ark returned, it lived at Kiriath-jearim (and not Shiloh).
- That the pressure from the Philistines continued into Samuel's old age and his sons were wicked led Israel to require continuity in defense beyond that provided by a temporary judge. This caused them to clamor for a king.
- The elder's request for a king is told in two voices interwoven into the account. Monarchy was necessary for Israel's survival, but elevating a single person to king results in lost freedoms and in opening the nation up to punishment from a single man's sins.
- The elders were right to be wary of a king. Ultimately, most of Israel's kings failed to fulfill their ordained role and were wicked in the Lord's sight.
- Saul ascends to king in stages:
 - Anointed by Samuel
 - Singled out in a casting of lots
 - Leads Israel to victory against the Ammonites
- Though physically striking, Saul is quite modest. His coming from the politically insignificant tribe of Benjamin probably minimized his threat to other tribes, making it easier for him to be accepted.
- Samuel's farewell address summarizes his view of the kingship: "if both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the Lord your God, it will be well; but if you will not heed the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then the hand of the Lord will be against you and your king" [1 Samuel 12:14-15].
- The Philistines' military advantage mostly came from their monopolization of metallurgy.
- As for the good, Saul is shown to act as a prophet and a mighty military leader. In response to the continual pressure from the Philistines, he establishes trained military leadership.
- However, Saul was not a priest. His impatient usurping of Samuel's priestly authority in offering pre-battle sacrifice was the beginning of the end of his reign. He failed to recognize the limits of his office.
- In addition, like Achan (in Joshua 7), Saul did not take *herem* seriously, and kept spoils of war from the Amalekites. He chose not to fully enact the vengeance of God as commanded.

- Like Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Joseph over the other 10, David is chosen as a younger brother over his elders.
- David's musical talents were what brought him into Saul's court. Saul, being tormented by an evil spirit (from God as part of his judgment), could only be lifted from his depression by music. He sent for the best musician, and in came David.
- David's victory over Goliath brought him further acclaim, leading to Saul's increased jealousy and eventual murderous envy.
- David's exile as a refugee of Saul led him to travel at night along the Philistine borders. Sometimes he attacked the Philistines. Sometimes he traveled amongst them to hide from Saul.
- Saul's death is quite brutal. The Philistines took his severed head as trophy.

Bible Study

- 1 Samuel 3
- 1 Samuel 13:5-14