

Modification to Monarchy: A King From Among Your Own – [1 & 2] Samuel

The Book of Samuel (1 and 2 Samuel to us) contains many favorite Bible stories: Samuel's birth and call, the loss and return of the Ark of the Covenant, the friendship of David and Jonathan, and the "boy" David defeating the giant Goliath. But most of these we first heard about out of context from their surroundings, seen as individual "snapshots without regard to the total landscape. We will seek to understand their larger significance.

"*The Record of Samuel the Seer*" is mentioned in 1 Chronicles 29:29. But the title "Samuel" is not entirely appropriate for these books, as they cover the history of Samuel, but also Saul and David as well. The traditional view (from the Jewish Talmud) that identifies Samuel as the author of these books is unlikely. Samuel's death is recorded in 1 Samuel, so it's almost impossible that he recorded 2 Samuel. In addition, the author's repeated use of the phrase "*to this day*" further suggests some chronological distance between the final author (or editor) and the subjects of his history. One hint might be that the author seems to "favor" David's kingship, and hopes to legitimize David's reign through these books.

Samuel relates the history of Israel as it moved from the rule of the judges to the rule of the kings. After Judges we needed a break. Through twelve judges, it was hard to keep the players straight without a scorecard. In Samuel there are three main characters: Samuel, Saul and David – though there are a number of lesser characters who impact the final outcomes.

The Barren Woman – 1 Samuel 1 - 2

The story begins with a woman who cannot have children, and whose husband has taken another wife – presumably because she is "barren." This is the same situation we have seen three other times in the story of God's promise fulfilled (Genesis 11:30; 25:21; 29:31). This woman, Hannah, calls to the Lord and God answers her call in the birth of her son, Samuel.

From her experience and prayer she writes a song in which she praises Yahweh as the one who

*Raises the poor from the dust
and lifts the needy from the ash heap;
He seats them with princes
and has them inherit a throne of honor. (1 Samuel 2:8).*

Yahweh is the unique Lord of Israel and has become Hannah's security. Yahweh is the rock of safety. "*There is no rock like our God*" (1 Samuel 2:2). Compare this song to the song of Mary's *Magnificat* in Luke 1:46-55.

Samuel – Prophet and Judge – 1 Samuel 3 – 7

Meanwhile back at the Tabernacle, where Samuel is dedicated and is being raised, things could not be worse. The current priest Eli and his sons have violated the rules of sacrifice to suit their own needs. They threaten violence against faithful worshippers and introduce Canaanite sexual abominations (1 Samuel 2:12-17, 22-25).

God's answer is to raise up a new leader, Samuel, whose progress is measured against the continual failings of Eli's sons (1 Samuel 2:11, 18-21, 26; 3:1-21). Samuel's call is not just a quaint children's story, but the beginning of a great career. Yahweh is calling Samuel to be a

prophet, and makes Israel realize that there is, again, a prophet in their midst (1 Samuel 3:19-21. Compare 3:1).

But Samuel is more than a prophet; he is the last of the judges. The capture of the Ark of the Covenant and its history with the Philistines shows that Yahweh can vindicate Himself without Israel. They need Yahweh, but Yahweh does not need them (1 Samuel 4 – 7).

But Samuel's most important task now begins. He is the transitional figure to take Israel into its monarchy. You might say that Samuel is God's kingmaker (1 Samuel 8 – 12). This is not a task that Samuel wants; he considers the people's desire for a king disrespectful to Yahweh, and so does God (1 Samuel 8:6-8; 12:13-19).

It seems the people want a king in order to have visible security (they want to walk by sight, not faith). They don't want more judges; they want a king who will fight their battles (1 Samuel 8:19-20). Their lack of faith will require higher taxes to support a national defense, a costly central government, and a draft to establish a standing army (1 Samuel 8:10-18).

Yahweh will give them their king, and that king will be Saul (1 Samuel 9:11). Saul seeks out the prophet to help him find his father's donkeys and ends up on the throne.

Saul as King

Like the judges before him, Saul is anointed by the prophet [privately] and then publicly presented to the people. Saul is gifted with the Holy Spirit for leadership (1 Samuel 11), and the people accept him as their king, appointed by Yahweh.

Saul is successful: he defeats Israel's enemies, freeing them from outside invaders (1 Samuel 14:47-48). Saul worships Yahweh, not idols (1 Samuel 14:35). Saul expels occult practices (mediums and fortune tellers) from Israel (1 Samuel 28:3). David praises him for bringing economic prosperity to Israel (2 Samuel 1:24). But the Bible is not as interested in Saul's general success as why he and his family are removed from power. So 1 Samuel 13-15 highlights two particular failures:

- Saul does not follow instructions to wait for Samuel to offer a pre-battle sacrifice (is this his sin, or is it that he usurped the role of the priesthood by offering the sacrifice himself?).
- Saul does not carry out God's command for *herem* (total and complete divine justice) against the Amalekites as commanded by Yahweh through the prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 15:1-32).

Saul's sin is not just these two instances of disobedience, but rather that Saul began to think that his being king gave him certain rights and privileges rather than serving at Yahweh's pleasure. Saul wanted to be absolute monarch and have his word be the final say rather than God.

But God's law was all the guidance and direction Israel needed. And Saul must trust that God speaks through the prophet(s). Their word is higher than the king's (you can see how this could be problematic). Moses had warned about rulers who set themselves up above the Law (Deuteronomy 17:18-20). So Torah is higher than the king and the prophet is higher than the king. Both are Yahweh's instruction.

The consequences of Saul's failures are: 1) from his first disobedience Saul lost the right to pass the throne on to his sons (1 Samuel 13:13-14); and 2) Saul's second failure loses his right to the throne (1 Samuel 15:26).

David and Goliath

Because Saul is no longer Yahweh's choice for king, the prophet now anoints David (1 Samuel 16:1-13), and even the Holy Spirit, given as a gift for Saul to rule, now leaves him and comes upon David (1 Samuel 16:13-14).

David begins to fulfill his mission as king, though this is not known publicly. Saul, no longer empowered by God, is not leading his nation into battles and expecting great victories from Yahweh. He is hiding in his tent and content to allow a "strapping youth" (not a "young boy") to answer the challenge of Goliath. The story of David rejecting Saul's armor is not because it was "too big," but because he is "*not used to wearing armor*" (1 Samuel 17:38-39).

David wins his first victory as king over Goliath, but no one else knows the significance of this story. As David continues to be successful, Saul sees the truth (1 Samuel 18:5-8), and when David doesn't die in battles against great odds, Saul tries to kill him directly. The rest of 1 Samuel has Saul chasing David around the wilderness of Judah. David learns the concept of security in the midst of vulnerability ("*I can lie down and sleep soundly because you, Lord, will keep me safe.*" Psalm 4:8). As Saul continues to become more unstable, he tries to fight against the word of judgment that comes through the prophet (1 Samuel 24:4-5; 26:8-11).

David as [the Model] King

After Saul's death, David is quickly anointed king over Judah. Saul's surviving sons reign over the rest of the tribe, but the real power behind them is Saul's general Abner. David mourns the deaths of Saul and Jonathan (2 Samuel 1). He commends those who bravely rescued Saul's body from further dishonor (2 Samuel 2:4-7). He punishes the murders of Saul's son who thought David would be pleased (2 Samuel 4). Abner comes to negotiate terms of peace and is killed. This is the one blot on David's otherwise spotless record (2 Samuel 3:12-37).

Some of David's own clan becomes part of his inner circle. David has three nephews through his sister Zeruah (2 Samuel 2:18). One of these is his nephew Joab, who becomes one of David's generals. Though loyal to David, dealing with Joab and his brother will always be a challenge for David (2 Samuel 3:39; 16:10; 19:22). Joab is the one who murdered Abner.

David:

- has victories over the Jebusites (who rule over the area which becomes Jerusalem, the royal city)
- defeats the powerful Philistines who try to stop this rising monarch (2 Samuel 5:6-25).
- establishes Jerusalem as the capital.
- wants to build a permanent Temple, but Yahweh refuses and instead makes a covenant with David (2 Samuel 7).
- has more military successes (2 Samuel 8:1-14; 10:1-19).
- Does "*what is just and right for all his people*" (2 Samuel 8:15).

David's "Shadow"

The inspired account of David's faithfulness and blessedness comes to a halt in 2 Samuel 11. This is the story of David and Bathsheba. As great as David's many accomplishments will be, his life will be defined by this failure. No details are spared in this account:

- David sees her bathing – from his vantage point in the palace, this could be considered an innocent accident. But then
- He inquires about her.
- Sends for her and
- Sleeps with her.

All of these could be considered the right of an absolute monarch. But David serves at Yahweh's pleasure. He has violated God's laws and committed adultery (Exodus 20: 14, 17; Deuteronomy 5:18, 21).

As if his sin was not bad enough, when David finds out that Bathsheba is pregnant, he attempts a "cover up":

- Plan #1 – Call Uriah, Bathsheba's husband and David's general, home from battle. He'll sleep with his wife and assume the baby's his. Uriah refuses out of a sense of duty (to David and his troops).
- Plan #2 – Get him drunk. His sense of duty will be lowered and he will go home. Failure again, as Uriah is more honorable drunk than David is sober.
- Plan #3 – Have him die in battle. David will then marry Bathsheba and no one will be the wiser. This plan works only because of Uriah's honor. He carries his own death warrant into battle and never "takes a peek." It is Joab that carries out the deed.

Again we see the raw power of the king whose word is Law. But David had gone against God's Law – a greater authority than the king. God sends his prophet Nathan to shame David. Not realizing he is speaking against himself David declares, "*The man who did this deserves to die!*" (2 Samuel 12:5). God does not kill David, but a sword will keep peace from his house. His sin was secret, but David's punishment will be public (2 Samuel 12:7-12).

The remaining chapters in Samuel (2 Samuel 13-20) are the sad history of a blessed rule gone bad. 2 Samuel 21 – 24 round out David's reign and include two psalms, both celebrating Yahweh as the Rock (much as Hannah's song which we began with). The second

psalm is David's last words (2 Samuel 23:1-7) and he focuses on two truths: the beauty of a righteous reign and the promise God to David for a continuing dynasty.

The Lessons of Kingship

Israel's king was a sub regent: a ruler "under God." Yahweh always was and always will be Israel's king (1 Samuel 12:12). This human ruler was designed as a permanent judge, and not a monarch like other kings. When the king acted like other kings that ruler was in trouble.

The king's task was to implement God's laws, not originate his own. Creativity was not a virtue when it was used to twist (or "spin") Torah. The king was to be a student of the Law, first and foremost. This is how the king would best know how to rule.

The king's sins were a sin against Yahweh.

The Davidic Covenant

2 Samuel 7 is the charter for the future kings of Israel. God's covenant with Abraham laid out God's plan to bless the whole world through Abraham. God's covenant with Moses formed the nation of Israel. God's covenant with David established his lineage as the rulers of Israel:

- David's name would be great (2 Samuel 7:9).
- There would be undisturbed peace for Israel and rest from enemies (7:10-11).
- David's line is established as rulers over God's kingdom forever (7:16; 22:51; Psalm 89:28-29).
- There would be a father-son relationship between Yahweh and the king (7:14; Psalm 2:7; 89:27).
- Sin would bring punishment (7:14) but not the removal of the lineage of kings, as it has with Saul (7:15; Psalm 89:30-33).

The New Testament Fulfillment

The New Testament quotes many passages from the Old Testament as the fulfillment of God's promises. Christ is predicted throughout Scripture (Luke 24:27), but he is not always *directly* predicted in all Scripture. Many of these passages had a primary meaning within their original context. But Paul dares to say, "*no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' [fulfilled] in Christ*" (2 Corinthians 1:30). Jesus fulfills God's promises to David:

- Jesus was born in the line of David (Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 2:4; Romans 1:3).
- Jesus rode into Jerusalem in the predicted manner, and accepted the praises of those who saw him as the son of David who would save them and introduce God's reign (Mark 11:2-10; cf. Psalm 118:25-26; Zechariah 9:9).
- On the cross Jesus experienced the same persecution from which David prayed to be delivered. Both David and Jesus seemed forsaken by God into enemy hands (Matthew 27:46; Psalm 22:1), were mocked for believing that God would deliver them (Matthew 27:43; Psalm 22:8), were physically pinned down by their enemies (Matthew 27:35; Psalm 22:16), had lots cast for their clothing (Matthew 27:35; Psalm 22:18); were thirsty and received sour wine to drink (Matthew 27:48; Psalm 22:15; 69:21), and were delivered (Matthew 28:6; Psalm 22:22-24). Could this have been by chance, or is God trying to tell us something?
- Jesus' resurrection from the dead fulfilled Psalm 2:7 – "*You are my Son; today I have become your Father*" (Acts 13:32-33). Though Jesus was always the Son of God in his divine nature; we are speaking here about his rule as David's heir. The resurrection is God's public announcement of his King (Messiah and Son).

- Jesus' ascension into heaven marked the beginning of the period predicted in Psalm 110:1, "*Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet*" (Acts 2:32-36). In the Resurrection and Ascension, God has exalted Jesus to the position of Lord and Christ (Messiah, "anointed King," Acts 2:36, 5:31; Hebrews 1:3-13).
- Jesus reign over the nations of the earth "*with an iron scepter*" (Psalm 2:9) is yet future. It will be implemented by his return to the earth (Revelation 19:15; 12:5).

The hope of Israel for a Davidic king is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. His rule will not only extend to Israel, but over "heaven and earth." Security is to be found in the King alone. "*Amen. Come Lord Jesus.*"

Discussion (Reflection) Questions

1. What was it about having God as their ruler that made Israel feel vulnerable? What advantages did having a king afford the people? How do "security" and "faith" relate in the Bible? What might this say to us today?
2. What is the story of David and Goliath really about? Is the passage teaching that belief will slay any "giant?" Can you think on examples where this might not be true?
3. Why is it important for the Biblical writer to show that the Word of God was higher than the king's word in Israel? How would you relate this to today?
4. What effect did David's sin with Bathsheba have on his family? How does the Bible frankness about failure affect you as a reader?
5. What promise kept David's line from losing the kingship of Israel? How is this promise ultimately fulfilled? How does God mark Jesus so that no one can miss the fact that he is God's promised king? How will those who are "wise" respond to the king?