

Introduction

The Time before Israel had a King

The time of Israel's first kings comes at the end of the period of the Judges of Israel, approximately 200 years after Moses led Israel to the Promise Land and Joshua and the Israelites settled in Canaan. God instructed Israel to conquer the lands of Canaan and the people living there, as recorded in the book of *Joshua*. From the outset the Israelites failed to completely conquer the land given them by God. This led Israel to disobey God's Commandments and rejecting their covenant with God as they settled amongst the pagans of Canaan. They experienced a hard life of constant warfare with the surrounding peoples. There was also a constant threat of the Israelites turning from God and embracing the ways of the Canaanites. In this period of the Judges, God raised up 13 men and women to lead and guide his nation. These judges were anointed by God to lead the people of Israel back to him. Unfortunately their efforts were not enough to turn the people wholeheartedly back to the Lord in the long term. During this period the nation of Israel fell further into sin, the result of which was the spiritual, moral and political decline of the nation. The book of *Judges* records an almost constant cycle of the nation of Israel sinning against God – not keeping his commandments, not keeping themselves a "people set apart for God" (by permitting intermarriage with Canaanites and idol worship), and God allowing suffering (the natural consequence of their sin and rebellion against the Covenant) to come upon the land. This suffering was followed by a period of calling upon the Lord for help and repentance; and, returning to living in compliance with the covenant before repeating the cycle yet again.

Israel's cycle of disobedience and what it teaches us today:

A Judge would be raised up to provide: <u>Deliverance</u> <u>Leadership</u>	God raised up a righteous man or woman to: 1. <u>Deliver</u> Israel from her enemies 2. <u>provide leadership</u> 3. <u>spiritual guidance</u>	Sound teaching and guidance is necessary in seeking to live a life that is pleasing to God. Obedience to his sovereignty in our lives is a must, not an option.
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A Woman After God's Own Heart:
A study of King David
Introductory Lesson Notes

<p>Death of the Judge leads to a period of social/spiritual : <u>Decay and Compromise</u></p>	<p>The nation faced decline and failure because the people compromised their high spiritual purpose:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. They abandoned their mission to drive all the people out of the land 2. They adopted the customs of the people living around them 	<p>The world has many rewards for those who are willing to sacrifice their faith: wealth, acceptance, recognition, power, and influence to name a few. When God gives us a mission we must not fail in its completion by falling for the promises of the world. We must keep our focus on Christ, our Judge and Deliverer.</p>
<p>Israel's Disregard for the Covenant: <u>Suffering, defeat and oppression</u></p>	<p>God allowed his people to suffer the natural consequences of their sins and used the oppression of Israel's enemies to bring his people back to repentance and to test their allegiance to him.</p>	<p>Rebelling against God leads to disaster. God may use defeat to bring wandering hearts back to him. When all else is stripped away, we recognize the importance of serving only him.</p>
<p>Israel cries out to the Lord: Repentance</p>	<p>Decline, decay and defeat caused the people of Israel to cry out to the Lord for help. They vowed to turn from their idolatry and to turn to the Lord for mercy and deliverance. When they repented, the Lord delivered them.</p>	<p>Idolatry gains a foothold in our hearts when we make anything more important than God. We must identify modern idols in our hearts, renounce them and turn to God for his love and mercy.</p>
<p>A new judge: The cycle repeats</p>	<p>Because Israel repented, the Lord raised up a new hero to deliver his people from the oppression brought about by their sin.</p>	<p>Real heroes recognize the futility of human effort without God's guidance and power.</p>

The final verse of the book of Judges very neatly sums up not only the mindset of the nation of Israel, but also the individual hearts of most of God's chosen people:

"In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit." (Judges 21:25)

*A Woman After God's Own Heart:
A study of King David
Introductory Lesson Notes*

What the nation of Israel failed to learn during the time of the Judges, the Lord would clearly teach in the time of Samuel, Saul and eventually David. Where there is sin, there is suffering and strife. Instead of living a cycle of sin, suffering, crying out to the Lord for rescue (which he promises those with a repentant heart!), we should strive to live a life of consistent faithfulness recognizing his sovereignty in every part of our lives and of pursuing his way, not our own. Recognizing his sovereignty requires our obedience.

Israel Demands a King



1 Samuel 8: 1-22

They said to [Samuel], "You are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have." (v5)

What is so wrong with this request? Wasn't a "judge" much the same as a king? Didn't the judge lead them in battle and rule over them? Yes he did. But a judge is not what the other nations had. Israel saw the governing bodies of its neighbors and being dissatisfied with their own political system they wanted a different type of governing body. What they failed to consider was *why* their system wasn't working for them. The political system of Israel consisted of an agreement directly between the nation and God in the form of a covenant. Yahweh is their Sovereign and Lord. Yahweh obligates himself to be the God of Israel – their protector and provider, all the things incumbent upon a deity in relationship to man. Yahweh will fulfill his obligation as long as Israel keeps their part of the covenant with Yahweh, which is essentially to abide by the Torah, or Ten Commandments. The Covenant reads: *If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations on earth...* (Deut 28: 1-14). God chooses one man to act as representative for the nation of Israel and as God's spokesman. Moses fulfilled this role, as did Joshua after him, and all subsequent judges chosen and anointed by God. This leader was not chosen by the people of Israel, but by God himself to serve between God and Israel. The current leader chosen by God, in context of our Bible Study, is Samuel.

The story of Samuel's calling is told in 1 Samuel 3:1-21. It is a remarkable story of God's voice being heard by one lone child in all of Israel. Verse 19

*A Woman After God's Own Heart:
A study of King David
Introductory Lesson Notes*

summarizes Samuel's position of authority: "*The LORD was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the LORD. The LORD continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word. And Samuel's word came to all Israel.*" Samuel was Israel's High Priest, Prophet of God, and Judge, or anointed leader, of Israel.

The function of the High Priest is to act as mediator between God and Israel. Samuel, as the High Priest provides instruction on how to live in peace with the God of Israel. He teaches Israel the proper way to live in accordance with God's instructions as described in the Torah. Such an example is his instruction in 1 Samuel 7:2-4:

It was a long time, twenty years in all, that the ark remained at Kiriath Jearim, and all the people of Israel mourned and sought after the LORD.³ And Samuel said to the whole house of Israel, "If you are returning to the LORD with all your hearts, then rid yourselves of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths and commit yourselves to the LORD and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines."⁴ So the Israelites put away their Baals and Ashtoreths, and served the LORD only.

As High Priest Samuel's role made him an intercessor between Israel and god:

Then Samuel said, "Assemble all Israel at Mizpah and I will intercede with the LORD for you. Then Samuel said, "Assemble all Israel at Mizpah and I will intercede with the LORD for you."⁶ When they had assembled at Mizpah, they drew water and poured it out before the LORD. On that day they fasted and there they confessed, "We have sinned against the LORD." And Samuel was leader of Israel at Mizpah."(v.5-6)

And finally, as High Priest his role required him to mediate between Israel and God by offering the sacrifices required by the Law: "*Then Samuel took a suckling lamb and offered it up as a whole burnt offering to the LORD. He cried out to the LORD on Israel's behalf, and the LORD answered him.*" (v.9) Samuel's role as High Priest is a sacred appointment. His failure to follow through on his obligations would cause him to sin against God. "*As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you. And I will teach you the way that is good and right*"(1 Sam 12:23).

*A Woman After God's Own Heart:
A study of King David
Introductory Lesson Notes*

As a prophet, Samuel, is God's spokesman. A prophet speaks the word of God. He is the main means of communication between God and the nation of Israel. All of Israel has accepted that God speaks through Samuel:

The LORD was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of his words fall to the ground. ²⁰ And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the LORD. ²¹ The LORD continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word. (1 Sam 3:19-21)

As God's spokesman and messenger, Samuel is sent by God to do and act according to God's command. God commands him to do something, Samuel obeys. Samuel's obedient action is as if God is speaking and acting himself among the nation of Israel. Samuel's words and actions carry the weight of God's authority. God's will is worked out in the actions of his prophet. We see this exemplified in Samuel 9: 15-17.

Now the day before Saul came, the LORD had revealed this to Samuel:

¹⁶ "About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin. Anoint him leader over my people Israel; he will deliver my people from the hand of the Philistines. I have looked upon my people, for their cry has reached me."

Samuel also bore the title of Judge. The title "Judge" as applied to Samuel is translated from the Hebrew word *shāpāt* which means to judge, govern, rule, vindicate, punish¹. In addition to being the High Priest and Prophet, Samuel was the anointed military and judicial leader of Israel. 1 Samuel 7:6 tells us that "*Samuel was leader of Israel at Mizpah*" as he prepared to lead a unified Israel against the Philistines. The Lord handed them a victory against the Philistines that day and the passage concludes with the statement "*Samuel continued as judge over Israel all the days of his life*" (v.15).

The nation of Israel is unique among all nations. No other nation had a political system wherein their God is their sovereign. But Israel is in close contact with the pagan kingdoms of Canaan. They see a different political structure before them. They see that these nations have a king who leads them and rules them, not an invisible God whom they are unable to approach. Israel decided they wanted to

¹ Strong's Talking Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

*A Woman After God's Own Heart:
A study of King David
Introductory Lesson Notes*

be like the other nations. *"We want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles."* (1 Sam 8:20b, 21). In desiring to be like the other nations, to have a sovereign lead them out in battle they were rejecting the divine sovereignty of Yahweh. They had a military leader, Samuel was that military leader. What they wanted was a human sovereign to lead them, not an invisible divine sovereign who was not seen in battle with them despite victory after victory handed to them by Yahweh under Samuel's leadership.

And the LORD told him [Samuel]: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. ⁸ As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. (1 Sam 8:7-8)

Their demand for a king was a rejection not only of Samuel, God's chosen and anointed ruler, but also a rejection of God himself as their sovereign.

In demanding a king they were rejecting the original covenant. Establishing a monarchy had different requirements. God instructs Samuel to describe the burdens a monarch would impose in order to run a government. Those burdens would include: a military draft, taxation, governmental seizure of property and citizenry, and limits on freedom. (1 Sam 8:10-18)

In desiring a king and a pagan system of government Israel was pursing the ways of the pagans. They desired a secular system of government much like the surrounding Canaanite and Philistine city states instead of a theocracy. They wanted a government that was not based on God's law, but on man's desire. The Israelites mistakenly believed it was their system of government that wasn't working for them, not realizing it was their own disobedience. Everything for which they are asking Samuel points to a blatant disregard for Yahweh and a desire to do as they see fit, to put themselves ahead of God. They failed to realize that their disobedience would cause their new form of government to fail as well. What they needed was uniform faith, not uniform rule. Embracing the ways of the pagans would not insure success. They needed to submit to their own faith in Yahweh. If they did they would succeed in ways beyond their expectations.

This applies to us today as well. We cannot compromise our faith to be more like the world and expect to be effective in the Kingdom. Our obedience is weak if we ask God to lead our family or our personal life but continue to live by the world's standards. Our faith in God must touch all practical areas of our life. Imagine what blessings God has ready for us if we are just able to surrender control to him. I get

*A Woman After God's Own Heart:
A study of King David
Introductory Lesson Notes*

myself in a frenzy trying to control my day. One thing comes up and throws my schedule off, I'm off balance all day. It happened on Friday. I thought I finally had all the girls back to school. I had plans to get chores done, exercise, work on this lesson, pick the twins up and get errands done while Emily was at practice, and get everyone home in time for a pizza movie night (our Friday night tradition). Well, it didn't work out that way. I got a call to come get Katie at 9am. Essentially I lost two hours out of my morning running around for and with Katie instead of working on this. It did my attitude no good. Did I turn to God to help me work it out? No. My focus became me and what can I accomplish in a limited amount of time. My focus shifted to a horizontal plan. **I believed** it was **my responsibility** to get everything accomplished on **my** to-do list. Did my day work out? Sort of, most everything got done except this lesson – I wasn't in a receptive frame of mind to hear God. Perhaps if I had taken the time to refocus on a more vertical plan – what should I do that is most pleasing to God? What is his priority? But no, that's not how things went. So instead, God got me out of bed at 5:30 on Saturday morning telling me to get down to my computer and this lesson came out in a flash. But at 5:30 on a Saturday! I look forward to Saturday mornings so that I can get up a little later than I do during the week, not earlier. Perhaps if I had gone to the Lord when I was working on this on Friday things may have been different. This is a very minor example, but for me it showed that I am not as in control of my life as I think I am!

Israel was called to be a holy nation, separate from and unique among all others (Lev 20:26). The Israelites' motive in asking for a king was to make them like the nations around them. This was in complete opposition to Yahweh's original plan. All the things the Israelites are doing in asking for a king is what Yahweh told them they must not do. Look back again at Deut 28: 15-25, 28. It was not their desire for a king that was wrong, but their reasons for wanting a king. I think this is the reason Yahweh told Samuel to give them what they were asking for. Their first king would fulfill not only what Samuel tells them in 1 Samuel 8:11-18, but also a good bit of Deut 28's curses. Again Yahweh is letting his people come to a time of suffering through their own choices in order to bring them back to himself through a king of his choosing, a king with a heart for him. Take a close look at v28 of Deut 28: "*The LORD will afflict you with madness, blindness and confusion of mind.*" I think this is a foreshadowing of Saul's future as king.

*A Woman After God's Own Heart:
A study of King David
Introductory Lesson Notes*

Israel's First King



1 Samuel 9 & 10

Saul is chosen as the first king because he fits the worldly view of a strong leader: *"He [Kish] had a son named Saul, an impressive young man without equal among the Israelites--a head taller than any of the others* (1 Sam 9:2). Verse one reveals that Saul comes from a wealthy and influential family and physically Saul is impressive and tall. In the eyes of men he looks regal and powerful. Even though Saul is not who God has in mind, God will use him to temporarily deliver his people from the oppression of the Philistines:

1 Sam 9:15 *Now the day before Saul came, the LORD had revealed this to Samuel: 16 "About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin. Anoint him leader over my people Israel; he will deliver my people from the hand of the Philistines. I have looked upon my people, for their cry has reached me."*

I think it interesting that Samuel refers to Saul as "*the desire of all Israel*" (v. 20). The desire of Israel is a King in the model of all other nations. From outward appearance, Saul was exactly what was needed. As we proceed with our study, we will see that Saul is charismatic, handsome, strong, and a successful leader. But we will also see that he has some significant character flaws that will preclude him from ever being God's true choice to rule Israel.

Verse 21 gives us a glimpse into Saul's insecurity: *"Saul answered, "But am I not a Benjamite, from the smallest tribe of Israel, and is not my clan the least of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin? Why do you say such a thing to me?"* While Saul may be descended from the smallest tribe of Israel, his family is not the least of all the tribes. V1 tells us Saul's father is a man of standing, as translated by the NIV. The original Hebrew says he is a "mighty and valiant man of wealth"². That wealth is immediately apparent in the owning of slaves, multiple donkeys, oxen and land (cf. 11:5). This would make Saul's family one of premier influence throughout the region.

² New American Commentary (NAC) and Strong's Talking Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

*A Woman After God's Own Heart:
A study of King David
Introductory Lesson Notes*

Saul's insecurity is further evidenced in the scene of his coronation. When all of the tribes of Israel come together to laud Saul as the new king, he is found hiding among the baggage, hiding from an all important God-given responsibility. He did not feel up to either the challenge or the responsibility that was bestowed upon him by God (1 Samuel 10:20-24).

It is clearly evident that God has chosen Saul for this position. Clan by Clan, then man by man, the selection was narrowed down by the casting of lots. Saul and Samuel already knew who would be King. The casting of lots, done by the High Priest, was to show all Israel that God had chosen this man to be their King. Not only was he to be their first King and deliverer from the Philistines, we will see that he is also God's instrument of judgment against Israel for rejecting God's methods. Just before the casting of lots, Samuel addressed the assembled tribes and delivers a reprimand:

Samuel summoned the people of Israel to the LORD at Mizpah and said to them, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'I brought Israel up out of Egypt, and I delivered you from the power of Egypt and all the kingdoms that oppressed you.' But you have now rejected your God, who saves you out of all your calamities and distresses. And you have said, 'No, set a king over us.' So now present yourselves before the LORD by your tribes and clans." (1 Sam 10:17-19)

The presentation of the King becomes also a revelation of judgment. The "*desire of all Israel*" hiding from his responsibilities foreshadows a pattern that will become evident throughout the reign of King Saul. Their king "*like the other nations*", would shirk responsibility, eschew Godly counsel, and lack wisdom revealing instead self-centered insecurity and arrogance. He will be a strong contrast against the king whom God has chosen to lead Israel.