

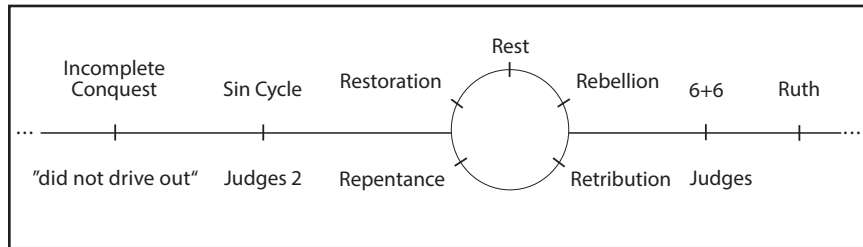
Session 2

The Story of Samuel and Saul

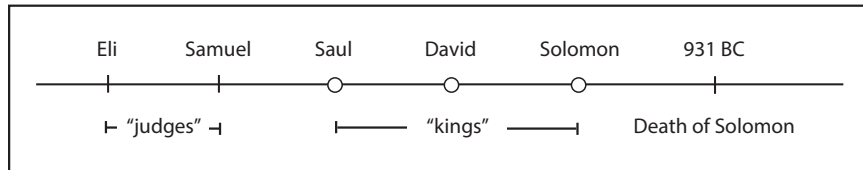
I. PRAYER

II. PANORAMA TIMELINES

A. Movement 5: Apostasy



B. Movement 6: Kingship United Monarchy

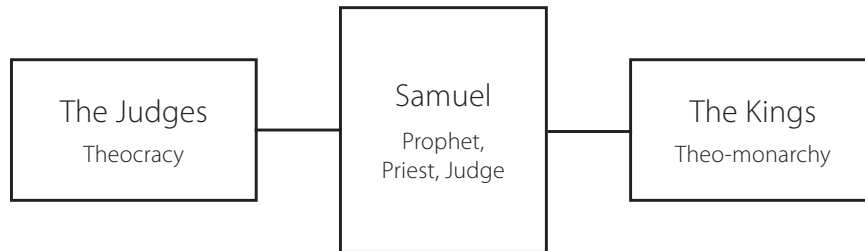


III. PROMINENT PERSONS (MOVEMENT 6)

NAME	TRIBE	OFFICE
Eli	Levi	Priest-Judge
Samuel	Levi	Priest-Judge-Prophet
Saul	Benjamin	King (First)
David	Judah	King (Second)
Solomon	Judah	King (Third)

IV. BIBLICAL CONTEXT:

A. Samuel: Transition Figure



B. Book of 1 Samuel

1. Charted

1 SAMUEL		
Chapters	Key Personalities	Roles
1 - 7	Eli and Samuel	Transitional Judges
7 - 15	Samuel and Saul	1 st King Anointed
16 - 31	Saul and David	2 nd King Anointed

2. Seven Distinctive Features (of 1 Samuel)

- a. Transition from “judges” to kings
- b. Unusual birth of Samuel (priest, judge, prophet)
- c. Ark of Covenant lost and regained
- d. Saul anointed as first king
- e. David and Goliath story
- f. Saul and David in conflict (contrast)
- g. Death of Saul

V. KINGSHIP AND THE ISRAELITES

Some have suggested that Israel should never have expected nor certainly demanded a king as their sovereign. The objection states that Israel always had a king (the LORD Himself). For example, Isaiah the prophet ascribed the title “...my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty” (Isa 6:5). Later in Isaiah the LORD Himself speaks through the prophet, “I am the LORD, Your Holy One, Israel’s Creator, Your King” (Isa 43:15). Thus, as the argument goes, Israel as a people were ruled by God alone (i.e. a theocracy – cf. pp 10 ff).

But the provision of a human king to rule over Israel **under** God's sovereign authority was clearly promised (what is called a theo-monarchy - cf. pp 11-12).

A. Kingship Promised

1. To Abram (Abraham)

Genesis 17:5-7

No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations.

*⁶ I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and **kings** will come from you. ⁷ I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.*

2. To Jacob (Israel)

Genesis 35:11

*And God said to him, "I am God Almighty; be fruitful and increase in number. A nation and a community of nations will come from you, and **kings** will be among your descendants."*

3. To Judah (Jacob's prophetic blessing)

Genesis 49:10

"The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his."

4. To Israelites (from Moses)

Deuteronomy 17:14-17

*When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, "Let us set a **king** over us like all the nations around us," ¹⁵ be sure to appoint over you a **king** the LORD your God chooses. He must be from among your fellow Israelites. Do not place a foreigner over you, one who is not an Israelite. ¹⁶ The **king**, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them, for the LORD has told you, "You are not to go back that way again." ¹⁷ He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold.*

B. Kingship Needed

Movement 5: "Apostasy" demonstrated that Israel sorely needed a king. Four specific times in the Book of Judges this lack was highlighted.

Judges 17:6

*In those days Israel had **no king**; everyone did as they saw fit.*

Judges 18:1

*In those days Israel had **no king**. And in those days the tribe of the Danites was seeking a place of their own where they might settle, because they had not yet come into an inheritance among the tribes of Israel.*

Judges 19:1

*In those days Israel had **no king**. Now a Levite who lived in a remote area in the hill country of Ephraim took a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah.*

Judges 21:25

*In those days Israel had **no king**; everyone did as they saw fit.*

In the prophet Samuel's lifetime the nation of Israel would clamor for a king. Addressing the aged prophet the people declared, "*Behold, you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint for us a king to judge us **like all the nations***" (1 Sam 8:5 ESV).

The request for a king was not sinful. But the kind of king requested was ("like all the nations"). As we will see in this session, the problem was the kind of king, the choice of a king, and the timing for a king.

It would seem that Israel wanted a monarchy of their choosing not a theo-monarchy of God's choosing.

VI. BIBLICAL DEVELOPMENT

A. Samuel

In the previous Session 1 the early life of Samuel was described: his unusual birth, his childhood, his calling. Further, Samuel's lifetime of ministry was summarized:

1 Samuel 3:19-21

The LORD was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of Samuel's 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. The general nature of Samuel's ministry

1 Samuel 7:15-17

Samuel continued as Israel's leader all the days of his life.¹⁶ From year to year he went on a circuit from Bethel to Gilgal to Mizpah, judging Israel in all those places.¹⁷ But he always went back to Ramah, where his home was, and there he also held court for Israel. And he built an altar there to the LORD.

- a. Note his role as judge (leader).
- b. Note his role as priest ("built an altar").
- c. Note his role as prophet, although not found here in the text (but note 1 Sam 3:19-21 above).

2. The request for a king

1 Samuel 8:1-5

*When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as Israel's leaders.² The name of his firstborn was Joel and the name of his second was Abijah, and they served at Beersheba.³ But his sons did not follow his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice.⁴ So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah.⁵ They said to him, "You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now **appoint a king** to lead us, such as all the other nations have."*

3. The response to the request

a. Samuel's displeasure

1 Samuel 8:6

But when they said, "Give us a king to lead us," this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the LORD.

b. The LORD's response

1 Samuel 8:7-9

And the Lord told him: "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. ⁸As 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. ⁹Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will claim as his rights."

(1) The people's rejection was a rejection of theocratic rule by God through His chosen administrator, Samuel ("not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king").

(2) The Lord will permissively allow this request (demand) of the people, but Samuel was instructed to tell the people what a reigning king would do as their monarch.

(3) The idea of a king was not wrong in itself, but the kind of king and the timing for a king was not the best plan.

c. Samuel's description (of the consequences of their request)

1 Samuel 8:10-18

Samuel told all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking him for a king. ¹¹He said, "This is what the king who will reign over you will claim as his rights: He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots. ¹²Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and others to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and still others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. ¹³He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. ¹⁴He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants. ¹⁵He will take a tenth of your grain and of your vintage and give it to his officials and attendants. ¹⁶Your male and female servants and the best of your cattle and donkeys he will take for his own use. ¹⁷He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves. ¹⁸When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, but the LORD will not answer you in that day."

Note the consequences to come:

- (1) Military draft (11-13)
- (2) Seizure of property (14-16)
- (3) Extreme taxation (17-18)

4. The renewed request for a king

1 Samuel 8:19-20

*But the people refused to listen to Samuel. "No!" they said. **"We want a king** over us. ²⁰Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles."*

The renewed demand was for a king like other nations had. Getting what they wanted will prove to be disastrous (as seen in the failure of Saul as the first king).

- a. "A king over us" ...rejection of Samuel's sons; also a rejection of theocracy

- b. "A king like all the other nations" ...rejection of the Lord's kingship over His people
 - c. "A king to lead us" ...rejection of the Lord's leadership (and provision)
 - d. "A king ...to fight our battles" ...rejection of the Lord's protection
5. The renewed request granted

1 Samuel 8:21-22

*When Samuel heard all that the people said, he repeated it before the LORD. ²²The LORD answered, "Listen to them and **give them a king.**" Then Samuel said to the Israelites, "Everyone go back to your own town."*

Insight:

Beginning with 1 Samuel 9 to the final chapter 31, Samuel's life and ministry is entangled with that of Saul, Israel's first king.

In these chapters Samuel will:

- 1. Anoint Saul as prince (Heb. nagid), later as king (Heb. melek) (1 Sam 10:1; 15:1);
- 2. Chasten and challenge Israel in his Farewell Speech (1 Sam 12);
- 3. Rebuke Saul for a foolish offering on the eve of a Philistine battle (1 Sam 13);
- 4. Announce the Lord's rejection of Saul's kingship (1 Sam 15);
- 5. Anoint David as the next king (1 Sam 16);
- 6. Appear to Saul at the time of Saul's seeking the witch (medium) of Endor, then announcing Saul and his son's death (1 Sam 28).

6. The death of Samuel

1 Samuel 25:1

Now Samuel died, and all Israel assembled and mourned for him; and they buried him at his home in Ramah. Then David moved down into the Desert of Paran.

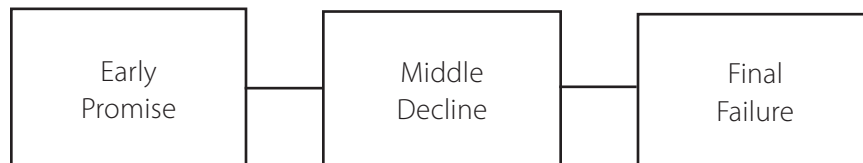
Note also the strange and final encounter with Saul (cf 1 Sam 28—Saul, the medium, Samuel).

1 Samuel 28:3a

Now Samuel was dead, and all Israel had mourned for him and buried him in his own town of Ramah.

B. Saul: An Overview

The life of Saul, the son of Kish the Benjamite, can be divided into three segments (cf. Cupp, *Panorama of the Bible, Revised*, 112).



The diagram highlights his successful beginning but notes his decline and failure. Starting well is not as commendable as finishing strong. Saul's life reinforces this principle.

C. Saul: Biblical Development

1. Early Promise

a. A man of standing

1 Samuel 9:1-2

There was a Benjamite, a man of standing, whose name was Kish son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Bekorath, the son of Aphiah of Benjamin. ²Kish had a son named Saul, as handsome a young man as could be found anywhere in Israel, and he was a head taller than anyone else.

- (1) "Man of standing" suggests a special man of strength, might, and wealth. His family was affluent for the day, owning slaves, donkeys, and oxen (1 Sam 11:5).

(2) "Impressive young (or "chosen") man without equal" addresses the natural characteristics of the man. Saul was a "head taller" than most men, a man of strength and natural distinction. He appears in the narrative of Israel's first king to be all that the people might wish for in a king.

b. A man of stature (height, strength)

1 Samuel 10:23-24

They ran and brought him out, and as he stood among the people he was a head taller than any of the others.

²⁴Samuel said to all the people, "Do you see the man the LORD has chosen? There is no one like him among all the people." Then the people shouted, "Long live the king!"

c. A man of initial humility

When Samuel the seer (or prophet) first met Saul, the young man and one of his family's servants had been searching for lost donkeys. They were seeking the seer (Samuel) to discern the location of the lost animals. But Samuel had a word from God concerning the encounter.

1 Samuel 9:14-17

They went up to the town, and as they were entering it, there was Samuel, coming toward them on his way up to the high place. ¹⁵Now 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 ruler over my people Israel; he will deliver them from the hand of the Philistines. I have looked on my people, for their cry has reached me." ¹⁷When Samuel caught sight of Saul, the LORD said to him, "This is the man I spoke to you about; he will govern my people."

Later, when Samuel begins to reveal that Saul will be Israel's leader, the young Benjamite humbly resists the notion.

1 Samuel 9:21

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?"

d. A man anointed to kingship

1 Samuel 10:1

Then Samuel took a flask of olive oil and poured it on Saul's head and kissed him, saying, "Has not the LORD anointed you ruler over his inheritance?"

This priestly action of Samuel is validated as the prophetic-word-come-true as the donkeys are found precisely as the prophet-seer had pronounced. His formal anointing before the people will come later (cf. 10:17-24).

e. A man of Holy Spirit enabling

1 Samuel 10:5-7

"After that you will go to Gibeah of God, where there is a Philistine outpost. As you approach the town, you will meet a procession of prophets coming down from the high place with lyres, timbrels, pipes and harps being played before them, and they will be prophesying. ⁶The Spirit of the LORD will come powerfully upon you, and you will prophesy with them; and you will be changed into a different person. ⁷Once these signs are fulfilled, do whatever your hand finds to do, for God is with you."

(1) The filling of the Holy Spirit was God's gracious enabling of Saul to fulfill the task God (through Samuel's prophetic words) had placed before him, i.e. lead the nation of Israel.

(2) The Holy Spirit filling will also change Saul (cf. 10:9—"God changed Saul's heart"). This could be his (OT) conversion experience or perhaps, better, his new, divinely-inspired perspective on life.

- f. A man of early discretion (and leadership)

1 Samuel 10:26-27

Saul also went to his home in Gibeah, accompanied by valiant men whose hearts God had touched. ²⁷But some scoundrels said, "How can this fellow save us?" They despised him and brought him no gifts. But Saul kept silent.

- g. A man of courage

Constable (*Notes on 1 Samuel*, 49) rightly points out, "Israel's king not only needed to be an admirable individual in his personal conduct, but he also needed to be an effective military commander."

Saul's first military challenge as a kingly leader came with the attack of the Ammonites. The story is narrated in **1 Samuel 11**.

- (1) The siege of Jabesh Gilead (1-3)

1 Samuel 11:1-3

Nahash the Ammonite went up and besieged Jabesh Gilead. And all the men of Jabesh said to him, "Make a treaty with us, and we will be subject to you."² But Nahash the Ammonite replied, "I will make a treaty with you only on the condition that I gouge out the right eye of every one of you and so bring disgrace on all Israel."³ The elders of Jabesh said to him, "Give us seven days so we can send messengers throughout Israel; if no one comes to rescue us, we will surrender to you."

- (a) The Ammonites were descendants of Lot, earlier defeated by Jephthah in the time of the judges (Judg 11:12-33).

- (b) Jabesh Gilead was located about 25 miles south of the Sea of Galilee (or Chinnereth) on the eastern side of the Jordan River. It is possible that Saul (a Benjamite) had ancestral connections to the people of the city (cf. the death of Saul—1 Sam 31:11-13; also consider the drastic loss of men for the tribe of Benjamin as recorded in Judg 19-21. With so few survivors of the tribe, it is likely that Saul had relatives there).
- (c) Gouging out the eye of the conquered would accomplish several purposes:
- Humiliation
 - Enough sight to serve as slaves (agricultural necessity)
 - Lack of sight (depth perception) for waging war
- (d) Granting seven days to consider the terms of surrender demonstrates Nahash's confidence that no substantial aid would come to the people of Jabesh. A humiliating surrender would avoid a potentially costly war for the invading army.

(2) The situation of Saul at Gibeah (4-8)

1 Samuel 11:4-8

When the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul and reported these terms to the people, they all wept aloud. ⁵Just then Saul was returning from the fields, behind his oxen, and he asked, "What is wrong with everyone? Why are they weeping?" Then they repeated to him what the men of Jabesh had said. ⁶When Saul heard their words, the Spirit of God came powerfully upon him, and he burned with anger. ⁷He took a pair of oxen, cut them into pieces, and sent the pieces by messengers throughout

Israel, proclaiming, "This is what will be done to the oxen of anyone who does not follow Saul and Samuel." Then the terror of the LORD fell on the people, and they came out together as one.⁸ When Saul mustered them at Bezek, the men of Israel numbered three hundred thousand and those of Judah thirty thousand.

- (a) Saul was working in the fields when he heard the news. Apparently he had not received from the Lord (through Samuel) any specific kingship-related instructions. That he was in the fields points out his early humility. As a wealthy landowner he could send workers to do all the agricultural work, but in fact, he was laboring with the oxen.
 - (b) Hearing the news "the Spirit of God came upon Saul" to empower him to a kingly task, i.e. leading his people to military victory (cf. 10:6, 10 for other "fillings").
 - (c) To impress upon other tribes the gravity of the situation, Saul cut into pieces two oxen and sent the pieces throughout Israel. Such a shocking, dramatic act could not be ignored (as could a mere summons or call). This act was similar to the ghastly story of the Levite and his concubine (Judg 19). Both surprising actions brought out the intended result, namely a mustered army.
- (3) The subterfuge of Jabesh Gilead (9-10)
Hearing that help from fellow Israelites was indeed on the way, the men of Jabesh slyly responded to Nahash's demand.

1 Samuel 11:10

They said to the Ammonites, "Tomorrow we will surrender to you, and you can do to us whatever you like."

(4) The success of Saul (11)

1 Samuel 11:11

The next day Saul separated his men into three divisions; during the last watch of the night they broke into the camp of the Ammonites and slaughtered them until the heat of the day. Those who survived were scattered, so that no two of them were left together.

(5) The story's aftermath (12-14)

Following Saul's handling of the Ammonite crisis, the people clamored against his early detractors (12). Saul's response betrayed no sense of revenge or impulsive response. *"No one shall be put to death today, for this day the LORD has rescued Israel"* (13).

1 Samuel 11:14-15

Then Samuel said to the people, "Come, let us go to Gilgal and there renew the kingship."¹⁵So all the people went to Gilgal and made Saul king in the presence of the LORD. There they sacrificed fellowship offerings before the LORD, and Saul and all the Israelites held a great celebration.

“This was the young Saul of fair promise. Extraordinarily rich in natural endowments, and specially equipped by supernatural conferments, the future seemed bright indeed. His call to the kingship was an opportunity in a million, coming to a man in a million. He was called to the kingship and he was constitutionally kingly... He betrayed none of the symptoms of vain-glory which others, less gifted than himself, have betrayed when suddenly elevated.”

(J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book*, 2:57-58)

2. Middle decline

a. Foolish sacrifice (1 Sam 13)

(1) Backdrop: prelude

Saul had been chosen to be the first king. The people had demanded it, God had permitted it. After the people witnessed Saul's first kingly battlefield victory, he was reconfirmed as Israel's king. But Samuel, the seer prophet had a sobering warning to king and people alike.

1 Samuel 12:13-15

“Now here is the king you have chosen, the one you asked for; see, the LORD has set a king over you. ¹⁴If you fear the LORD and serve and obey him and do not rebel against his commands, and if both you and the king who reigns over you follow the LORD your God—good! ¹⁵But if you do not obey the LORD, and if you rebel against his commands, his hand will be against you, as it was against your ancestors.”

(2) Kingship: summary

1 Samuel 13:1

Saul was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned over Israel forty-two years.

(3) Challenge: Philistines

1 Samuel 13:5-8

The Philistines assembled to fight Israel, with three thousand chariots, six thousand charioteers, and soldiers as numerous as the sand on the seashore. They went up and camped at Mikmash, east of Beth Aven. ⁶When the Israelites saw that their situation was critical and that their army was hard pressed, they hid in caves and thickets, among the rocks, and in pits and cisterns. ⁷Some Hebrews even crossed the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. Saul remained at Gilgal, and all the troops with him were quaking with fear. ⁸He waited seven days, the time set by Samuel; but Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and Saul's men began to scatter.

- (a) Saul had three recorded major battles with the Philistines (1 Sam 13-14; 17; 31).
- (b) This first major encounter with the Philistines had the army of Saul in a critical state with troop defections (14:21) and mass desertions. Morale was low and “all the troops with him were quaking with fear” (13:7).

(4) Sacrifice: disobedience

1 Samuel 13:7b-10

Saul remained at Gilgal, and all the troops with him were quaking with fear. ⁸He waited seven days, the time set by Samuel; but Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and Saul's men began to scatter. ⁹So he said, “Bring me the burnt offering and the fellowship offerings.” And Saul offered up the burnt offering. ¹⁰Just as he finished making the offering, Samuel arrived, and Saul went out to greet him.

Saul's sacrifice was blameworthy for at least two reasons: first, such a sacrifice was only to be performed by a priest (cf. Lev 6:8-13). Saul was not a priest nor a descendant of Levi. Second, the sacrifice was disobedience to the Lord's prophet. The king was not the absolute ruler.

His reign was a theo-monarchy which always placed God's rule above the human king. To disobey the prophet of God was to disobey God Himself.

(5) Rebuke: Samuel

1 Samuel 13:11-14

"What have you done?" asked Samuel. Saul replied, "When I saw that the men were scattering, and that you did not come at the set time, and that the Philistines were assembling at Mikmash, ¹²I thought, 'Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the LORD's favor.' So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering." ¹³"You have done a foolish thing," Samuel said. "You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. ¹⁴But now your kingdom will not endure; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him ruler of his people, because you have not kept the LORD's command."

- (a) Samuel bypasses polite greetings and calls Saul to task, "what have you done?" (11).
- (b) Saul offers three excuses for his foolish sacrifice (note that each excuse points to someone else, not Saul):
- First, the soldiers were scattering.
 - Second, the Philistines were a threat to arrive.
 - Third, the prophet had not arrived.
- (c) Saul's disobedient, irreverent actions brought judgment upon him. He will be replaced by "a man after his (the LORD'S) own heart" (14). There will be no Saulide dynasty.

b. Rash vow (1 Sam 14)

During Saul's first major campaign against the Philistines (1 Sam 13-14), a time came when Jonathan, Saul's son, and his armor bearer struck out on a secret reconnaissance into enemy territory. Confident in the Lord's leadership, Jonathan killed twenty Philistine soldiers (11-14).

1 Samuel 14:15

Then panic struck the whole army—those in the camp and field, and those in the outposts and raiding parties—and the ground shook. It was a panic sent by God.

Saul had requested the Ark of the Covenant (symbol of the presence of God) to be brought to the battlefield. He had sought guidance by means of the priest, but hearing the battle turmoil, he stopped the priest (v. 19—"withdraw your hand"—from sacred lots, Urim and Thummim; cf. Ex 28:29-30 and 1 Sam 14:40-42).

1 Samuel 14:20-23

Then Saul and all his men assembled and went to the battle. They found the Philistines in total confusion, striking each other with their swords.²¹ Those Hebrews who had previously been with the Philistines and had gone up with them to their camp went over to the Israelites who were with Saul and Jonathan.²² When all the Israelites who had hidden in the hill country of Ephraim heard that the Philistines were on the run, they joined the battle in hot pursuit.²³ So on that day the LORD saved Israel, and the battle moved on beyond Beth Aven.

(1) The rash vow: spoken

1 Samuel 14:24

Now the Israelites were in distress that day, because Saul had bound the people under an oath, saying, "Cursed be anyone who eats food before evening comes, before I have avenged myself on my enemies!" So none of the troops tasted food.

(2) The rash vow: broken

1 Samuel 14:25-27

The entire army entered the woods, and there was honey on the ground.²⁶ When they went into the woods, they saw the honey oozing out; yet no one put his hand to his mouth, because they feared the oath.²⁷ But Jonathan had not heard that his father had bound the people with the oath, so he reached out the end of the staff that was in his hand and dipped it into the honeycomb. He raised his hand to his mouth, and his eyes brightened.

(3) The rash vow: questioned (Jonathan)

1 Samuel 14:29-30

Jonathan said, "My father has made trouble for the country. See how my eyes brightened when I tasted a little of this honey.³⁰ How much better it would have been if the men had eaten today some of the plunder they took from their enemies. Would not the slaughter of the Philistines have been even greater?"

(4) The rash vow: exposed

The exhausted Israelites barely had strength to pursue the retreating Philistines (recall Saul's command to not eat food for strength but vigorously pursue the enemy (14:24).

Later, when God does not answer the priest concerning further plundering upon the Philistines, Saul convenes his army to cast lots (Urim and Thummim) to expose the rebellious soldiers who broke the vow not to eat. Saul has wrongly confused the Lord's silence with the breaking of his kingly vow to not eat.

1 Samuel 14:38-39

Saul therefore said, "Come here, all you who are leaders of the army, and let us find out what sin has been committed today.³⁹ As surely as the LORD who rescues Israel lives, even if the guilt lies with my son Jonathan, he must die." But not one of them said a word.

(5) The rash vow: confessed

1 Samuel 14:43-45

Then Saul said to Jonathan, "Tell me what you have done." So Jonathan told him, "I tasted a little honey with the end of my staff. And now I must die!" ⁴⁴Saul said, "May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if you do not die, Jonathan." ⁴⁵But the men said to Saul, "Should Jonathan die—he who has brought about this great deliverance in Israel? Never! As surely as the LORD lives, not a hair of his head will fall to the ground, for he did this today with God's help." So the men rescued Jonathan, and he was not put to death.

Apparently the Israelite army had greater spiritual clarity than the king. The decline of Saul continues.

c. Partial obedience (herem ban) (1 Sam 15)

(1) The command

1 Samuel 15:1-3

Samuel said to Saul, "I am the one the LORD sent to anoint you king over his people Israel; so listen now to the message from the LORD. ²This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt. ³Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy all that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.'"

These verses set the stage for a stark failure of King Saul. From the passage, note the following key elements:

- (a) Samuel speaks to Saul representing the word (and absolute authority) of God to the king (1).
- (b) The Israelites are the instruments God will use to punish the Amalekites (2).

Earlier at Rephidim during the wilderness wanderings, the Amalekites had attacked the Israelites, but Israel had prevailed that day. The Lord instructed Moses to record the incident and further prophetically declared, "I will completely blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven" (Ex 17:14). This was a catastrophic pronouncement. That such a punishment was so severe points to the heinous nature of the Amalekites' sins. The command is reminiscent to that of Moses to the Israelites before entering the land of the wicked Canaanites.

Deuteronomy 7:1-6

When the LORD your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations—the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations larger and stronger than you—² and when the LORD your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy.³ Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons,⁴ for they will turn your children away from following me to serve other gods, and the LORD's anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you.⁵ This is what you are to do to them: Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones, cut down their Asherah poles and burn their idols in the fire.⁶ For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.

- (c) “Totally destroy” (3) refers to the “herem” ban placed by God upon certain nations (cf. Jericho and others in the Book of Joshua). “Herem” means to ban, deny, or **devote to destruction**. It was to place a corrupt, nefarious nation under God’s heavy hand of judgment. This severe kind of judgment was only at the directive command of God, not a prerogative of kings or prophets.

Insight: Divine Judgment

The agent of divine judgment can be impersonal (e.g. the Flood or the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah) or personal (as here—**Amalekites**), and in his sovereign purpose God often permits entire families or nations to be destroyed if their corporate representatives are willfully and incorrigibly wicked (cf. Josh 7:1; 10-13; 24-26).

Ronald Youngblood as quoted by Constable, *Notes on Samuel*, 64.
Bold word added for clarification.

(2) The battle

1 Samuel 15:7-9

Then Saul attacked the Amalekites all the way from Havilah to Shur, near the eastern border of Egypt.⁸ He took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and all his people he totally destroyed with the sword.⁹ But Saul and the army spared Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs—everything that was good. These they were unwilling to destroy completely, but everything that was despised and weak they totally destroyed.

- (a) The Israelites soundly defeated the Amalekites.
- (b) The “herem” was placed upon people and animals as the Lord the Sovereign Judge had commanded.

- (c) But Agag the king and choice sheep and cattle were spared, a direct violation of the Lord's clear "herem" ban. "Everything that was despised and weak they totally destroyed" (9). King Saul has ignored an important principle.

Partial obedience is disobedience.

- (3) The assessment

1 Samuel 15:10-11

Then the word of the LORD came to Samuel:

"I regret that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions." Samuel was angry, and he cried out to the LORD all that night.

- (4) The confrontation

Samuel set out to meet Saul. When Saul saw the prophet, he greeted him, "*The LORD bless you! I have carried out the LORD's instructions*" (15:13).

1 Samuel 15:14-15

But Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?" ¹⁵*Saul answered, "The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the LORD your God, but we totally destroyed the rest."*

Note Saul's lack of ability to take responsibility.

"The soldiers...spared the best of the sheep and cattle..."

Samuel will not hear Saul's excuses. He reiterates to the guilty king that Saul's task from the Lord was complete destruction ("herem"). When Saul excused himself by declaring his intent all along was to sacrifice the choice spoils to the Lord, Samuel replied.

1 Samuel 15:22-23

“Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. ²³For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king.”

(5) The admission

1 Samuel 15:24-26

Then Saul said to Samuel, “I have sinned. I violated the LORD’s command and your instructions. I was afraid of the men and so I gave in to them. ²⁵Now I beg you, forgive my sin and come back with me, so that I may worship the LORD.” ²⁶But Samuel said to him, “I will not go back with you. You have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you as king over Israel!”

King Saul continues his downward spiral.

d. Jealousy of David (1 Sam 18-19)

King Saul had been informed by the prophet Samuel that the Lord would take the kingship out of Saul's hands. He would have no successor that would fill his throne or continue his kingly legacy. Samuel gravely prophesied, *“The LORD has torn his kingdom from you today and has given it to one of your neighbors—to one better than you”* (1 Sam 15:28).

Such a declaration to a reigning king was devastating. It eventually placed Saul at odds with the next king, young David (anointed by Saul as the next theo-monarch—1 Sam 6:13).

Following are some of the “jealousy-encounters” between Saul and David.

- (1) Songs praising David as a mightier warrior than Saul

1 Samuel 18:7-9

As they danced, they sang: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands."

⁸ Saul was very angry; this refrain displeased him greatly. "They have credited David with tens of thousands," he thought, "but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?"⁹ And from that time on Saul kept a close eye on David.

- (2) Throwing a spear at David while he was playing a harp (1 Sam 18:10-11)

- (3) Sending David out to command soldiers

1 Samuel 18:12-16

Saul was afraid of David, because the LORD was with David but had departed from Saul. ¹³So he sent David away from him and gave him command over a thousand men, and David led the troops in their campaigns. ¹⁴In everything he did he had great success, because the LORD was with him. ¹⁵When Saul saw how successful he was, he was afraid of him. ¹⁶But all Israel and Judah loved David, because he led them in their campaigns.

- (4) Allowing his daughter Michal to wed David

1 Samuel 18:28-29

When Saul realized that the LORD was with David and that his daughter Michal loved David,²⁹ Saul became still more afraid of him, and he remained his enemy the rest of his days.

(5) Plotting to kill David

1 Samuel 19:1-3

Saul told his son Jonathan and all the attendants to kill David. But Jonathan had taken a great liking to David² and warned him, "My father Saul is looking for a chance to kill you. Be on your guard tomorrow morning; go into hiding and stay there.³ I will go out and stand with my father in the field where you are. I'll speak to him about you and will tell you what I find out."

(6) Searching for David to kill him

Until the end of his life, King Saul was fearful, angry, jealous, and opposed to the innocent David. Swindoll (quoted by Constable, "Notes," 84) suggests:

"The writer H. G. Wells says of one of his strange characters, Mr. Polly, 'He was not so much a human being as a civil war.' I think that is a perfect description of Saul. He became a living civil war, miserable, possessed of an evil spirit, mentally breaking, a suspicious, angry, jealous man. As a result, he struck out against the most trusted and trustworthy servant in his camp—David."

3. Final Failure

The rise and fall of Israel's first king came to a close. Two final inappropriate actions seal his failure and his life.

- a. Saul consults the witch (medium) of Endor (1 Sam 28).
- b. Saul takes his own life at the end of a military defeat (1 Sam 31).

VII. TAKEAWAYS

A. Life Perspective

The life of Saul is captured in three movements: early promise, middle decline, final failure. His life can be contrasted to that of the Apostle Paul: early passion (Judaism), defining conversion (Christ-follower), faithful conclusion. Paul's own personal epitaph highlights the fact of his strong finish.

2 Timothy 4:6-8

For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. ⁷I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

B. Personal Kingship

God alone is the Supreme Sovereign. Man was created to be His chosen administrators over the world God created.

Genesis 1:26-28

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." ²⁷So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. ²⁸God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

Neither individual men or Israel's kings were ever complete, independent sovereigns in their own rights. God alone is the king of creation, nations, and individuals. Israel's kings often forgot this perspective. Today's individuals ("mini-sovereigns") tend to forget it as well. We are not the captains of our souls nor the masters of our fate.

C. Life as a Race: the Challenge

Hebrews 12:1-3

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us,² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

It does not matter how one begins the race but how one finishes it.

D. Trust and Obey

1 Samuel 15:22-23

But Samuel replied: "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.²³ For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king."