

A NATION RULES - ISRAEL'S EARLY MONARCHY

Study 1

Samuel - The Last of the Judges

Read

Judges 21: 24-25; 1 Samuel 2-4

The period of Israel's history that we now study is very interesting. It begins with Israel at its lowest ebb under the judges. It rises through Saul and David's times to the zenith of the nation's power under Solomon. From being a disunited group of tribes the people of Israel were to take their place among the other nations, ruled by a king. Notice the final verses of the book of Judges. It tells us two things. First that each tribe had its separate inheritance in the land. Secondly we see that there was NO KING. This in itself was no loss as Israel was under the rule of God - THEOCRACY - make a note of this word. The sad feature of their condition is contained in the sentence, "**every one did what was right in his own eyes**". (verse 25) From this we learn that lawlessness abounded and God's will and guidance were disregarded. The land was in chaos and sin and idolatry were rife.

Before you read **1 Samuel** spend time if you can, reading through **Ruth**. It has to do with the times when the judges ruled or judged Israel. It is a wonderful story of a woman called Naomi, who returned to her native land after years of being away from God. Her daughter-in-law, Ruth, meets a godly man, Boaz. Eventually marrying him, she is brought into the royal line of Israel. It is through her generation that King David is born, **Ruth 4: 18-22**. This forms a vital link between **Judges** and **1 Samuel**.

The life of Samuel is very important at this stage of Israel's history. We have his birth, boyhood, ministry and death recorded for us in **1 Samuel**. He was the LAST OF THE JUDGES and the FIRST PROPHET of the monarchy.

Notice his BIRTH.

He was born in answer to prayer **chapter 1**. The name 'Samuel' means "**asked of the Lord**". Yet as soon as Hannah, his mother, received him she gave him back to the Lord. **Verses 27-28** are wonderful in this connection. Because the Lord had granted her prayer she "**lent**" her son, her firstborn, to the Lord for as long as he lived. What great faith Hannah had and we can admire her faithfulness as she gave back to the Lord what He had first given to her.

Notice Samuel's CALL.

Chapter 3 gives us one of the most wonderful children's stories in the Bible. It is probably one of the first Bible stories we ever knew. Yet there is something far more serious in it for us to learn. There were very few people in Israel who would listen to God's Word or even think of Him, **verse 1**. "**The Word of Lord was rare in those days, there was no widespread revelation**" **Chapter 2** shows how wicked were the sons of Eli. Everything they did was degraded, defiled and debased, and they, who should have

been the spiritual leaders of the people, "**made the Lord's people transgress**". (2: 24) Therefore God pronounced judgement upon the whole house of Eli, **2: 27-36**, and declares, "**I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind: . . . and he shall walk before my anointed for ever**". (2: 35) So it was that God began His work in the life of an unspoiled consecrated child. Given by his mother to the Lord, Samuel worked in the temple, and it was as he lay down to sleep that the Lord called. This was a new voice to Samuel; one that he had never heard before. Eventually under the guidance of Eli he responds "**Speak, for your servant hears**". (3: 10) The crisis in Samuel's life took place that night. From that time onward, God spoke to him and Samuel spoke for God. Notice **verse 19**, "**Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground**". Just think how important this was for the nation. Remember, if we want to speak for God, our lives must also be pure and we must be ready to listen to what He has to say to us in His Word.

The COURSE of Samuel's life was a troubled one.

He worked and spoke for God in a period of change. **Chapter 7: 15-17** gives a résumé of his movements. All the days of his life he judged Israel, and we notice that the people knew where to find him. We also see that he built an altar to the Lord. He was just the leader that Israel needed - a man in touch with God. If you study the Scriptures, you will find that time and time again, God always has someone to whom He can communicate His mind and will, in times of national and spiritual crisis. It would be good if God could use us in our own, very needy, days.

We end this study with considering the picture of CHAOS which **chapter 4** gives. It tells of the Philistine attack on Israel, and the panic and defeat that followed. The underlying cause of the trouble is not difficult to see. God was not given His right place in the hearts and lives of the people. Notice what the chapter says about the ARK OF THE COVENANT of the Lord. This piece of furniture from the Tabernacle (**see Exodus 25 - 27**), was Israel's most precious possession, the focal point of the Tabernacle. It contained a copy of the law given through Moses, and its lid was the mercy-seat; the symbol of the presence of God. But now the nation, whose HEARTS were away from God, wanted to use the Ark purely as a talisman; the ultimate protection against the Philistines. The result is total disaster; the army is defeated, and in **verse 11** we read, "**the Ark of God was captured**". It is in enemy hands! The news of this caused the death of Eli, the old priest and judge, under whom Samuel served. What a tragic end to his life!

Here in brief we have a picture of the CONDITIONS under which Samuel judged the people. There is no doubt that the demand was for a godly, spiritual leader who could gather up the scattered remnants of the worship and service of the nation. Through Samuel we learn again that God had His man in the right place at the right time.

Study 2

Samuel - The Prophet

Read

1 Samuel 7: 1-17

You will notice, if you read the Bible carefully, that critical conditions very often brought out the true quality of leadership in those chosen by God for His work. This was certainly so with Samuel and the chapter you have read makes it clear. Disobedience in the life of the nation had brought about a terrible distance between God and His people. The incident of the capture of the ARK by the Philistines seemed to emphasise this. The sign of God's presence was taken away. As Samuel viewed the lives of his people he was confronted by a picture of defilement, defeat and despair. For when God is left out of a nation's, or an individual's life, such conditions are bound to follow.

Let us look through the chapter together and especially notice how Samuel's fine stature as a PROPHET stands out. Because of God's judgement on them the Philistines had sent back the Ark as far as to Kirjath-jearim where it remained for twenty long years. This represented a sad period in the history of the nation, for it meant that there was no united worship of their God. Gradually a hunger for the Lord began to draw them towards Him again. **Verse 2** tells us that **"all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord."** There was REMORSE - they felt the emptiness of life without Him. If He is missing, life loses its meaning and power.

We can see too, how Samuel dealt with the situation. It is obvious that as a prophet he had God's interests uppermost in his mind. He called upon the people to RETURN to the Lord. (**verse 3**) Look at this verse carefully. His demand was for a complete return to the Lord. **"With all your hearts"** - this was essential. It is obvious also that other gods had entered into the nation's worship. **"Put away the foreign gods"** - these stood in the way of dedication and were a dishonour to the God of Israel. So commitment was all-important, **"prepare your hearts for the Lord and serve Him only"**. (**verse 3**)

In examining closely these words we see that Samuel was faithful as a prophet of the Lord. His words came direct from God Himself. For many years the voice of God had been silenced by the unfaithfulness of His servants. But here was a voice that spoke without fear and called the nation to REPENTANCE. How valuable was the work of this man. Yet the survival of Israel depended on their obedience to his word. If they repented, then the Lord would deliver them out of the hand of the Philistines. Victory could only come as they were right with God. We can learn a serious lesson for ourselves from this. Often in Christian experience the influence of wrong or worldly things spoils our enjoyment of the Lord and we become defeated Christians. It is at such times as this that we need to return to the Lord and repent. It may be that there are things in your life today that need to be put away so that you can be RIGHT with the Lord.

It is good to notice how this day the people of Israel were RESTORED to a right relationship with God, for **verse 4** tells us that they put away the evil gods. There was no hesitation in obeying and they served the Lord only. It would be good if you underlined in your Bible that word ONLY. If

the nation had kept up this way of life during future days, so much sadness and sorrow would have been avoided. So today, those Christians who give the Lord Jesus their ALL, have the greatest joy and blessing.

Let us close this lesson by looking further at Samuel's actions as a prophet of the Lord. He PRAYED for the people. This is vitally important to notice. **Verse 5** shows what a deep concern he had for them and **verse 8** tells us how much the people depended on his prayers. Samuel realised that the lines between God and His people had been broken because of sin. Prayer was a neglected exercise and power was therefore lost and impossible. So they prayed and fasted together and as Samuel offered the sacrifice. (**verse 9**) the Lord heard and answered by destroying the Philistines. Prayer therefore brought a new dimension of VICTORY into the life of Israel. What a faithful man Samuel was!

Here again is a lesson which we have noticed many times before. Without PRAYER we lose POWER. Sometimes the smallest of sins can overcome us because we are out of tune with God. Like Samuel, others pray for us and we owe so much to them for their prayers. We read that the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel, How much they owed to his loving prayers and careful concern. Once you begin to learn in your own life the secret of prayer, you will want to pray for others. They need YOUR PRAYERS.

We shall conclude with a look at **verse 12**. Samuel set up a stone of witness to the Lord that day. **"EBENEZER - Thus far the Lord has helped us."** Here we have the acknowledgement of God's help and blessing. Those who PRAY will soon learn how to PRAISE. Every life of prayer will soon find reasons in God's blessing for thanksgiving and praise!

Study 3

"Give us a King" - the Nation's Demand

Read

1 Samuel 8 - 12

We now come to study the beginning of the Monarchy in Israel. Under the judges, Israel was a fractured nation. You will find, as you study the book of Judges, that in all the recorded cases of action, only certain tribes are involved. There was no KING IN ISRAEL, no uniting force. The end of Samuel's life was a sad one. He was faithful to the last, a tremendous influence for God. Yet notice what it says about his sons. He made them judges, thinking no doubt that they would follow his example. This was not so and we see history repeating itself, for they turn out to be little better than the sons of Eli. (**1 Samuel 8: 3**)

Let us look at **1 Samuel 8: 4-5**. Here we find the REASON and REQUEST for Israel to be ruled by a King. The elders came to Samuel with their demands. It seems very clear that they were disillusioned by the behaviour of Samuel's sons. How sad that they had to remind the old prophet, that after a long life of service for God, his sons did not follow him. How often in the history of Israel we find a good father followed by a bad son! Samuel was no doubt deeply hurt but could say nothing in his sons' defence. The truth of their accusation provided the people with a ready-made excuse

to ask for a King, like their neighbours around. We see now a new era beginning in the life of Israel, but how sad it came in the way it did!

“Make for us a king to judge us like ALL THE NATIONS”. (verse 5) Here we get the heart of the matter. They wished to be like the other nations. Up until now, ideally, they were a THEOCRACY - God was their ruler and king. When Samuel lamented their demand before the Lord, God had to make clear for him that their act of REJECTION was not of him as a prophet, but of God himself. In **verse 8** we have the bitter complaint from the Lord because of the way in which they had forsaken Him during many years. This was a symptom of the attitude of Israel’s heart. They easily turned away from following God. Samuel warns them of the kind of life that would be theirs under a king. They had only to look at their neighbour states to see that having a king meant conscription, forced labour, taxation, and loss of personal liberty. But even this does not deter them. Nothing he said could turn them aside from their purpose. So we see at the end of **chapter 8** that their request was granted.

We can now look at the kind of man who became Israel’s first king. He came from the tribe of BENJAMIN - Saul the son of Kish. Physically he was splendid; head and shoulders higher than any man in Israel. **Chapter 9** makes much of the fact that his business was most unkingly when he was sought to be anointed. Yet God uses a search for lost donkeys, of all things, to bring Israel’s future king from Gibeah to Ramah, and the meeting with Samuel. All Israel knows the prophet but not, apparently, this young man. His mind is still taken up with the lost asses and kingship was the last matter he was considering. In his early days Saul was unassuming and humble. **Chapter 9: 21** gives us his reaction. It was a pity that this spirit did not go with him throughout his reign over Israel. He would have been a better king. Let us pause to reflect on this. God often seeks out people to do a job for Him when, like Saul, they are least aware of it. Saul could have gone on with the asses and refused the kingdom. Humbly, at first, he appreciated the honour. If God calls you to serve Him, make sure that nothing stands in the way. Humility and obedience make us effective servants of God. Ultimately this is where Saul failed!

Chapter 10 is about the anointing of Saul. It is an interesting chapter. It tells us how the spirit of the Lord came upon him and he became a different man with another heart. Thus God chooses Israel’s king; it is not left to the people. Although God was displeased with the nation for asking for a king, He gave to Saul a good start to his reign. Yet it has been said of Saul that he had a kingly body but an unkingly heart, and we shall see in a later study how sadly Saul failed in his kingship, to honour God and obey Him. He had a good BEGINNING but a very BAD END.

Read chapters 11 - 12; they will give you the atmosphere of the early days of the MONARCHY of Israel. For perhaps the first time since Joshua the nation is united; a good beginning to the new king’s reign. We are going to end this study by looking at **chapter 10: 17-27**. Samuel gathers together the people at MIZPEH. Here he does two things. He displays before them the MAN who was king. He presents to them the LORD’S ANOINTED. Notice how Samuel, with all his opposition to the plan in the first place, gives Saul his rightful place. **“Do you see him whom the Lord has chosen, that there is no one like him among**

all the people”. (verse 24) He calls for the admiration and loyalty of the nation. They shout **“Long live the king!”** He wanted them to serve the king. It was a great day in Israel’s history.

Samuel also writes in a book the CONSTITUTION of the kingdom. This was laid up before the Lord. It is interesting to notice this. They were still God’s people and it was His Kingdom. The king still owed his allegiance to the Lord and you will notice as you read Israel’s history, that when this was recognised by those who ruled, all went well for the nation. Those kings who disregarded this allegiance not only came to grief themselves, but they brought the nation to ruin with them.

Study 4

Saul - Chosen by the People



1 Samuel 12 - 13

We are going to look at some features of Saul’s reign in this study. Remember that it was the people’s choice to have a king, yet, under God’s permission, the kingdom was established, and the king was God’s **“anointed”**. This was why when David was being chased by Saul, and had the opportunity to kill him, he would not do so. (**1 Samuel 24**) He dare not lift his hand against the Lord’s anointed. He waited for God’s time, when the kingdom would be rightly established under David.

Samuel felt that he had personally been rejected to give place to the king. Look through **chapter 12;** it puts the crisis in the perspective of Israel’s history. As the old prophet gathers the people together he calls them to account. He challenges them concerning his work amongst them, **verse 3. “Witness against me before the Lord.”** There is something rather sad about this. The people assure him that he had only done well - he was without blame. They had to record his faithfulness, and he was much loved of the people. This is the value of true LEADERSHIP.

From **verses 6-12** Samuel goes back over some of the facts of history. He calls them to STAND STILL. He recalls the RIGHTEOUS ACTS of the Lord. Notice that however wrong the people had been down through the years, GOD WAS ALWAYS RIGHT. This is the importance of Samuel’s message. Their experience had been one sequence of SINNING - REPENTANCE - FORGIVENESS. Yet they had never learned the lessons that the Lord had wanted to teach them. Asking for a king, in Samuel’s reckoning, was just another act of irresponsibility. They said in defiance of Samuel’s advice, **“a king shall reign over us”, (verse 12)** yet God was their true king. The confrontation in this chapter ends with God manifesting His power at Samuel’s request. The people are brought to their knees and Samuel utters a solemn warning, **“Only fear the Lord and serve Him in truth with all your heart, for consider what great things He has done for you”, verse 24.** This is a lovely verse - take it to heart in your study of this lesson.

What kind of a king was Saul? Let us look at him as the first ruler over the monarchy of Israel. He was a man who BEGAN WELL. Israel was in the grip of the Philistines; a wild, cruel, destructive force who wanted to possess the

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whole of Israel's promised land. As a warrior Saul was mighty and of fine physique and he began to destroy the enemy forces. Notice in **chapter 13: 19-23** how desperate the condition of the nation was because of the Philistines. The enemy had so ordered the nation's affairs that weapons of war were almost extinct. They had no means of producing swords or spears, so were defenceless and unable to attack. How like Satan the Philistines were! He will steal the Christian's "**weapons**" and make it his business to leave us defenceless. The Bible is called the **SWORD OF THE SPIRIT, (Ephesians 6: 17)** and if Satan can make us neglect to read and study prayerfully the Word of God, he can accomplish in our lives just what the Philistines did in the life of Israel. Guard your Bible study - the devil knows its value!

Saul was HASTY and IMPATIENT in his actions. **Chapter 13** illustrates this. Although the matter seemed small, it was a test of his steadiness of character in obeying God. **Verses 2-14** record how Saul musters his troops and waits seven days for Samuel to come. The nation was in dire straits, with the overwhelming weight of Philistine power against them. They needed God's blessing and the assurance of His presence if they were to conquer. Without Samuel, the man of God, no sacrifice could be offered. Seven days went by during which time the army steadily dwindled and Saul lost his patience. He failed to see the seventh day out and did that which dishonoured God in offering a burnt sacrifice. As Samuel comes, notice his excuse in **verse 12**. Impatience and lack of spiritual awareness cause him to disobey, and his disobedience and arrogance in taking over the function of the priest/prophet, costs him his dynasty. This was serious, and indicated the kind of man Saul was at heart. He was not stable and settled in the commands of God. No king of Israel could be hasty with God's things.

So we see the first step to Saul's rejection. It teaches us that we cannot be careless with God's commands. Saul may have had a kingly head, but he had a most unkingly heart. It also teaches us, as Christians, the importance of "**waiting upon God.**" Of waiting God's time in directing and ordering the circumstances of everyday life. How often we are tempted to hurry things up by taking the law into our own hands as Saul did. How much better it would be for us to "**stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord.**" (**Exodus 14: 13**) Patience is a great Christian virtue.

Then, too, Saul was UNSYMPATHETIC and HARSH towards the people. Israel's people were loved by God. The whole idea of rule was built upon the character of Divine love. Notwithstanding all their failures, God's love did not change and the king should have reflected this attitude. If you read **chapter 14** carefully you will appreciate how erratic and even cruel Saul could be. His demand for abstinence from food caused great distress to the people, **verse 24**, and because of it, when the opportunity at last arose, they were unrestrained in their eating and sinned. We shall study in a later lesson the true nature of Saul's failure and rejection by God. We will also learn how David, after rejection by Saul, was elevated to the throne. We can conclude by again remembering the great possibilities of strength in Saul, which were defeated in himself by his disobedience and unkingly behaviour.

Study 1

THE LAST OF THE JUDGES

1. What sad feature characterised the times of the judges?
2. What is the significance of Hannah's role at this time?
3. What lesson can we learn from the call of Samuel?
4. What was always true of God in times of national and spiritual crisis? Give two examples.
5. What basic mistake did Israel make by taking the Ark into battle?

Study 2

SAMUEL - THE PROPHET

1. What conditions prevailed in Israel through their departure from God?
2. How did Samuel deal with this situation?
3. On what did Israel's survival depend, and why?
4. Why did Samuel pray for the nation and what happened as a result?
5. What is the importance of prayer in the life of a Christian?

Study 3

"GIVE US A KING" - THE NATION'S DEMAND

1. What was sad about the end of Samuel's life?
2. a) What reasons did the Israelites give for wanting a king?
b) What reason did God give?
3. What kind of man was Samuel?
4. What do you learn about Samuel, the man of God, from these chapters?
5. What will make us effective as God's servants?

Study 4

SAUL - CHOSEN BY THE PEOPLE

1. How did David prove his respect for the Lord's anointed?
2. What did the history of Israel, recalled by Samuel, show about their relationship with God?
3. What does the lack of weapons in the life of Israel illustrate about Christian living?
4. What lesson can we learn from Saul's hasty attitude to God's commands?
5. What is the most important lesson you have learned in our study of **1Samuel** so far?