
The King and Kingdom Challenged

1 Samuel 10:17-11:25¹⁰

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This section of 1 Samuel has some things to think about...

A kingdom... We Americans have been proud of our form of government. It has generally served us well. Like all forms of human government, it is only as good as the people serving in it. No system of human government can rise above the character of its leaders. Sometimes, we somehow think of our way as the Biblical way. If you are committed to that idea, then you are going to struggle with quite a lot of the Old Testament. When God implemented a human government for His people, He did NOT put into place a representative democracy. He put in place a monarchy, a king.

A war... A violent, dangerous, bloody war. And the Old Testament is full of them. What does this mean for us as Christians? We don't draw a straight line from Israel to America (or any other nation, for that matter). The New Testament is full of military and warfare analogies. How do we think about them? Is the gospel an instrument of war? Yes. There is deployment of the gospel against our old sinfulness. There is the deployment of the gospel to spread God's kingdom to the ends of the earth.

And a reluctant king...

But about the matter of the kingdom, of which Samuel had spoken, he did not tell him anything. (v. 16b)

Saul has been identified by God to Samuel as the future king. Samuel has anointed him with oil to show that God has chosen him to be king. God gives Saul a new heart (1 Samuel 10:9). The Spirit of God rushes upon Saul so that he prophesies (1 Samuel 10:10). This seems strange to the people. And Saul never tells anyone about his anointing as king. Is this because he is humble and meek? Or is this because he struggles with the fear of man? We will see as his life and reign unfolds.

I am convinced that this whole section from chapter 9 through chapter 11 is to show that the kingdom of Israel and her king were to be under the Word of God and prophets. All through these 3 chapters, Samuel speaks for God and is clearly in authority over Saul. Israel may have wanted a king like the nations around them who would rule as the absolute king. What they

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got was a king under God, under the prophets, under the Word and accountable to the Scriptures. As we work through this story of the beginning of the king and kingdom, watch the challenges that are faced.

The Inauguration of the King

(10:17-27)

Samuel is God's representative and prophet. As the emissary of the king in heaven Samuel will establish the kingdom and the king on earth.

In the Convocation of the People

(v. 17-19)

¹⁷ Now Samuel called the people together to the Lord at Mizpah. ¹⁸ And he said to the people of Israel, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'I brought up Israel out of Egypt, and I delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of all the kingdoms that were oppressing you.' ¹⁹ But today you have rejected your God, who saves you from all your calamities and your distresses, and you have said to him, 'Set a king over us.' Now therefore present yourselves before the Lord by your tribes and by your thousands.

Samuel summons the people to a national convocation. Mizpah had been so used before. It was here that Samuel convened the nation when they demanded a king. So here he would convene them when God would publicly choose and inaugurate the king.

Samuel speaks to the people. He prepares them for the king they will receive.

Samuel reminds them of the history what God has done for them. *I, God...* God brought them up out the slavery of Egypt. God delivered them from all their enemies.

Samuel reminds them of the history of what they have done to God. *But* you... They were not satisfied with God as their king. They demanded a king. They wanted one to be like the nations. And they wanted him now.

Now they are to line up before God in order by tribes.

This is suddenly ominous. What follows next has historically been a punishment. God has done all this good for you. But you have sinned against God. Now, here is consequence.

The last time the people were summoned like this was at the sin of Achan in the book of Joshua.² Listen to Joshua 7:10-21 (NLT)

¹⁰ But the LORD said to Joshua, "Get up! Why are you lying on your face like this?"

¹¹ Israel has sinned and broken my covenant! They have stolen some of the things that I commanded must be set apart for me. And they have not only stolen them but have lied about it and hidden the things among their own belongings. ¹² That is why the Israelites are running from their enemies in defeat. For now Israel itself has been set apart for destruction. I will not remain with you any longer unless you destroy the things among you that were set apart for destruction.

¹³ “Get up! Command the people to purify themselves in preparation for tomorrow. For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: Hidden among you, O Israel, are things set apart for the LORD. You will never defeat your enemies until you remove these things from among you.

¹⁴ “In the morning you must present yourselves by tribes, and the LORD will point out the tribe to which the guilty man belongs. That tribe must come forward with its clans, and the LORD will point out the guilty clan. That clan will then come forward, and the LORD will point out the guilty family. Finally, each member of the guilty family must come forward one by one. ¹⁵ The one who has stolen what was set apart for destruction will himself be burned with fire, along with everything he has, for he has broken the covenant of the LORD and has done a horrible thing in Israel.”

¹⁶ Early the next morning Joshua brought the tribes of Israel before the LORD, and the tribe of Judah was singled out. ¹⁷ Then the clans of Judah came forward, and the clan of Zerah was singled out. Then the families of Zerah came forward, and the family of Zimri was singled out. ¹⁸ Every member of Zimri’s family was brought forward person by person, and Achan was singled out.

¹⁹ Then Joshua said to Achan, “My son, give glory to the LORD, the God of Israel, by telling the truth. Make your confession and tell me what you have done. Don’t hide it from me.”

²⁰ Achan replied, “It is true! I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel. ²¹ Among the plunder I saw a beautiful robe from Babylon, 200 silver coins, and a bar of gold weighing more than a pound. I wanted them so much that I took them. They are hidden in the ground beneath my tent, with the silver buried deeper than the rest.”

So, if the Israelites are familiar with their history, they have to wondering what is next.

With the Confirmation by the Lord

(v. 20-21)

²⁰ Then Samuel brought all the tribes of Israel near, and the tribe of Benjamin was taken by lot. ²¹ He brought the tribe of Benjamin near by its clans, and the clan of the Matrites was taken by lot; and Saul the son of Kish was taken by lot. But when they sought him, he could not be found.

What follows is the casting of lots to narrow the choice. Now in no way is this an election. This is quite simply some form of rolling a dice or picking a number or pulling straws.

And it follows the pattern of Achan again. Imagine the nation or its representatives lined up in twelve groups. Around the outskirts of the camp are the horses and wagons and carts with the baggage and back packs of all those who answered the summons. At this point, it is likely the people are thinking that someone is being selected for punishment. Maybe the person who was behind the request for a king is going to be singled out and brought to justice.

First lot is cast – and it falls on the tribe of Benjamin. But wait, isn't the true king to come from Judah? And then the next lot falls on the clan of Matrites. The census of the clan is brought and the lot is cast and it falls on Saul, the son of Kish.

The lot is in the sovereign control of God. This is not chance. Samuel knows exactly what is going to turn up. He knows exactly who the lot will pick. Not because he is cheating but because he has already been told by God. He has already anointed this one.

And Saul knows it too.

At the Presentation of the King

(v. 22-24)

²² So they inquired again of the Lord, "Is there a man still to come?" and the Lord said, "Behold, he has hidden himself among the baggage." ²³ Then they ran and took him from there. And when he stood among the people, he was taller than any of the people from his shoulders upward. ²⁴ And Samuel said to all the people, "Do you see him whom the Lord has chosen? There is none like him among all the people." And all the people shouted, "Long live the king!"

If we are reading this account for the first time, then we would simply say that Saul is afraid. After reading the account of Saul through the book, I am sure that he is afraid. Our author finds the first king of Israel cowering among the baggage. And for the rest of his life, he is a study in a man in a powerful, prominent position who is driven by the fear of man.

So the Lord has to finger Saul. "There he is", the Lord says. So the people run and bring him out. He stands up and you can almost see the people stop and gape at him. There he is, standing tall over the people. He is a walking irony – a big man on the outside and a small man on the inside.

But he is the Lord's chosen. There is none like him. Well, I can't help hear this as a bit of biting sarcasm. "Look, there he is! Your King. God has chosen Him. There is no one like him. You had to dig him out of the baggage but he is tall and imposing like the kings of the nations." Yes, God has chosen Saul. Saul's name means "Asked for." Israel is getting what they "Asked for". Saul is their punishment for rejecting God as their king/

He is accepted and acclaimed by the people. "Long live the king..." Yes, and longer than anyone would have cared for...

As a Constitutional Monarchy

(v. 25)

Here is another evidence that this text is asserting the authority a

²⁵ Then Samuel told the people the rights and duties of the kingship, and he wrote them in a book and laid it up before the Lord. Then Samuel sent all the people away, each one to his home. ²⁶ Saul also went to his home at Gibeah, and with him went men of valor whose hearts God had touched. ²⁷ But some worthless fellows said, "How can this man save us?" And they despised him and brought him no present. But he held his peace.

The king is under the Law of God. He is not free to do whatever he wants. He is subject to the Word of God. While we do not know exactly what Samuel wrote here, It is safe

to assume that at least he wrote down Deuteronomy 17:14-20 which pertained to the King. As God's spokesman, Samuel may have had many other instructions for the Saul.

The point here is that the king is subject to the prophet and to the Scripture. There is a written law outside of the king to which he must submit. In that day, the king's word was law. His will and word were the law of the land. So Saul is not like the kings of the nations. He is not the law. He is the king under God and under God's law. And he is the king accountable to Samuel, the prophet of God.

With the Varied Response

(v. 26-27)

The people are sent to their own homes. What is curiously absent here is any sense of celebration. Samuel elevates Saul. Samuel establishes the constitution for the King. Samuel sends the people home. I am surprised. I would have expected some even passing mention of a celebration. But this seems to be quite restrained and sober.

The king goes home. He just goes home. In the following narrative, he not only goes home, he returns to farming. Is he taking this seriously? Is he simply incompetent? No one has ever been king in Israel before. There is no capital city. There is no throne. There is only a circuit riding judge who is a wise old prophet.

Men of courage go with Saul. God has touched their hearts. These are men who see that the king will need to be protected, served and fought for. Here is the beginnings of Saul's administration. Because Saul has been asked for by the people and given to the people by God to "save them from their enemies", then God touches the hearts of men who are fit to be soldiers.

The king is despised. Now these are "worthless" men. They are not insightful nor discerning. This word is used in Deuteronomy 13:13 to describe people who entice Israel to follow other gods. This word is used to describe the useless and wicked sons of Eli. It describes people who did not know the Lord. So Saul may be Israel's punishment, but he is still their God-appointed king. These unbelievers look on God's king with disdain. How can he save us?

A thousand years later, God's King walked among us. He was despised and rejected. Many unbelievers looks on Jesus and said, "How can He save us? He is dying on a cross..."

The Attack on Israel

(11:1-4)

We do not know how much time has transpired. But soon a challenge to the king and the kingdom is going to rise. This too, is in the providence of God.

¹ Then Nahash the Ammonite went up and besieged Jabesh-gilead, and all the men of Jabesh said to Nahash, "Make a treaty with us, and we will serve you." ² But Nahash the Ammonite said to them, "On this condition I will make a treaty with you, that I gouge out all your right eyes, and thus bring disgrace on all Israel." ³ The elders of Jabesh said to him, "Give us seven days' respite that we may send messengers through all the territory of Israel. Then, if there is no one to save us, we will give ourselves up to you." ⁴ When the

messengers came to Gibeah of Saul, they reported the matter in the ears of the people, and all the people wept aloud.

The Terrible Enemy

(v. 1)

Jabesh-Gilead is located on the east side of the Jordan River, about 40 miles from Saul's home town of Gibeah. The Philistines would be a constant threat from the west all through Saul's reign. But the Ammonites had been the impetus for Israel to demand a king. Fast forward to **1 Samuel 12:11-13** — where a history lesson is being given to Israel:

¹¹ And the LORD sent Jerubbaal and Barak and Jephthah and Samuel and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side, and you lived in safety. ¹² And when you saw that Nahash the king of the Ammonites came against you, you said to me, 'No, but a king shall reign over us,' when the LORD your God was your king. ¹³ And now behold the king whom you have chosen, for whom you have asked; behold, the LORD has set a king over you.

So Nahash and Ammon were not new enemies. Their threat had provoked Israel to demand their king. Now God uses them to bring their newly installed king to the fore.

What a dreadful enemy... The Ammonites were a people who lived on the east side of the Jordan River. They were descended from Lot's involuntary incest with his younger daughter after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:30-38). The Ammonite's history of sin and wickedness lived up to their sordid origins. They had a special hatred for the Hebrews. They attempted to at first to enslave them. Then they tried genocide to clear them from the east side of the Jordan and enlarge the Ammonite kingdom. From (Keddie, 1988, p. 112).

The Proposed Treaty

(v. 1-2)

Under the threat from Nahash, the men of Jabesh-Gilead propose a treaty. The offer to become the vassals, the servants of the Ammonites. This displays no confidence in Saul's willingness or ability to defend them. Saul has just been proclaimed king *to deliver Israel from her enemies and this enemy, Ammon, in particular.*

Nahash's evil depravity and disdain for Israel are put on frightening display. He will be glad to make a treaty and to make vassals of Jabesh-Gilead. But he will brand them. He will gouge out the right eye of every man. He even declares that by doing so he will bring disgrace upon all Israel. God had removed the disgrace of Egypt's slavery by delivering Israel from Egypt. Nahash knows exactly what he is doing. If Israel returns to slavery, they will be disgraced. He is ready to put a thumb in their eye. But it is Saul who is the real target here. What kind of king is he?

The Frightened Responses

(v. 3-4)

How pathetic. The elders ask for a week. If no one comes to rescue them then they will capitulate. Again you see no real confidence in the new king nor even in the nation itself. The kingdom is new and young and not yet truly formed. But still, why would they not simply send a messenger to Gibeah to Saul to say, "You have been made king to deliver Israel from our enemies. Come and save us."

Though the text doesn't say, Nahash allows this. He is supremely arrogant and confident. That or he intends to draw out this new king and his fledgling nation and army into the battle field. He certainly intends to defeat and disgrace the whole nation.

Well, the response in Gibeah is not just loud weeping. No hope. No confidence. No going to their taller than everybody king. Just defeat. No one seems to go ask for the man they asked for to deliver them. So little expectation. So little hope.

The Salvation by the King

(v. 5-11)

The king appears, not seeking donkeys, but trailing a team of oxen. It is likely this a threshing team. So here is the king out living his normal life doing his normal work. It seems to me that Saul still has not realized the significance of what he has been appointed to do. Well that is about to change.

Now, behold, Saul was coming from the field behind the oxen. And Saul said, "What is wrong with the people, that they are weeping?" So they told him the news of the men of Jabesh. ⁶ And the Spirit of God rushed upon Saul when he heard these words, and his anger was greatly kindled. ⁷ He took a yoke of oxen and cut them in pieces and sent them throughout all the territory of Israel by the hand of the messengers, saying, "Whoever does not come out after Saul and Samuel, so shall it be done to his oxen!" Then the dread of the Lord fell upon the people, and they came out as one man. ⁸ When he mustered them at Bezek, the people of Israel were three hundred thousand, and the men of Judah thirty thousand. ⁹ And they said to the messengers who had come, "Thus shall you say to the men of Jabesh-gilead: 'Tomorrow, by the time the sun is hot, you shall have salvation.' " When the messengers came and told the men of Jabesh, they were glad. ¹⁰ Therefore the men of Jabesh said, "Tomorrow we will give ourselves up to you, and you may do to us whatever seems good to you." ¹¹ And the next day Saul put the people in three companies. And they came into the midst of the camp in the morning watch and struck down the Ammonites until the heat of the day. And those who survived were scattered, so that no two of them were left together.

The King's Response

(v.6)

No one thought to go tell the king. He has to find out by overhearing their grieving. So they told him. And when they do, two things happen. The Spirit of God rushes upon him and he is very angry. This is a holy anger. This is Spirit wrought wrath. This is not natural to him. His anger is not mere human anger. It is a divine, holy wrath. An evil man and an evil nation are threatening to enslave and to disgrace God's people again. With the Spirit of God upon, he is ready to deliver God's people.

The King's Recruiting

(v. 7-8)

So he has a most unusual recruiting method. He kills the yoke of oxen. He cuts them up into pieces. He messengers a piece to every tribe and clan in Israel. "Bring your weapons and muster to Samuel and Saul at Bezek or I will do this to all your oxen." What surprises you here? First surprise is the mention of Samuel. The author is again reinforcing the centrality of the prophet of God and the Word of God. Saul knows it. Bu he is also making a historical connection.

Judges 19-21 records a story about near decimation of the tribe of Benjamin and particularly the city of Gibeah. A Levite who stayed in Gibeah had his concubine taken, raped all night and killed by the men of Gibeah. He took her body home, cut here into 12 pieces and sent the pieces to all of Israel. Israel gathered to punish Benjamin with the result that nearly the whole tribe was wiped out along with ALL the unmarried women of the tribe.

Saul is invoking this story when he does this. Saul's action with the oxen was an awful reminder of those days when "there was no king in Israel" and "Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25; cf. 19:1). Saul's action marked the new beginning. Now there *was* a king in Israel! What difference would that make? (Woodhouse, p. 198) The king is calling for a muster of all the fighting men in the nation. They will come to his side and they will save Israel from Nahash and Ammonites. The fear of God falls on the people of Israel. And they respond. The 10 northern tribes of Israel contribute 300,000 men and the 2 southern tribes of Judah, 30,000.

The Kings' Victory

(v. 9-11)

The messengers are now sent on their third mission. They tell the men of Jabesh-Gilead that before the sun is high in the sky, they will be saved. The men tell Nahash that they will surrender the next day. This strategy seems to cause the Ammonites to relax their guard in the camp. There will be no rescue. But as Saul divides the army into three companies and they attack the Ammonites while they are in their camp. They rout the enemy. The slaughter is so great that that the few scattered survivors could not be found in pairs.

The Renewal of the Kingdom

(v. 12-15)

Do you see the providence of God? These events have been designed by God to secure king Saul and the Kingdom.

¹² Then the people said to Samuel, "Who is it that said, 'Shall Saul reign over us?' Bring the men, that we may put them to death." ¹³ But Saul said, "Not a man shall be put to death this day, for today the Lord has worked salvation in Israel." ¹⁴ Then Samuel said to the people, "Come, let us go to Gilgal and there renew the kingdom." ¹⁵ So all the people went to Gilgal, and there they made Saul king before the Lord in Gilgal. There they sacrificed peace offerings before the Lord, and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly.

The King's Mercy

(v. 12-13)

Everyone loves a winner. The people are impressed. So much so that they are prepared to deal with those who refused to accept Saul's reign. So they go to Samuel. But Saul intervenes. Don't spoil a day of victory by turning it into a day of death. Here is the mercy of Saul. Here is the big man who now seems to have a big heart.

The King's Enthronement

(v. 14-15)

Samuel summons the people to Gilgal. Why Gilgal? I think it is to restore was lost in the long sad years since Joshua 4:19-24.

¹⁹ The people came up out of the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and they encamped at Gilgal on the east border of Jericho. ²⁰ And those twelve stones, which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up at Gilgal. ²¹ And he said to the people of Israel, "When your children ask their fathers in times to come, 'What do these stones mean?' ²² then you shall let your children know, 'Israel passed over this Jordan on dry ground.' ²³ For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you passed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up for us until we passed over, ²⁴ so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever."

They gather there before the Lord. Saul is accepted as king by the people. But it is God's kingdom that is renewed. This long text then has moved from Samuel's condemnation because of rejecting God's kingdom to the renewal of God's kingdom with under Saul. Now we hear celebration and gladness.

Reflect and Respond

John Woodhouse helps to bring us to Christ in this story.

They recognized the wickedness of rejecting God's king (v. 12)

They discovered the grace of the day of God's king (v. 13).

They heeded the call to renew the kingdom (v. 14).

They learned the goodness of God's ways (v. 15)

So Jesus is King:

He has been appointed by God to rule and reign over His people.

He has been proclaimed by the Word through His prophets.

He has defeated our vile and implacable enemy, sin.

We must not reject Him as our true king.

We will hear of His grace and mercy to sinners.

We will hear and heed the call to acknowledge Him as king.

We will experience His goodness and gladness forever.

Notes

² I am greatly indebted to Dr. John Woodhouse for his insight in making this connection and parallel. It is compelling on so many levels. Not only is the summons, the speech and the lining up of the tribes similar but so is the nature of the sin. Rather than being satisfied with God's abundant provision, Achan coveted the finery of the pagan people. Israel, rather than being satisfied with God, have coveted a king like the pagan nations. Then the striking drill down toward the man through tribe, clan and person lot casting cannot be coincidental.