

Dr. Elaine Phillips, Old Testament Literature,

Lecture 18, 1 Samuel, Eli and Saul

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We start.

Gracious God, our Heavenly Father, as we begin this second quad together, it's with gratitude that you have kept each one of us over this break. Father, thank you for your tender hands, your caring hands, your protective spirit for us.

Lord, you do pray for those who might not be feeling well that you will bring restoration quickly as we begin classes again together. Father, I just earnestly pray for each one that not only would you keep us well physically, but keep us well spiritually. Enfold us, draw our hearts to your heart.

Father, may we know you and love you and may your word be powerful and burning in our hearts. We ask for your presence as we study today. Help me to teach with clarity and help us all to be moved by your spirit and your word.

Help us to be good members of the communities. We love each other and encourage each other. We ask all these things in Christ's name with thanksgiving. Amen.

Well, it has been a week and a half. I've said that three times already, and so we've got to review a little bit, right? This is a question from two weeks ago.

What spiritual cycle characterized the period of the judges?

A. notice that nice alliterative thing, sin, sloth, sleaze, supplication, surrender. Maybe that's it.

B, apathy, attack, arrest, alienation.

C, apostasy, oppression, repentance, deliverance, repetition.

D, apostasy, heresy, apathy, enthusiasm, repetition.

Which one is it? C. Splendid.

There we go—one more review question. The incidents at the end of the book of Judges are interspersed with the saying, there was no king in Israel, and everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

It is time to build the temple and atone for wickedness.

C. the Ark of the Covenant will be lost forever.

D. the Lord helps those who help themselves.

E. none of the above.

Which one is that? Oh, wow, you're just great. All right.

Yes, it's A. We're moving on. Since you know judges so very well, do you know there's an exam again in here a week from Wednesday? I know. You can't get away from it, can you? We're going to make our transition to the monarchy today, which means we study the characters of Samuel and Saul.

Those are the big focuses. Of course, there are lots of other things that will happen as we work through this business of moving the Ark of the Covenant from Shiloh to the Philistines and then back again, and some other very important issues as well that we'll have to talk about. As usual, we need to do a little bit of background stuff.

So, let's see what we've got here in terms of the geopolitical situation. The problems I just reviewed for you, the apostasy, the oppression, and so forth. The apostasy problem continues.

The oppression problem continues. It was the Philistines in the period of Samson. It's going to be the Philistines as we get going in First Samuel and moving on to Saul as well.

So, kind of keep that in mind. The problems from the period of the judges persist into this time period and, as a matter of fact, well beyond that. Neighboring problems and neighboring peoples are really where the source of the problem.

One of the issues here is that the big superpowers, such as Egypt, such as people in Mesopotamia, are not quite so powerful in Israel at this point. And so, it's going to be the neighboring peoples. Philistines on the one hand, we're going to look at a map in a moment that has the five Philistine cities on it, and I'll clue you in right now, those are things you want to know on a map, all right, five Philistine cities.

The key here is, in terms of our political situation, when you read First Samuel 13, and I trust you've read it, or at least you will be doing that fairly soon, you find out that they control the production of iron. In fact, it says, the Israelites had to go down to the Philistines. They had their plow shares, their tools, and their mattocks sharpened.

They didn't have the iron production stuff themselves. If you want to think of the contemporary counterpart, because obviously, it's kind of hard for us to think of iron tools, we just don't. But if you want to think of the contemporary counterpart, just think of who has nuclear weapons and who doesn't, right? And those who do are the ones who have the upper hand.

And of course, now we're all concerned, lest Iran get production capabilities for arsenals, nuclear arsenals, it's that as opposed to use for peaceful purposes. The Israelites, if you read First Samuel 13 at the end of the chapter, had mattocks and plow shares and so forth. That was fine, that was fine.

Those are the peaceful purposes, if you will, for nuclear production, right? They didn't have swords and spears of iron. In fact, it says only Saul and Jonathan were armed in that way. That would be the counterpart to having a nuclear arsenal.

So, if you want to kind of keep that in mind, that might be helpful for you. At any rate, keep that in mind, and also keep in mind the second half of this sentence, which says they had almost overrun the land multiple times. I'm going to show you a map in a moment to show you how that works.

But kind of keep that in the back of your head. The Philistines are not sort of out there far away. They're really making their way right into the heartland of Israel, and that becomes terribly threatening.

Having said that, Saul gets his first combat practice, if you will, once he's king, not against the Philistines, that's going to come a little bit later on, but against the Ammonites. The Ammonites are people off to the east, across the Jordan Valley. Don't lose sight of our Amalekites.

We saw them as we were exiting Egypt. You'll remember the Amalekites attacked the Israelites. The Amalekites are semi-nomadic sorts, and so they're wandering around quite a bit.

They attacked the Israelites when they came out of Egypt. That is the background narrative for what we're going to see in 1 Samuel 15, in about 45 minutes or so. Moab and Edom were also there because of Saul's disobedience.

By the way, I hope you have in your mind a map right now, so that as I'm mentioning these, you can kind of locate them mentally in your map. And then finally, the third thing we want to note, the third thing, the final thing we want to note, it's a third color. Israelite settlements are pretty much in the hill country area.

They're not going to make their way out to the coastal plain an awful lot. That's controlled by the Philistines and other foreign Canaanite settlements still, primarily in the hill country.

Got that geopolitical thing in your minds? Pretty much, all right, let's have a look at a map. These are the five Philistine cities that you want to know. The blue ones are the ones on the coast, fitting with sea and all that sort of stuff.

So, you want to know Gaza right down here, Ashkelon there, Ashdod there. Ashkelon is only the one that's actually right on the coast itself. Gaza, tiniest bit inland.

Ashdod, tiniest bit inland. Basically, avoiding some of the worst of the coastal sands. But here they are, right next to the coast itself.

Inland, a little bit, we have Gath, right there, and Ekron, right here. Particularly in the narratives that we're talking about today, the three Philistine cities that we're going to zero in on are going to be, first of all, Ashdod, then Gath, and then Ekron. Notice how close they are, these two especially, to an area that's going to be a contested area, the Shephelah.

And finally, here's our hill country of Judah itself. So, just to repeat myself, should you happen to have a map on the next exam, these are some things you're going to want to know. I said a moment ago that the Philistines had actually penetrated into the Israelite territory, and I've tried to outline how that happens here.

And yes, they are color-coded. When you read 1 Samuel 13 and 14, this is where they are. It says, and we'll look at the narratives in a little bit, that the Philistines had an outpost at Mishmash, and the Israelites were encamped at Geba.

That's just about under the A and the M of Benjamin right there. Do you see how far they've come into Israelite territory? This is scary. Philistines are supposed to be out here.

Here are the cities we just pointed out: Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Gath, Ekron, and yet they've come all the way up here. If they have an outpost at Mishmash, that's very threatening. And it says, when you read 1 Samuel 13 and 14, the Philistines were sending from that outpost at Mishmash, raiding parties up in three different directions.

So, you can see why the Israelites are going to be just a little bit troubled by this kind of thing. That's invasion number one or penetration number one, and you want to keep that in mind. When you have that thing unfolding, this is really threatening to Israelites.

The second one is our famous David and Goliath story, the one that we all grew up on if we grew up in Sunday school. That's going to take place right about here. In fact, David is from Bethlehem.

David's brothers are out fighting. It's the Ela Valley, which is right about in here. The Philistines have made their way this far.

They're encamped right about there. The Israelites are encamped here, and the battle unfolds in that particular location. What are the Philistines trying to do? They're trying to make their way all the way up into the hill country, get a foothold up here.

They don't do it. David wins the battle. All right, and then finally, this takes us beyond where you read for today, but just in terms of how the Philistines were making life pretty miserable for the Israelites.

At the end of 1 Samuel, as a matter of fact, the place where Saul loses his life is going to be up here. The Philistines, again, not content with being where they settled themselves, march all the way up. They're encamped up in here.

In fact, what they have done, if you're looking very carefully, and if you've got anything in your mind that's putting this map together, they have cut Israel in half because you've got northern tribes up here, Naphtali, Asher, Zebulun, Issachar. The Philistines control this whole thing. They've got an encampment of Beit Shan.

They've cut the northern tribes off from the southern tribes. They're controlling our famous Jezreel Valley, which is, of course, a major battleground—making sense? If the map isn't making sense, say so.

I'll go over it again. Okay, let's carry on. Samuel is the last of the judges.

That's why I'm calling him a transition figure. He also functions as a priest because he's in the line of Levi, interestingly enough. So, judge, priest, and also a prophet, called a seer, one who sees.

We'll say more about that term when we start dealing with prophets themselves. When we look at Samuel's birth, which is, of course, a fairly decent place to start, you find out that he's another one of these children born from a barren mother, Hannah, and Peninah, two wives of a guy named Elkanah. And, of course, the most loved, or the more loved, is the one who is barren.

And yet, as she is in the presence of Eli, the high priest, he says, in response to her prayer, remember, he thinks she's drunk initially. But when she says, I'm praying earnestly, he says, may your prayer be granted. And then, of course, she does have a son.

She vows to dedicate him as a Nazirite. Notice what she says in chapter one, verse 11. O Lord Almighty, if you'll only look upon your servant's misery and remember me and not forget your servant, but give her a son.

I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head. Numbers chapter six, if you need to go back and refresh your memory of the Nazirite vow. But giving over to the Lord, for the Lord to be using him in a radical way, and then also the sign of that is no razor used on his head.

He's set aside as a Nazirite. Hannah's song, which she sings in joy in chapter two, once she gives the boy to the Lord, is a very interesting song. I just want to mention a couple of things about it, and then you can kind of go back and look at it yourselves a little bit more.

Notice how she emphasizes reversals in this song. Those who are full hire themselves out for food. Those who are hungry, hunger no more.

She who was barren has born seven children. She who has many sons pines away. Hannah is talking about all the things being totally turned upside down if you will.

The Lord brings death and makes alive. Keep that in mind as well. She's alluding to the fact that God is able to raise the dead.

The Lord brings death and makes alive. He brings down to the grave and raises up. Now, I won't say anything more about this.

Again, I encourage you to go back and read it. But what's really interesting is that most of the themes from this song get repeated by somebody else later on. Do you happen to know who it is? It's in the New Testament.

Who might it be? Who sings a song in the book of Luke? It's Mary, isn't it? And when you have Mary's song in Luke, a lot of the themes from Hannah's song are coming back again and again and again. This is just one indication of the fact that I would suggest to you that Mary probably knew her Bible fairly well. So, as she sings for joy, it's not just her own made-up song.

It's infused with the words of scripture. And she's echoing Hannah's song. Now, there's a lot more that I could say about that, but we need to keep moving along.

Probably another story that's the most familiar one for, yeah, I'm sorry. Go ahead. Yeah, the question is, is there a reason why Samuel was separated from his family? And Samson, as your other Nazirite, was not.

There's nothing in the Nazirite vow that says that the person has to be brought and left somewhere at the temple. That's just apparently Hannah's own choice, which she does. She says I'll give him to the Lord all the days of his life.

And she takes him there. And then, of course, as you know, God honors that in a remarkable way and gives her other children in addition to that. But no, that is not contingent on the Nazirite vow.

That just seems to be part of what's going on here. But he is in Samuel's, sorry, in Eli's care when he's at the temple. And I shouldn't say temple.

It's actually tabernacle, although this raises an interesting issue. The Hebrew word here in chapter three is the word for temple, interestingly enough. So whatever's at Shiloh, it's being called a heikal, which is the Hebrew word for temple.

It's not the word for tabernacle. Why? I don't know. Maybe it was more stationary establishment at that point, not entirely sure.

At any rate, as you know, Samuel's there. He's sleeping in the presence of the ark. I would suggest probably outside the actual tabernacle curtains themselves.

But he's clearly in close proximity to it. And the Lord calls him. And even though he thinks it's Eli to start with, Eli says, no.

Go back and say, Lord, here I am. Tell me what's going on. The message to Eli at that point is not a very good one.

And we're going to talk more about that in a moment. But his call is at the tabernacle. It's at Shiloh.

As I mentioned earlier, he then serves in three significant offices. Prophet, right? Chapter three, verse 20. All of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the Lord.

And it says the Lord continued to appear at Shiloh. There, he revealed himself to Samuel through his word. It's no accident that Samuel gets called a prophet and a seer, one who sees because the Lord is appearing to him.

It's a vision that he's having. We also have at the end of chapter seven, Samuel continued as a judge over all the days of his life. He always went back to Ramah where his home was.

And there he judged Israel and he built an altar there to the Lord. So again, these three offices that Samuel's fulfilling. Very major figure.

Now, we're going to move on to Eli and Eli's sons in a moment. Any questions on the Samuel establishment? We haven't left Samuel alone, but this is just the start of Samuel's ministry. Let's carry on.

Yes, Susanna. Yeah, good question. We have this barren woman motif that shows up on more than one occasion.

Sarah, Rebecca, actually for a while, and Rachel, certainly since the Rachel-Leah thing, and now this. Yes, I think there is a significance here, and that is that it's eminently clear, as God is giving these children, and in this case in response to a heartfelt prayer, it's God's purposes that are going to be done. So nobody can think, I just had a kid, that's fine, so forth and so on.

It's really clear that it's God who is affecting this and, therefore, is going to use this person. And in Samuel's case, Samuel cooperates, if you will, with his Nazirite vow. That's not always the case, as we went back to the Samson illustration.

But yeah, it's not just happenstance. The barren woman motif is an ongoing one. All the way up, by the way, into the book of Luke, where you have Elizabeth and Zechariah.

And she's been barren for all these years until finally, you have the angel of the Lord appearing to Zechariah in the temple there. So yeah, good question. Yes, a picture, I'm sorry, I forgot I was going to show you this.

This gives us a little bit of a sense of the area where Shiloh was and where the tabernacle would have been located. It is smack dab in the middle of the hill country. And in a moment, I'm going to show you a map that's going to make evident why that would be the case and why it would be so good to have the tabernacle there.

Hill country, isolated, rugged, and not easily accessible, is a great place to put your religious object, your Ark of the Covenant, and your Tabernacle because it's more protected. Now, if you're thinking, we're going to see what happens to this in a moment and why that's so significant. First of all, however, I'm going to back up Eli and his sons a little bit.

I just landed in chapter 7, and we need to go back. Chapter 2, verse 12. Eli's sons were wicked men.

They had no regard for the Lord. And it goes on to say that when the people brought sacrifices, what did these priests do? Well, they just stuck a spear into the boiling cauldron and picked out whatever meat they wanted. They also took the fat portions.

And of course, if you remember anything about our study of Leviticus, there were certain sacrifices that went to the priests, such as the sin and the guilt offerings. But of the fellowship offering, they only got part. They got the thigh and the breast.

And what was the fat to do? All the fat of the offering was given to the Lord. And yet, here they are abusing the sacred things. And of course, that's a horrendous desecration of God's sacrifices.

And God will hold them responsible. What else were they doing? Abuse of the sacrifices. What was the other major sanctuary abuse that Eli's sons were doing? Susanna.

Yeah, they were sleeping with the women who served at the entrance of the tent of the meeting place. And by the way, we've seen those women before. They showed up in Exodus, and it says they were there somehow being of service.

I don't know exactly how, but here you have Eli's son sleeping with them. So, it seems to be sinking to the level of the culture roundabout. Sacred prostitution kinds of things were going on in that wider cultural context.

So, both of those things are viewed as really utterly despicable, and God will punish them for it. As a matter of fact, in chapter 2, verse 27, a prophet, who is an unnamed prophet, it's just called a man of God here, comes to Eli and says, I'm going to take this away from you, this priesthood, from you and your family, because of the kinds of things that are going on. It seems like Eli pretty much ignores it.

That's the first warning to Eli, an unnamed prophet says it. Then Samuel's going to hear it as well. When God calls Samuel in the tabernacle, Samuel also gets this message.

And it's a very tragic message. Let me read it for you in chapter 3. I'm about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears it tingle. I will carry out everything I have spoken against Eli and his family from the beginning to the end.

He knew what his sons were doing. He knew it was contemptible, and he failed to restrain them. This lesson for future fathers or future parents, right? Eli knew what his sons were doing, and just let him do it.

And there were horrifying consequences as a result of that. Now, not all of us serve as high priests, but as I said, there are some lessons for parents in this as well. At any rate, we have to move on from that thing to our ark itself.

The ark, well, you know from all the study of the ark that we did in chapters 25 through 30 in Exodus and also 36 through 40, that this is indeed God's dwelling place with his people. In his mercy and in his condescension, he's dwelling in their midst. Separate from them, yes, but still dwelling, mishkan.

And so it's a symbol of his presence. Nevertheless, what do the Israelites do? What's the abuse of the ark? They're losing a battle, aren't they? I'm going to show you the map in a moment. They're losing a battle to the Philistines.

And so they take the ark with them, thinking that it's going to serve as sort of a magic box, if you will, and do the job that they can't do. And when they take it out there, the Philistines, interestingly, have a greater sense of what's going on. They're scared to death.

They know the ark has come. They fight like crazy because they know how powerful it is. And God allows that ark of the covenant to be captured.

Again, we'll look at the map in a moment. They took it out to battle and capture the Philistines. Let's look at a map and then talk about the return of the ark.

Here we go. Notice Shiloh, way up here. I showed you the picture; now I'll show you the map.

Hill Country of Ephraim is one of the most rugged areas. It's kind of like, well, I'm trying to think. Those of you from New Hampshire, Vermont.

It's probably not quite as high as the presidential range area, but you know, it's rugged like that. And you can just think, planting the ark of the covenant somewhere up on Mount Madison, for those of you who've climbed Mount Madison. That would be a good place for it to be.

Not everybody's going to get up there and grab the thing. But when the Israelites decide that they want this along with them for the battle at Ebenezer Aphek, because Aphek is where the Philistines are encamped. They are violating the sanctity of the ark, and they're also taking it into a really vulnerable place.

From here, protection, out to there. Philistines capture it. What happens when they go down to Ashdod? This is one of the better stories in 1 Samuel.

What happens? Well, first of all, yeah, go ahead. Yeah, it's parked in the temple of Dagon, isn't it? Who's kind of a fertility grain god. And what happens to Dagon? Yeah, he falls over.

And the second time he falls over, he all gets broken to pieces, and only his torso is left. What else happens? Something else happens that makes this group of Philistines pretty concerned to get rid of the ark as soon as they possibly can. Yes.

Yeah, they all start getting tumors. Now, one of the suggestions is that these tumors may have been associated with something like the bubonic plague. Because what do

they do when they send the ark back? First of all, it's going to go from Ashdod. They're vexed there and going to go into Gath. Notice it's heading sort of towards home.

Gath, then Ekron, but what do they send it with? Chelsea. Yeah, five gold rats and five tumors to represent the five Philistine cities. But the suggestion that that combination together recognizes the real problems.

Rats carry bubonic plague. And the bubonic plague we usually associate with the 1300s and 1400s. It was existent long before that, and it seems to have had its origins in the Middle East.

Some people think in the Arabian Peninsula. So not necessarily surprising that this might be what's happening to them. At any rate, they send it back.

What happens from Ekron? How does that ark get back? It's going, yes, with five gold tumors and five golden rats. There's something else that's important here. What do the Philistine diviners say? It's kind of fascinating that these Philistines, who are, well, pagans, if you will, know something about the Israelite religion.

They say to send back a guilt offering. And then what do they say about the mode of transport? Put the ark on a cart. Yeah, go ahead, Matt.

Yeah, two cows that are going to draw it back that have calves. And their idea, which is a very good one, is if the ark led by that pair of cows continues to go towards the Israelites, even though they've got calves back there in the barn, this is something that's come of the Lord. And that, indeed, is what happens.

So, it makes its way from Ekron, Philistine territory, to Beit Shemesh, where there are Israelites here. It's up a long valley. The Israelites can probably watch it coming.

The text says that the Philistines watched it going. They watched it all the way going to Israelite territory. Unfortunately, the Israelites don't have nearly the same kind of concern for the sanctity of the ark that they should have had.

Because a couple of them peek into it once it's at Beit Shemesh, and they, too, get stricken. And finally, they're terrified enough that they send it to a place called Kiriath Yeairim, back in the hill country again. This is still Shephelah area out here.

Back in the hill country, where we're told it stays for 20 years. It'll be David who will bring the ark actually up to Jerusalem. So the ark has had a fairly tumultuous journey, but God has preserved it through this time.

Just a quick look, we're actually standing on a high site in Israel called Azekah, which we're going to look at again in a moment when we talk about the David and Goliath, no, I'm sorry, that's on Wednesday. But we're standing on Azekah looking out towards Tel Gath, which is right here, looking towards the Philistine plain out there, and beyond that is the Mediterranean Sea, whoops. Another quick look, standing on Beit Shemesh, looking west.

Right around the corner here is Timna, and right around, the valley kind of curves around, and right out beyond that is Ekron. So they could stand and watch this thing as it made its way up the Zorek Valley. Well, that's our transition in terms of the foolish things that the Israelites do with their most sacred symbol of God's presence.

And now, to make matters even worse, they're going to sort of despise God's kingship over them and ask for a king themselves. Chapter 8, we're going to put together chapters 8 and 12. It says that when Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as judges.

They served at Beersheba, but in verse 3, they did not walk in his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain, and they accepted bribes and perverted justice. It's not really a great thing for judges, judges particularly who are supposed to be affecting the covenant because one of the strongest things that you read in the covenant is don't pervert justice for whatever reason.

So, Samuel's sons are indeed dishonest, and that's one of the reasons the people give for giving a king. However, they also state something else, chapter 8, verse 20. We want a king because then we're going to be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us, and to go out before us, and to fight our battles.

Okay, so their one reason sounds pretty good. Look, your sons, they're going to succeed you, and they're dishonest. We don't want to live under dishonest rulers.

Who does? But the other reason is, we really would like to be just like all these other nations, which is tempting, which is tempting. You want to have a whole structure, a whole system that looks like everybody else's.

And that seems to be the real reason they're asking for a king. The Lord is not happy with that. Samuel's not happy with that, but God basically says to give them what they want.

They'll know what a king is like. Samuel proceeds to tell them what a king is going to be like in terms of exacting tribute from them and taking their children as sons, slaves, soldiers, and so forth and so on.

Samuel does give them a challenge. This is chapter 12. And I'm not going to read through this whole thing, but I'm just going to highlight parts of it.

He goes back through history, which is what leaders are wont to do. Joshua did the same thing as Joshua was about to die. Joshua reviewed some covenant history.

Samuel does, too. He reminds the people of what God had done for them, what God did for them in the deliverance at Exodus.

What God has done for them repeatedly, in spite of their hard hearts, in spite of their apostasy, God repeatedly delivered them during the period of the judges. Samuel reminds him of that. Then he says something very interesting.

I'm going to start reading chapter 12, verse 16. Now, then, stand still and see this great thing the Lord is about to do before your eyes. Is it not wheat harvest now? I will, when's wheat harvest take place? Does anybody remember in terms, not for us, in terms of Israel? Say it again.

That's barley in Egypt. Good, nice try. Keep moving ahead a little bit.

It's going to be between Passover and Feast of Weeks, isn't it? Right, and probably more like the end of May, end of May. Now, think of that for a moment, and let's keep going. Is it not wheat harvest now? I will call upon the Lord to send thunder and rain.

Well, so, what's going to be such a sign wrapped up in thunder and rain? I mean, don't we get thunder and rain? Anytime there are clouds, so God produces a rainstorm. What's so big deal about that? Cassia? Yes, it has everything to do with the dry season. May is the dry season, right? Generally speaking, if it's a good year, it might rain a little bit in April.

But then it stops. Now I got to be honest, and full disclosure and all that sort of thing. When I got to Israel two years ago, I was supposed to be teaching, I drove up to Jerusalem in a downpour on May 12th.

But everybody was just shocked, just shocked. They were saying, I can't believe it, it's a Mabul, it's a Mabul. That's the Hebrew word for flood, right? So, normally, it doesn't do that.

This is a sign. So, Samuel has indeed called upon the Lord, and that it happens. Verse 18, Samuel called upon the Lord that same day.

The Lord sent thunder and rain, and all the people stood in awe of the Lord and of Samuel. So, Samuel is attesting to the folly of their asking for a king. And yet, here's what's interesting.

It's a foolish thing to do. He's told them that. But notice what he goes on to say.

And this, by the way, would be a great sermon outline at some point. Starting at verse 21, you have done all this evil, Samuel says. Yet don't turn away from the Lord, serve him with all your heart.

They're not beyond recall. It's a foolish thing they're asking for, but they're not beyond recall, and Samuel knows that. Don't turn away after useless idols.

They can do you no good, nor can they rescue you. They're useless. For the sake of his great name, the Lord will not reject his people.

The Lord is pleased to make you his own. You're way out on the leash, he's saying, but God has still got you on that leash. And here's Samuel's last thing here.

As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by failing to pray for you, all right? Tremendous lesson. Most of us might be inclined to just say, let them suffer. They heard they knew it was right, Samuel says.

Far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by failing to pray for you, and it's a call to prayer. Well, that leads us to our king, and he's indeed a tragic king. Those of you who like to do reading outside of the Old Testament have heard me mention probably Elie Wiesel before.

Some of you have read Knight, probably by Elie Wiesel. Anything else? Katie? Knight, Dawn, and Day, he's got a trilogy, actually, yeah, yeah. Well, he's also written a lot of other very interesting books, and one of them is entitled Five Biblical Portraits.

Five Biblical Portraits, in which he takes five characters from the Hebrew Bible and not only explores the Bible material on it but also all the rabbinic stuff that is developed around these characters. And as a good psychologist, he kind of weaves it all together. Saul is one of the people he does.

Do Jeremiah and Jonah and a couple of others as well? But Saul is just remarkable in what he does with Saul—the tragic king.

Why is he tragic? What's the tragedy of Saul's kingship? Chelsea? Yes, even though God has clearly chosen him, and we're going to watch how that works in a moment. Saul very intentionally turns away and gives up all this stuff, probably for his own self-aggrandizement, as we'll see. Well, that brings us to another question.

Why did God choose Saul? I mean, don't we know from Genesis 49 that it's going to be the tribe of Judah that's going to have the king coming from it? Why did God choose Saul? Does anybody want to guess? Go ahead, Matt. Okay, your answer is he's what the people wanted. Why was he what the people wanted, do you think? He looked like a king, in what way? Did you say it and I just didn't hear you? Well, he was certainly taller.

It says he was a head taller than everybody else, so he's going to have the stature in order to do this. So, he'd look like a king, that's true. So, want to push it a little further? And I'm not sure, by the way, that we can necessarily say that he's what all the people wanted.

And the reason I say that is because when he's chosen as king by Lot, as we're going to see in chapter 10, there's a bunch of folks that are sort of mad at this. They're grumbling. They're distressed until he wins his first battle against the Ammonites.

But you're right, he's got the kingly stature. Probably good looking. In other words, all those superficial qualities that people might want.

Anything else? Becca. Yeah, what tribe is he from? Anybody, what tribe is he from, Sarah? Benjamin, which is a small tribe, isn't it? Although actually, this whole idea of I'm from the least tribe and the smallest clan and all that is something that Gideon said, too, back in the Book of Judges. It might just be a kind of a self-deprecating thing because Gideon's from Manasseh, which is a pretty big tribe.

But anyway, he does say that. He's from the tribe of Benjamin. And you're on to something.

What about the tribe of Benjamin? I know we went through this way too fast, and it was a week and a half ago. But what happened at the end of the Book of Judges? Sarah. The tribe of Gideon they don't really feel that way.

And why are they feeling that way? In other words, what was our incident? Actually, there were multiple incidents, all wound together in an ugly morass at the end of the book of Judges, which may mean that Benjamin, as a tribe, needs a little bit of elevation. Trevor. I'm not sure, but was the area that Levi's concubine was building cut off, was that the area of the concubine? Yep. That whole business about the Leviite's concubine and what happened to her was in the tribe of Benjamin.

Gibeah of Benjamin, nasty, nasty events that take place. And so, then what happens? The tribe of Benjamin just about gets wiped out, doesn't it, with the warfare. And then what happens? Well, they have to find wives for them.

The tribe of Benjamin is really in the dregs at this point. And so, in some ways, having their first king from Benjamin may well be, I'm not putting motives in God's mind, but I'm just trying to think this through a little bit, may well be God's gracious, merciful reinstatement of the tribe of Benjamin. The first king comes from that tribe that had been so, so denigrated, not just denigrated but had done all these horrible things.

Just as, interestingly enough, Korah, remember Korah in Numbers 16 and that terrible disobedience and the men of Korah get wiped out? Samuel is in the line of Korah. The line of Korah continues as people sing in the Tabernacle. So, you know, you get the idea that God is in the business of taking people who are even in their own minds, perhaps, too abased to go on and raising them back up again.

I would suggest that's what's happening with the tribe of Benjamin and Saul becoming the first king. Likewise, to pick up on what Matt has said, this is what the people want. They want someone who can fight.

Saul is big, a commanding presence, and he fights for them. And he wins a major battle right away against the Ammonites. So that's part of the issue as well, I would suggest.

We do have a very interesting story. Chapter 9, first of all, Saul's out looking for donkeys. Did you ever see a little bit of an irony in that? He's out looking for lost donkeys, and he finds a kingship instead.

That's quite an interesting thing. In the meantime, the donkeys do get found. But notice that there are two confirmations of God's choice of him as king.

First of all, it's Samuel. You remember Saul and his servant are going to Samuel because they want to know where to find the lost donkeys. But in the meantime, God has appeared to Samuel and said, there's going to be a man show up tomorrow, and I want you to anoint him as king.

It's a private, private ceremony: chapter 10, verse 1. Chapter 9 is about the donkeys. Chapter 10, verse 1. Samuel took the flask of oil and poured it on Saul's head and kissed him, and he said, has not the Lord anointed you leader over his inheritance? And then he gives him three signs, three signs that he's indeed going to be king.

He's going to meet some people, et cetera, et cetera. One of the most interesting ones is, and I've made a note of it up here, starting at verse 5. As you approach town, you'll meet a procession of prophets coming down from the high places. They will be prophesying.

Verse 6, the spirit of the Lord will come upon you in power. It's a Hebrew word that just means to completely clothe and overwhelm, all right? Come upon you in power. You will prophesy with them, and you will be changed into a different person.

You will be changed into a different person. Keep that verse in mind. The spirit of the Lord will come upon you in power.

You're going to prophesy. You'll be changed into a different person. And then, lo and behold, that does indeed happen.

Verse 9, as Saul turned to leave Samuel, God changed Saul's heart. Now, reading between the lines here, you kind of get the sense that Saul was not a kingly type of person. Yes, he's big.

Yes, he looks impressive. But what happens when they do the public confirmation and they find out by lot that this is supposed to be the king? Where's Saul? Is he clamoring to be king? He's hiding in the baggage. He's hiding.

Even though Samuel has already anointed him, there have been three signs to demonstrate that he's God's choice. He's been prophesying, which is fairly remarkable for him. In fact, it causes people to say, oh, my goodness, is Saul really among the prophets? They knew him well enough to know that he was not that kind of person.

God changes his heart. And as long as the spirit of the Lord is on Saul, Saul will do these magnificent things. But this is a special empowerment.

I wouldn't say that it's the indwelling spirit, and there are my reasons for saying that. I'll make clear, Lord willing, on Wednesday. This is God's special empowerment by his spirit to accomplish these things that God wants accomplished.

And it took really a dramatic change in Saul that he becomes someone that he just didn't seem to be before. At any rate, he does have some initial success. Chapter 11 talks about his fight against the Ammonites.

There's an interesting motif in this chapter that's very similar to something we saw with the Levite and his concubine. Do you remember that gory message that the Levites sent around? Chop the concubine up into 12 pieces and send it to all the tribes. Did you notice Saul does the same thing? Verse 7, this is after the Ammonites are striking. He took a pair of oxen, cut them in 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.

It is a very interesting system for conveying messages. It was effective. The people showed up.

Well, now we're going to take a little break and look at another picture, and there's a reason for looking at this that will become evident once we move into the story of David, sorry, not David, Jonathan, and his armor bearer. A little geography. What do you see here? Well, you see a little village right here.

That happens to be the modern-day village of Michmash, which preserves the name Michmash, which if you've read the text, you know is one of the very major places where the Philistines had their outpost, right up in the hill country. It also talks about a pass at Michmash. In fact, let me read it for you.

A detachment of Philistines had gone out to the pass at Michmash. That's chapter 13, verse 23. Then, it goes on to the rest of the story.

Here's the pass. You see, you've got a fairly steep valley, or, sorry, deep valley, that's coming all the way up from down there around the Jordan Valley. This is kind of hard to climb down into and climb back out of.

It may not look like it to you, but believe me, it is. It's not something that you'd go down and up easily. However, at a very critical point between Michmash here and Geba that's over there is this little bit of land that goes across.

It becomes a major route for people to travel along. The Philistines want to control that for all the obvious reasons because that's how you get from this side of that deep valley to this side of that deep valley. Here it becomes deep again.

Here's our pass at Michmash. This is not the only place in Scripture that shows up, by the way. It shows up other places.

Isaiah chapter 10 is a major example. This is where Jonathan and his armor-bearer story shows up because they are going to climb up some steep cliffs. You can just see a little bit of an edge of it right there and overtake an encampment, an outpost of the Philistines' armies at that point.

Following that, the Israelites have a dramatic battle. I've just given you a little bit of geographical background to this story. Go back and read the story.

We're going to look at it in the couple minutes we've got left in a slightly different context because we see the Jonathan story, which is a remarkable demonstration of faith and trust in God. It's remarkable. Read it if you haven't read it.

That's in a bigger context of Saul and Saul's character flaws and the fact that after that event with Jonathan, Jonathan almost loses his life because of a rash vow that Saul has made. At any rate, Saul ends up being impatient. We'll look at the story in a moment.

He ends up being rash. Of course, he's classically disobedient. I would add on to that, although I haven't listed it up here, he's suffering from a pretty severe case of something that all of us suffer from, and that is pride, self-exaltation.

There'll be a couple of points where Saul is quite intent on making sure that people see him as a major figure. He's going to build a monument to himself. He's going to make sure in chapter 15 that Samuel comes back with him so the people don't think ill of him.

We're sometimes busy doing those things too, building monuments to ourselves, maybe not of stone, but we do this. And we're certainly way too often concerned about what people think about us when perhaps more important is what the Lord thinks about us. Those were Saul's problems, clearly Saul's problems.

At any rate, the first one says he's offering sacrifices at Gilgal. Samuel had said to wait seven days. In fact, he went all the way back to Chapter 10 and said, once you get to Gilgal, and that's going to be a little way down the pike, but he says, once you get to Gilgal, you wait seven days.

However, the Philistines, at this point in time, are massing their forces at Geba and Michmash. Remember the map. Remember the map.

This is the first place where they are right in the heartland of Israel. Geba and Michmash are in the heartland of Israel. Where's Gilgal? Does anybody remember where Gilgal is? This will give us a little bit more of a sense of what's going on here.

It's down in the Jordan Valley. The Philistines are so threatening up in the hill country, Geba, Michmash, that whole area around there, they're controlling this plateau area, central Benjamin Plateau. The Israelites have gone back down to the Jordan Valley.

That's how bad things are. And then they're waiting for Samuel to come. Samuel doesn't come.

What does Saul do? Well, he waits till the last minute, but you can understand why he would get a little nervous, for all the reasons I've just said. And he goes ahead, unfortunately, and offers sacrifices. Samuel immediately shows up at that point, and he says, You've not kept the command of the Lord.

If you had, you would have established your kingdom. Verse 14, I'm in verse chapter 13, Now your kingdom will not endure, for the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart.

And, of course, we know that to be David. The Lord has sought him out. He's appointed him as leader of his people because you have not kept the Lord's command.

Just as there were two confirmations of Saul's becoming king, so there are going to be two confirmations of Saul's losing the kingship. This is the first one. But Saul will do something else.

In the meantime, however, we do have the incident that I just alluded to with Jonathan. Jonathan doesn't know it, but Saul has bound the entire army under oath not to eat anything. And, of course, after this marvelous victory that Jonathan and his armor-bearer, and then the Israelites joining them, have, Jonathan, not knowing the oath, eats some honey.

When God no longer answers Saul, as Saul is seeking God's advice on this, Saul knows that something's gone awry. They determine that, indeed, it's Saul's family, and it turns out to be Jonathan, and Saul is ready to kill Jonathan because of this vow. And, fortunately, the men of the army intercede.

Our last one is where we really want to spend the last couple minutes that we have here. This is where we have the second confirmation that Saul is going to lose the kingship. And we need to actually take just a little bit of time, two whole minutes here, in chapter 15 of 1 Samuel.

Verse 2. This 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. Go attack them. Totally destroy everything that belongs to them.

Don't spare them. Put everything and everyone to death. Why did God command that? In other words, what's our reason? What did Deuteronomy 25 tell us? I know that's an unfair question.

When the battle was going on between the Amalekites and the Israelites, as the Israelites had just come out of Egypt, remember, they were a ragtag bunch of people. They didn't have armed forces necessarily arranged yet. It says in Deuteronomy 25 that the Amalekites waylaid and picked off the weak and vulnerable people in the rear.

And that was heinous in God's sight. And so, therefore, in Exodus 17, he says, you are to wipe them out of existence. May their memory be erased.

And at this point in time, Saul's the one who's been called to actually do that and effect it. Saul disobeys. Interestingly enough, verse 12 says early in the morning, Samuel got up and went to meet Saul, but he was told Saul's gone to Carmel.

There he set up a monument in his own honor. The thing I was just telling you about. Saul then says when Samuel confronts him, in verse 20, I did obey the Lord.

I went on the mission he assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites. The soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder.

The best was devoted to the Lord in order to sacrifice them. Now, you know, that's a bit of a cover-up because probably they were going to keep them for themselves, but now that he's been caught, he says, oh, but I was going to sacrifice them. Of course, in that context, Samuel says the following.

Does the Lord really delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obedience? To obey is better than sacrifice. To heed is better than the fat of rams. Rebellion is like the sin of divination.

Arrogance is like the evil of idolatry. You've rejected the word of the Lord. He's rejected you as king.

And that's our second confirmation that Saul has lost the kingship, and it's because of outright rebellious disobedience. God takes it away from him. Samuel says I'm not going back with you.

Saul says, oh, please, do I want the people to think well of me? So, Samuel does, but then he calls Agag into his presence, and it says he cut Agag up in pieces. Your NIV is far too soft. It says, put Agag to death.

The Hebrew word is cut him in pieces. Take care of the king, Agag. Now, we're going to see the name Agag again, but it's a way down the pike, a couple of months, as a matter of fact.

We need to stop with that. I think that's the end of our Saul material. We'll see the demise of Saul next time and the rise of David.

In the meantime, have a splendid day.