

Dr. Elaine Phillips, OT History, Lit. and Theology, Lecture 16

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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 hand, your caring hand, and your protective spirit for us. Lord, we do pray for those who might not be feeling well that you would bring restoration quickly as we begin classes 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 as we love each other and encourage each other. We ask all these things in Christ's name with thanksgiving. Amen.

Well you know 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? Notice that nice alliterative thing.

- A. Sin, sloth, 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 incidences at the end of the book of Judges are interspersed with the saying,

- A. There was no king in Israel and everyone did what was right in his own eyes.
- B. 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, yes it's A. We're moving on since

you know Judges so very well. Do you know there is an exam in here again a week from Judges? I know, you can't get away from it can you?

We're going to make our transition to the period of the monarchy today which means we study the characters of Samuel and Saul. Those are the big focus but of course there will be a lot of other things going on as we work through this business of moving with the Ark of the Covenant from Shiloh out to the Philistines and then back again and some other really important issues that we'll have talk about. We need to do a little bit in terms of background survey as usual. So let's see what we've got here in terms of the geopolitical situation. The problems I've just reviewed for you, the apostasy, the oppression and so forth. The apostasy problem continues, and 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 1 Samuel and moving on to Saul as well. So keep that in mind that the problems of the period of the Judges persist into this time period and as a matter of fact well beyond that.

Neighboring problems, neighboring peoples are really where the source of the problem is. One of the issues here is that the big super powers 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, and 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'll want to know on a map. The key here is in terms of our political situation when you read 1 Samuel 13 and I trust you've read it or at least you will be doing that fairly soon you'll find out that they control the production of iron. In fact, it says that the Israelites had to go down to the Philistines to get have their plowshares and their tools and their mattocks sharpened. They didn't have the means of iron production themselves. You know if you want to think of the contemporary counterpart because, obviously, it's kind of hard for us to think of iron for tools because we don't use it, but if you want to think of the contemporary counterpart just think; 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 less Iran get production capabilities for a nuclear

arsenals, you know they are developing them for war as opposed to use for peaceful purposes. The Israelites if you read 1 Samuel 14 at the end of the chapter had mattocks and plowshares and so forth, 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 the nuclear arsenal. So if you want to keep that in mind, and that might be helpful for you. At any rate keep will 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 are 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 and they attacked the Israelites as they are coming out of Egypt and that is the background narrative for what we're going to see in 1 Samuel 15 in about 45 minutes or so. They are the cause of Saul's disobedience, Moab and Edom are also there. 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, the final thing we want to note, Israelite settlements are pretty much in the hill country area. They are not going to make their way out into the coastal plain a lot. That's controlled by the Philistines and other foreign Canaanites settlements still; so they're primarily in the hill country.

Got that geopolitical thing in your mind? Pretty much? Alright, let's look at a map. These are the five Philistine cities that you want to know. The blue ones are the ones on the coast, you know fitting with sea and all that coastal advantages. So you want to know, Gaza right down here, Ashkelon there, Ashdod there. Ashkelon is only the one that

actually right on the coast itself. Gaza is the tiniest bit inland, and Ashdod, the tinniest bit inland, basically avoiding some of the worst 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 were talking about today, the three Philistine cities that we're going to zero in on going to be, first of all Ashdod and then Gath and then Ekron. Notice how close they are? These two especially to an area that's going to be a contested area that Shephelah. 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.

Alright, I said a moment ago that the Philistines had actually penetrated into the Israelite territory and I tried to outline how that happens here. Yes, they are color coded. When you read 1 Samuel 13-14 this is where they are. It says, and we're going to look at the narratives in a little bit, it says that the Philistines had an outpost at Michmash. 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. The Philistines are supposed to be out here, here are the cities we just pointed out, Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Gath and Ekron. And yet they've come all the way up into here. If they have an outpost a Michmash, that's very threatening. And it says when you read 1 Samuel 13-14, the Philistines were sending from that outpost at Michmash, 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 we have that thing unfolding, you know this is really threatening to the 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 in the Elah Valley which is right about in here. The Philistines have made their way in this far. They're encamped right about here, 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 to get a foothold up here. They don't do it. David wins the battle.

Alright 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, marched 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 and Issachar. The Philistines control this whole thing. They've got an encampment at Bethshan; they've cut the northern tribes off from the southern tribes, they're controlling our famous Jezreel Valley, which is of course a major battle ground. 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, that is called a seer, one who sees. I'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 Peninnah, two wives of a guy named Elkanah. And of course, the more loved one 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 is 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 Nazarite. Notice what she says in 1 Samuel 1:11 "O Lord Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then 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 6 if you need to go back and refresh your memory on the Nazarite vow, the 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 is to be used on his head. He's set aside as a Nazarite.

Hannah's song, which she sings in joy in chapter 2 once she gives the boy to the Lord, is a very interesting song. I just want to mention a couple things about it and then you can go back and look at it yourselves a little bit more. Notice how she emphasizes reversals in this song, "Those who were full hire themselves out for food, those who were hungry hunger no more, she who was barren has borne seven children, she who has many sons, pines away." Hannah is talking about all of 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 any more about this. Again I encourage you to go back and read it.

Now 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 an indication of the fact I would suggest to you that Mary probably knew her Bible very well. So as she sang this for joy it's not just her own made up song, it's infused with the words of Scripture, she's echoing Hannah's song. And there is a lot I could say about that but we need to keep moving on.

The question is, "Is there a reason why Samuel was separate from his family and Samson, as your other Nazarite, was not?" There is nothing in the Nazarite 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 when she says I'll give him to the Lord all the days of his life. She takes him there, and 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 Nazarite vow that's just seems to be part of what is going on here.

He is 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 3 is

the word for “temple” interestingly enough. So whatever is at Shiloh its being called the Hebrew word for “temple,” it’s not the word for “tabernacle.” Why? I don’t know. Maybe it was a more stationery establishment at that point, I’m 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. 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 in the Tabernacle. It’s at Shiloh and as I mentioned earlier he then serves as three significant offices, prophet, right? 1 Samuel 3:20 “And all 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 and 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 7, 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 are three offices that Samuel’s fulfilled. He’s a very major figure.

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

Yes? [Student Speaks] Yeah, good question. We have this barren woman motif that shows up on more than one occasion, Sarah, Rebekah 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 in this case in response to a heartfelt prayer. It’s God’s purposes that are going to be done so you know nobody can think, “Oh 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 this Nazarite vow, but that's not always the case as we went back to the Samson illustration. But yes, it's not just happenstance the barren woman motif is an ongoing one all the way up 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 at the temple. So, that was a good question.

Ah yes a picture I'm sorry I forgot I was going to show you this. This gives us a little bit of a sense in terms 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 it evident why that would be the case and why it would be so good to have the tabernacle there. Hill country is isolated, rugged, not easily accessible, great place to put your religious object, your Ark of the Covenant and 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, Eli and his sons, I'm going to back up a little bit, I just landed in chapter 7 and we need to go back. 1 Samuel 2:12, "Eli's sons were wicked men; they had no regard for the Lord." It goes on to say, 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 and they took out the fat portions as well. Of course, if you remember anything about our study of Leviticus, there were certain offerings that went to the priests, the sin and 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 to be given to the Lord. 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 else was the major sanctuary abuse that Eli's sons were doing? [Student speaks] Yeah they were sleeping with the women who served at the entrance to 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, we don't know exactly how. But here you have Eli's

sons 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 utterly despicable and God will punish them for it as a matter of fact.

In 1 Samuel 2:27 a prophet who is an unnamed prophet it's just called a "man of God" 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 is 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 "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears of it tingle. At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family, from beginning to end." He knew what his sons were doing, he knew it was contemptible, and he failed to restrain them; a lesson for future fathers, or for future parents. Eli knew what his sons were doing and he just let them 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 lapse to our ark itself. The ark, you know, from all the study of the ark that we did in Exodus 25-30 and also 36-40, that this is indeed God's dwelling place with his people. In his mercy and in his condescension he's dwelling in their midst. Separately from them, yes, but still dwelling. So it's a symbol of his presence. Nevertheless what did the Israelites do? What's the abuse of the Ark? They're losing a battle aren't they? I'm going to show you a map in the moment. They're losing a battle to the Philistines and so they're going to 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 because 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 that map in a moment.

They took it out to battle and it was captured by 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. The hill country was probably 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 Mt. Madison for those of you that have climbed Mt. Madison. That would be a good place for it to be. Not everyone is going to get up there and grab the thing.

But when the Israelites decide that they want this along with them for the battle of Ebenezer/Aphek, because Aphek is where the Philistines are encamped, they are violating the sanctity of the Ark. They are also taking it into a really vulnerable place. From here there's no protection out to there. The Philistines capture it. What happens when they go down to Ashdod? This is one of the better stories in 1 Samuel. What happens? [Student speaks] Yeah it's parked in the temple of Dagon isn't it? Who's a kind of a fertility/grain god and what happened to Dagon? [Student speaks] Yeah he falls over and the second time he falls over he 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. [Student speaks] 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.

What do they do when they send the Ark back? First of all it's going to go from Ashdod, you know they're vexed there. It's going to go into Gath, notice its heading sort of towards home, to Gath then to Ekron. But what do they send it with? [Student speaks] Yeah, five gold rats and five tumors to represent the five Philistine cities. The suggestion is that that combination together recognizes the real problems. Rats carry bubonic plague. And the bubonic plague we usually associate with the 1300s and 1400s but it existed long before that. It seemed to have its origins in the Middle East, some people think in the Arabian peninsula, so it is 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 is something else that is important here. What do the Philistine diviners say? It's kind of fascinating that these Philistines who are, 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? They put the Ark on a cart, yeah go ahead [Student speaks]. 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 toward the Israelites even though they've got calves back there in the barn, this is something that's come of the Lord. That is indeed what happens so it makes its way from Ekron, Philistine territory to Beth-Shemesh where there are Israelites. It's up a long valley. The Israelites can probably watch it coming. The text says that the Philistines watched it going all the way into 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 peak into it when it's at Beth-Shemesh and they get stricken and finally they're terrified enough they send it to a place called Kiriath Jearim back into the hill country again. This is still in the Shephelah area out here. Back in the hill country where we're told it stays for twenty years. It will be David who will bring the Ark actually up into 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 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.

Another quick look standing on Beth Shemesh looking west. Right around the corner here is Timnah 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

historic 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 despise God's kingship over them and ask for a king themselves in chapter 8.

We're going to put together chapters eight and twelve. It says, "When Samuel grew old he appointed his sons as judges. They served at Beersheba." But verse 3: "They did not walk in his ways they turned aside after dishonest gain and they accepted bribes and perverted justice." Not really a great thing for judges. Judges particularly are supposed to be implementing the covenant because one of the strongest things 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 getting 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." So their one reason sounds pretty good. Look you're sons they're going to succeed you but 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. We 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 give them what they want. They'll know what a king is like and Samuel proceeds to tell them what a king is going to be like in terms of extracting tribute for them, 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 want to do. Joshua did the same thing, he reviewed some covenant history. Samuel does too. He reminds the people of what God had done for them, what God did for them and the deliverance of Exodus, and what God has done for them repeatedly in spite of their hard hearts and in spite of their apostasy. God repeatedly delivered them during the period of the judges. Samuel reminds them 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?" When does wheat harvest take place? Anybody remember in terms of Israel? It's going to be between Passover and Feast of Weeks isn't it? Probably more like the 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 the big deal about that? It has everything to do with the dry season, May is the dry season. 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, full disclosure and all. When I got to Israel two years ago I was supposed to be teaching, I drove up to Jerusalem in a downpour on May 12. But everybody was just shocked, just shocked. They were saying "I can't believe it it's a *maboul*," That's the Hebrew word for flood. 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 you don't turn away from the Lord serve him with all of 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 for they cannot 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.

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"--tremendous lesson. Most of us might be

inclined to just say let them suffer, they heard and they knew what was right. Samuel says, “Far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by failing to pray for you.” It’s a call to prayer.

Well, that leads us to our king. He’s indeed a tragic king. Those of you who like to do reading outside of the Old Testament have heard me mention Elie Wiesel. Some of you have read *Night* probably by Elie Wiesel, anything else? *Night, Dawn, and Day* he’s got a trilogy actually. Well he’s also written a lot of other very interesting books and one of them is entitled *Five Biblical Portraits*. In *Five Biblical Portraits* 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 and Saul is one of the people he does. He does Jeremiah and Jonah and a couple others as well, but Saul is just remarkable and what he does with Saul--the tragic King, why is he tragic? What is the tragedy of Saul’s kingship? 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 God’s blessings 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? Why was he what the people wanted do you think? Did he look like a king, in what way? 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. I’m not sure by the way that we could necessarily say that he’s what all the people wanted. The reason I say that is because when he’s chosen as king by lot as we’re going to see in chapter ten 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? What tribe is he from? 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 be just a self-deprecating thing because Gideon is from Manasseh which is a big tribe. But at any rate he does say that he is 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? Benjamin was small and why are they are feeling that way? In other words, what was that incident, actually multiple incidents all wound together in an ugly miracle at the end of the book of Judges. They may mean that Benjamin as a tribe needs a little bit of elevation. That whole business about the Levite's concubine and what happened to her was in the tribe of Benjamin. Gibeon of Benjamin, nasty, nasty events take place and so then what happens? The tribe of Benjamin just about gets wiped out doesn't it with 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 of this true 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 and the line of Korah continues as people who 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 said, this is what the people want. They want someone who can fight and Saul is big and he has 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.

We do have very interesting story in 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 the kingship instead. What 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 do you remember Saul and his servant are going to Samuel because they want to find the lost donkeys. In the meantime God has appeared to Samuel and said there's going to be a man who will show up tomorrow and I want you to anoint him as king. It's a private ceremony chapter 10 verse 1--chapter 9 is the donkey chapter 10 verse 1. Samuel took the flask of oil and poured it on Saul's head and kissed him and he said "Has the not the Lord anointed you leader over his inheritance."

Then he gives him three signs, three signs that he's indeed going to be king. He's going to meet some people, 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. "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 look impressive but what happens when they do the public confirmation and they find out by law 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've 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's 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 it's the indwelling Spirit in there and 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. 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 Levite sent around? He chopped the concubine up into 12 pieces and sent 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. Very interesting system for conveying messages. It was effective, 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 Jonathan and his armor bearer. Little geography, what do you see here? Well you see a little village right here that happens to be the modern day of Michmash, which preserves the name Michmash, which if you 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 and then it goes on to the rest of the story. Here's the pass do you see you've got a fairly steep valley, that's coming up all the way up from down there around the Jordan valley. This is kind of hard to climb into and come back out of, may not look like it, but believe me it is not something you go down and come back 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 of 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 it shows up by the way; Isaiah chapter 10 is a major example. This is where the 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 the edge of it right there and overtake an encampment an outpost of the Philistine army at that point. And following that the Israelites have a dramatic battle.

Now I've just given you a little bit of geographical background to the 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. And of course, he's classically disobedient and 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 will be a couple of points where Saul is quite intent on making sure the 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 and 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 it says he's offering sacrifices at Gilgal. Samuel had said wait seven days, in fact he went all the way back to chapter 10 and says once you get to Gilgal, it's going to be a little ways down the pike, but he says once you get to Gilgal wait seven days. However, the Philistines at this point in time are massing their forces. At Geba and Michmash, 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? This gives us a little more 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 in the 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, so what does Saul do? Well, he waits until 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 he would have established your kingdom, verse 14 I'm in chapter 13: "Now your kingdom will not endure 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 and he's appointed him as leader of the people because you have not kept the Lord's command. Just as there were too 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 had just alluded to with Jonathan. Jonathan doesn't know it, but Saul has bound the entire army under an 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. Saul is ready to kill Jonathan because of this vow, and fortunately the men of the army intercede.

Our last one where we really want to spend the last couple of 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 they had just

come out of Egypt, remember they were a ragtag bunch of people they don't have armed force necessarily arranged yet, it says in Deuteronomy 25 that they, the Amalekites, waylaid and picked off the people in the rear who were weak and vulnerable. And that was heinous in God's sight. So therefore Exodus 17 it 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 has been called to actually do that and affect that.

Saul disobeys interestingly enough. Verse 12 says, "early in the morning Samuel got up and went to meet Saul and he was told Saul has gone to Carmel and 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 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: "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. Saul has lost the kingship. Now 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 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. The NIV is far too soft it says "put Agag to death" the Hebrew word is "cut him in pieces." Took care of the king Agag. Now we're going to see the name Agag again, but it's a ways 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.

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