

Sacred Space In Promise – The Emergence of the Monarchy

I. Introduction

1. From one vantage point, the most significant – *and most revealing* – component of Israel’s decline during the period of the judges was the nation’s insistence upon a human king.
 - a. This demand underscored Israel’s effective rejection of Yahweh as king and the fact that each person functioned as his own lord. * Judges 17:6, 21:25
 - b. A human king *was* part of Yahweh’s plan for Israel (Gen. 17:1-16, 49:8-10), *but a king who would fulfill the human vocation of image-son administering His lordship, not a king ruling in his own right in the place of Yahweh’s sovereign kingship.*
 - c. The text of 1 Samuel highlights this distinction and Israel’s intent in seeking a king by noting that they desired to be like the nations; *they wanted a king who conformed to their natural notions of kingship, not the divine King who led them as a wise, loving Father.*
2. Thus God’s answer to Samuel’s objection showed that the issue wasn’t human kingship as such (which was His ultimate design), but Israel’s rejection of Him as their King.

II. The Emergence of the Monarchy – King Saul (1 Samuel 8-15)

A. Israel’s Demand for a King (8:1-5)

1. Israel’s demand for a king heralded the end of the era of the judges, even as it was the unfaithfulness of Samuel’s sons that provoked it. *The sons of Israel saw no godly successor for Samuel, and this led them to rethink their future and how they would be governed.*
2. This demand displeased Samuel, and the text’s account suggests that he recognized the psychology behind it: *The sons of Israel had lost sight of their status as the Creator’s uniquely consecrated people and now viewed themselves as just another nation among many.*

Yahweh had chosen Israel and set them apart as the “seed” of Abraham to be His light to the nations, but they saw themselves as standing alongside the nations.

B. God’s Approval of the Demand (8:6-22)

Israel’s desire for a king continued its pattern of unfaithfulness, but Yahweh granted it because it served His ends. Again, a human king was key to God’s ultimate intent for His kingdom, *but a certain kind of king – a king like Him*. The Israelites’ longing for a human king exposed their idolatrous hearts, but the Lord yielded to them, allowing them to once again enjoy the fruit of their idolatry. They would learn all too well what they lost when they rejected His loving rule.

1. Thus Yahweh singled out *Saul* as a man who met all of Israel’s criteria – a man after *their* hearts. He gave them what they sought, but not before warning them about what they were to experience at the hands of their new king. * 8:9-9:17
2. Indeed, whatever man Israel might choose, he would rule according to a “procedure” that would benefit him at his people’s expense; *he would rule in his own name, not Yahweh’s.*

The sons of Israel were to understand that a human king would mean the end of the loving, benevolent, wise and just lordship they had taken for granted under Yahweh's rule. And it didn't matter who or how well they chose; it is inherent in every person to seek his own interests first.

C. Saul's Selection and Confirmation (9:1-10:27)

1. Saul was Yahweh's choice, but as His deference to Israel's desire; He would give them the sort of man they wanted (9:1-2, 15-16, 10:23-24), and they would reap the consequences.
2. The Lord identified Saul to Samuel as the man He'd chosen, after which Samuel informed Saul that he was to be ruler in Israel, *anointed with Yahweh's Spirit so as to be equipped to rule His people in His name and authority according to His wisdom and purpose.* Thus the Lord would render Saul a "new man," demonstrated in his prophesying before the people.
3. Afterward, Samuel called all the people of Israel together to appear before Yahweh at Mizpah, and there he proclaimed the Lord's words to them: They had rejected Him as king, and He was going to grant their desire. Thus Saul was identified to Israel by lot, after which Samuel recorded in a book the "ordinances of the kingdom" (Yahweh's instruction for the kingship in contrast to the "procedure of the king") and placed it before the Lord. * 10:24ff

D. Saul's Early Reign and Rejection (11:1-15:35)

1. After his presentation to Israel, Saul went on to solidify his recognition and acceptance as their king by his leadership and victory in the Ammonite siege of Jabesh-gilead. * 11:1-15
2. Saul's triumph won the hearts of Israel, but Samuel tempered their exultation and new-found devotion with a reminder that Saul's reign was the result of their own unbelief and rebellion. *Yahweh gave them a king, but as they had rejected Him. Nevertheless, He demanded that both king and subjects uphold the proper role of the kingship under the covenant.* * 12:1-25
3. Saul enjoyed early successes as Israel's king, but soon the Lord's warning was realized; whatever his original intent and commitment, Saul succumbed to the "procedure of the king."
 - a. His self-interest drove his decisions and actions, and the first instance of this in the text was his determination to offer sacrifices at Gilgal. * cf. 10:1-8, 13:5-12
 - b. This alone was sufficient for Yahweh to reject Saul as king (13:13-14), but, even so, Saul later directly disobeyed the Lord's command by taking spoil from the Amalekites after defeating them in battle, including the Amalekite king Agag. Yahweh gave Saul the victory, yet he was determined to exalt himself before his Israelite brethren by parading before them the spoils of his triumph. And even after Samuel confronted him and condemned his disobedience, Saul petitioned Samuel to disregard his transgression and honor him in the sight of the people. * 15:1-30
4. Saul very quickly showed himself to be just like the rulers of the nations, which is precisely what the Israelites asked for. He was a man who seemed to meet Israel's longing, but Yahweh intended His people to be ruled by a man devoted to Him – a man after His own heart. Saul's illegitimacy was evident at the outset in that he was a Benjamite, and Yahweh had assigned the scepter to Judah. But even more, Saul was intent on ruling in his own name, and the Lord sought a regal son who would administer His lordship in Israel. * 12:13-14

Conclusions: Saul's Role in the Developing Doctrine of God's Kingdom and Kingship

1. God had promised a royal seed to Abraham (Gen. 17:1-6, 15-16), later connected with his great-grandson Judah (Gen. 49:8-10). So Moses later spoke of a future king (reflecting Israel's rejection of Yahweh) and the qualities that he was to possess as the Lord's ruler over His covenant house (Deut. 17:14-20). *Human kingship administering His rule in the world was always God's design, evident in man's created nature and role as image-son.*
2. But prior to Saul, Yahweh had not spoken of a particular king in Israel, nor had He addressed the inherent problems of human kingship under His sovereignty as Israel's true King. However, it was clear from Moses' instruction that this king, whoever he might be, was to be fully devoted to Yahweh and His covenant (i.e., Israel's Torah). *If Israel was "son of God," its king was to be Yahweh's superlative son, reigning in His name and authority and manifesting His mind, wisdom and love in leading His people.*
3. This sort of submissive devotion to Yahweh as King is antithetical to the human form and manner of rule expressed by the phrase, "procedure of the king." The self-centric use of authority, power, and resource marks every human ruler because it is inherent to fallen human existence. *So even Jesus' disciples, just like their forefathers, had to learn a different concept of kingship if they were to discern and embrace God's king.* * Mark 10:32-45
 - a. Israel's king was to be the human manifestation of Yahweh's kingship, and so His *bona fide son*, revealing Him in truth to His covenant children and to the watching world.
 - b. In this way Israel's king was to be the epitomizing Israelite, faithfully executing Israel's sonship as the Abrahamic covenant "seed" on behalf of the world.

*Israel's king epitomized the nation's regal sonship, and so had a particular role in Yahweh's design to become the undisputed King over all the earth. **In and through His faithful king, the world would come to recognize and embrace the true King of all creation.*** * Psalm 72

4. This, then, shows the true nature and significance of Saul's failure. Though Yahweh anointed Saul with His Spirit to govern His people in His name with His wisdom (10:1-9), Saul was just what Israel wanted – not a "man of the Spirit," but a man who resembled the kings of the other nations. Like every other human ruler, Saul governed Israel according to the natural human "procedure" of rule, and so failed to fulfill his identity and role as "son of God."

Rather than testifying of Yahweh to Israel and the surrounding nations, Saul testified against Him by aligning himself with them in their unbelief and idolatry.

5. God rejected Saul, but not His design to have a human king administer His rule over His covenant kingdom. *But this time He would choose one who would fulfill Moses' prescription as a man after His own heart.*
 - a. Having renounced Saul, Yahweh dispatched Samuel to identify *David* as that man, but he, too, would fall short and demonstrate that he was also subject to the king's "procedure."
 - b. For all his genuine devotion and faithfulness, David would fail Yahweh and bring great distress and calamity on His kingdom. *And yet his failure would not be the end of the story; rather, it would provide the occasion for Yahweh's covenant pledge to David of a regal son in whom His eternal design for a king and kingdom would at last be realized.*