

Dr. Robert Vannoy, Samuels, Lecture 1

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What I want to do in a series of four lectures is speak about the books of First and Second Samuel and see how what is contained in these two important Old Testament books fits into the storyline of the whole of the Bible. So, this is the first of four lectures on First and Second Samuel.

When one reads the Old Testament, I think one of the first things that needs to be considered is the literary character or the genre of the material being read. The books of First and Second Samuel, to which we will be giving our attention in these lectures, find their place among what is generally known as the historical books of the Old Testament. Because historical books have a different literary character than, for example, the law books or the poetic books or the wisdom literature, they require a reading strategy that is appropriate to their literary character. So, in these four lectures on First and Second Samuel, I want to begin by saying something about the nature of the historical writing of the Old Testament. I do this because the way in which we understand the nature of Old Testament historiography has a very important influence on the way in which we read and understand the narratives of First and Second Samuel.

So let me start by asking a general question: What kind of history writing do we find in the Old Testament? And how does a proper assessment of the character of Old Testament historiography help us to read and understand the narratives of the Old Testament in an appropriate way? I then want to go on to say something more specific about how a proper understanding of the nature of Old Testament historiography helps us to read and understand the books of First and Second Samuel in an appropriate way. So first let me make some general comments on the character of Old Testament historiography. When we speak about the historical books of the Old Testament, we have the following books in view: there are, first of all, the books of Joshua, Judges, Ruth, First and Second Samuel and First and Second Kings that are all set in the pre-exilic time period. In addition we have First and Second Chronicles, that interestingly enough opens with a genealogy that goes all the way back to Adam and ends with a decree of Cyrus, the

Persian ruler in 538 B.C. He released the Jews from their Babylonian captivity, although the primary focus of First and Second Chronicles is the period of the monarchy in Israel. Then, in addition, there are the books of Ezra and Nehemiah that describe something of the experiences of the Jews who returned to their homeland after the exile. And finally we have the story of Esther, that is set in Persia among the Jews who did not return to their home land.

So there is an enormous amount of historical narrative in the Old Testament. In fact if you count page numbers in the Hebrew Bible, which I happened to do in preparation for this lecture, the books I just mentioned constitute approximately forty percent of Old Testament. If we add to this the historical narratives of the Pentateuch, and there are many of them in the Pentateuch, as well as chapters 36 to 39 of the book of Isaiah, which is also historical narrative, as well as the books of Jonah and Job, if we classify them as historical narrative, then more than fifty percent of the content of the Old Testament is historical narrative.

The presence of so much historical material in the Old Testament raises an important question. And that question is: Why did Israel have such an enormous interest in history? Why did Israel, of all nations in the ancient world, have a much greater desire to record and maintain memory of her historical experiences than did other peoples in the ancient world? And, in addition, why did Israel not only have a greater interest in history and historical traditions than other ancient peoples, but why did she also develop a unique concept of history and historical writing as well?

Hendrikus Berkhoff, in his volume *Christ the Meaning of History*, has said that we must thank not Greece, nor Persia, but Israel for our sense that history is goal directed and that as such it has meaning. Geerhardus Vos, in his volume *Biblical Theology*, claimed that “the true principal of history writing, that which makes history more than the chronicling of events because it discovers a plan and posits a goal, was thus grasped not first by the Greek historians, but by the prophets of Israel. Hence we find also that the activity among these circles include sacred historiography, the production of books like Samuel and Kings, in which the course of events is placed in the light of an unfolding

divine plan. Good meaning can thus be found in the ancient canonical custom of calling these historical writings the earlier prophets". G. Ernest Wright, in this volume *God Who Acts*, also called attention to what he described as "Israel's peculiar attention to historical traditions" and he noted that the Old Testament's focus was not merely on individual exploits of heroes and kings, not merely on court panels like the Babylonian Chronicle, but rather on the unity and meaningfulness of universal history from the beginning of time until the end of time. It is in the framework of this universal history that the chronicles of individual events are set, and ultimately receive their meaning." We might say then that Israel had what might be termed a linear concept of history. The idea that historical events had meaning because they were part of a historical process that was purposeful and that was moving toward a goal. This idea that history is progressive and goal directed is probably taken for granted by most of us today because in Western culture our thinking about history has been forged, in a large degree, by a Judeo-Christian idea of the historical process. But this was not the case in the ancient world.

In the ancient world, generally speaking, history was conceived of as either cyclical and based on the cyclical nature of natural processes, such as the seasons of the year, and the regular rise and setting of the sun, or oscillating, much like the movement of a pendulum, that swings perpetually back and forth with no meaningful pattern. So the question is: How and why did Israel come to understand universal history as a purposeful and meaningful process, in contrast to other ancient peoples?

G. Ernest Wright asked that question many years ago and he concluded, "We can never be certain of the true reason for this particular Israelite view of nature and history." He then went on to speculate that Israel's view of history arose because reflection on her own historical experiences led Israel to infer that God had chosen her as his special people and because of this initial and fundamental inference, Israel came "to take human events seriously because in them was to be learned more clearly than anywhere else what God willed and what God was about." I think we must say, however, that Wright's answer to this question is deficient. His answer does not adequately explain why other

ancient peoples did not make similar inferences from their own unique historical experiences, and then also develop a meaningful concept of history.

From a biblical perspective, I think we must say that Israel developed her distinctive historical sense because rather than discovering God in nature, as many around her did—thus a Sun God, a Storm God, a Fertility God, etc. Israel came to know God in historical events, yes, but in historical events as these were both announced in advance and subsequently interpreted for her by the prophets.

Wright's error in his analysis of this question was that he denied the existence and importance of what we might call "word revelation." The divine Word, spoken by the Old Testament prophets, is not given sufficient attention in Wright's analysis. He limited divine revelation to revelation in and through the experience of historical events. In the Old Testament however, we find that God made himself known to his people by both speaking and acting—that is, by both word and event. Revelation in the Old Testament is not found in a word that arises by blind interpretation from an event—that is, by inference, as Wright would put it from historical experience. Rather, revelation in the Old Testament consists in a word that is subsequently confirmed by an event. The words of God and the acts of God fit together in a manner in which God commits himself, verbally, to do something and then confirms that word as a reliable word by doing precisely what He said He would do.

There are innumerable examples of this to be found in the Old Testament. As Geerhardus Vos, in an essay called "The Idea of Biblical Theology," put it so well, "Without God's acts, the words would be empty." That is, if God did not do what he said he would do, his words would be of no value. "Without God's acts, his words would be empty, but without his words, his acts would be blind." That is to say, without word revelation the meaning of history would always remain a mystery. You only have to look around and try to interpret history yourself today by observation of the historical process. Everyone who does that comes up with a different conclusion. Without his words, the acts would be blind.

Sometimes attributing historical value to the narratives of the Old Testament has been challenged because of their over-religious or theological perspective, as well as because sometimes causal relationships are not clearly delineated. The religious or theological character of Old Testament historical narratives is quite apparent to anyone who reads the Old Testament. But what do I mean by the lack of attention to causal relationships in Old Testament historical narratives? Let me give you a couple of examples. In Judges 6:1, you read, “Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites.” There’s a very similar statement in Judges 13:1: “The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, so the Lord delivered them into the hands of the Philistines for forty years.”

When you read that, you might ask, “Where are the details that explain how Israel was delivered into the hands of the Philistines for forty years? What were the economic forces? The social forces? The military factors that enabled this to happen?” There are many today who would say that the frequent absence of information explaining causal relationships, such as that are described in Judges 6:1 and 13:1, disqualifies Old Testament narratives from consideration as legitimate historical writing. Now in assessing such concerns, I think it’s important to remember that the central focus of the Old Testament lies in something quite different than in any other historical writings. The central concern of biblical narrative is to describe what God has done in history to reveal himself and to redeem His people. Old Testament history then is what may be properly described, in my view, as a history of redemption. The incidents recorded in Old Testament narrative are significant because of their relationship to God’s ongoing works of revelation and redemption. What is important in connection with God’s revelatory and redemptive work finds its place in biblical narrative. What is not important in connection with God’s works of revelation of redemption is passed over, or mentioned only in a few words by way of transition to matters of greater significance in redemptive history.

It has sometimes been argued that this character of Old Testament historical narrative stamps it with some sort of religious or theological bias that then undermines its value as truly historical writing because it does not qualify as “objective historiography.”

Certainly it's not to be denied that the historical writing of the Bible has a distinct religious or theological character. It obviously does. It was not the purpose of the writers to provide some sort of detached or neutral description of the events that they depicted. In fact it may be questioned whether such a thing as "objective historiography" in the sense of some sort of completely neutral objective reporting of things that have happened is even possible. In the final analysis, I think we must say that all history writing is interpretive. So we might say there's reliable historiography, or unreliable historiography, but all history writing requires that events be viewed from a certain perspective that will govern the choice of material and the evaluation of its significance or meaning. To that extent, no history writing is strictly objective, and history writing cannot be otherwise. But that does not make all history writing unreliable or untrustworthy.

With respect to Old Testament narratives, yes; they are characterized by a religious or theological orientation that determines the selection and evaluation of the things reported. And yes, in many cases causal relationships are not fully explained. But such features of biblical narrative do not detract in any way from their legitimacy as sources of historical information. The point is biblical narratives describe things that have happened, and these events find their significance or meaning in connection with God's great work of redemption. So as I have already indicated we might say that Old Testament history is best described as a history of redemption. The importance of this concept for understanding the historical writings of the Bible—in my view—cannot be overemphasized, and the reason for that is this: the message of the Bible is inseparably joined with the history it describes. The history that it describes is the history of God's redemptive work. If the events of that history did not happen, then our faith becomes an irrational leap and is vain. It's both empty and a self-deception. Our faith rests on God's words and acts in human history. Paul put it very succinctly and forcefully, when he said "If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain." For this reason, we can be thankful that God has not only acted in human history to provide for our redemption, but that He has also spoken, and given us a trustworthy record of his redemptive work and plan. As Peter said, "above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the

prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets [though human] spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21).

Now, with that as sort of a background by way of looking at the nature of the historical writing of the Old Testament, I want to move on to reading First and Second Samuel from a redemptive historical perspective. It seems to me that the character of Old Testament historiography being that it is redemptive history requires us then to set biblical historical narratives in that flow of the movement of redemptive history.

So let's look at First and Second Samuel. I'd like to begin with just some introductory comments on the books themselves and the first thing we'll look at in that regard is some comments on the name of the books. The name "Samuel" is taken from the person who was prominent in the first part of this lengthy book of First and Second Samuel. I might say that First and Second Samuel contains 55 chapters: 31 chapters in 1 Samuel, 24 chapters in 2 Samuel. So, it's a long book.

Samuel was the person who was God's instrument to anoint both Saul and David as Israel's first two kings. The establishment of kingship in Israel by the prophet Samuel and the description of the reigns of Israel's first two kings Saul and David is what First and Second Samuel are all about. Although it's clear that Samuel was not the author of the book because his death is recorded in 1 Samuel 25:1, it's probable that the author, whoever he was, used material written by Samuel as well as other prophets at the time concerning events that they had either witnessed or with which they were familiar. I say that because 1 Chronicles 29:29 and 30 says "As for the events of David's reign from beginning to end, they are written in the records of Samuel the seer." Now that's not First and Second Samuel, but there must have been written material from the hand of Samuel. The records of Nathan the prophet and the records of Gad the seer, Nathan and Gad also played a role in the life of David, together with the details of his reign and power and circumstances that surrounded him and Israel and the kingdoms of all the other lands.

First and Second Samuel was originally a single book or scroll. The division into

two parts was done—as far as we know—by the translators of the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Hebrew of the Old Testament, and as they divided it into two books, the death of Saul in 1 Samuel 31 seemed to be an appropriate place to put a division and end the book of 1 Samuel, much as the deaths of Moses and Joshua are described in the last chapters of both Deuteronomy and the book of Joshua. The name or title of the books has varied overtime. Being designated First and Second Books of Kingdoms in the Septuagint, and because what we know as First and Second Samuel were called First and Second Kingdoms, that means what we know as First and Second Kings were called Third and Fourth Kingdoms, and then a slight modification of that in the Vulgate translation where the title was for First and Second Samuel, First and Second Kings and what we know as First and Second Kings became Third and Fourth kings. Now I say this because you may go into a library some day and see a commentary on Third Kings and Fourth Kings and wonder, “Where is that? I don’t have that book in my Bible.” It comes from the old tradition of the titles in the Latin Vulgate. The designation of the book with the title Samuel comes from Jewish tradition. So those comments just in a general way about the books themselves.

Let me now move to a brief survey of the content of First and Second Samuel, and suggest what in my view is the primary theme of the book. First and Second Samuel is placed between Judges and Kings. Of course at the end of Judges you have the book of Ruth that is set in the time of Judges, but Samuel becomes between the book of Judges and First and Second Kings and treats the period of history that begins with the close of the period of the Judges and ends shortly before David’s death. David’s death is actually described in the early chapters of 1 Kings. It’s concerned with the time period of 130 years, about 1100-970 B.C.

The book does not give us a detailed political history of this period of time, but it’s made up, for the most part, by a collection of biographical stories centered around the three prominent leaders of Israel during that period of time, namely: Samuel, Saul, and David. In my view that which binds these narratives together and gives a unity to the book, is that theme of kingship and covenant. As you read through First and Second

Samuel, I think you will find that first kinship as requested by the people in 1 Samuel 8 was a denial of the covenant. Secondly, kingship as instituted by Samuel as found in 1 Samuel 10:17-27 and 11; 14:12-25, kingship as instituted by Samuel was consistent with the covenant. Thirdly, kingship as practiced by Saul failed to correspond to the covenantal ideal, and the key chapters there are 1 Samuel 13 and 1 Samuel 15. Fourthly, kingship as practiced by David, was an imperfect but a true representation of the ideal of the covenantal king, and you find that in the book of 2nd Samuel.

I want to return to that four-fold develop of the theme of kingship and covenant in First and Second Samuel after completing these introductory comments on 1st and 2nd Samuel. So back to a little more of introduction to the two books. The two books as a whole can be divided into three sections connected with the lives of the three main figures: Samuel, Saul, and David. You find that Samuel is the most prominent figure in 1 Samuel chapters 1-12. You read of his birth, his becoming prophet, his anointing eventually of Saul to be king. In chapters 13-31 of 1 Samuel, Saul is the prominent figure. He has become king in chapters 8-12. He really begins his reign in chapter 13. Then from 13 to the end of the book you have the focus primary on Saul, although at this certain point David comes into the picture and you see the downward trend of Saul and the rise of David to throne. And then 2 Samuel 1-24, David is the most prominent figure. So if you look at those three sections, 1-12 of 1 Samuel, Samuel; 13-31 of 1 Samuel, Saul; and the entirety of 2 Samuel, David; you will find that those sections take up respectively 17, 34, 45 pages in the Hebrew Bible. Notice David section is by far the largest, and I think that in itself is an indication that the author desires to highlight for us the reign of David.

Now, for some final remarks in this introductory section, I want to call your attention to three significant advances in the history of redemption that are found in First and Second Samuel. If the historical material of the Old Testament is correctly understood to be a history of redemption, what are the prominent significant events in First and Second Samuel that move this history of redemption forward? I want to call your attention to three things. First, Samuel records the fulfillment of God's promise

Abraham concerning the extent of the Promised Land. I'm going to mention all three of these and then come back and look at each one in a little more detail, but first, you find a fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham concerning the extent of the Promised Land. Second, Samuel records how Jerusalem became the political and religious center of Israel. Thirdly, and most importantly, and this is where we will spend a bulk of our time, 1 Samuel describes the establishment of kingship in Israel, and associates anointing with kingship. Now you might ask why is that important? We'll look at that a bit later. But it seems to me that these are three events in the forward movement of redemptive history found in First and Second Samuel that are of enormous significance. Let's look at each of them briefly.

First, 2 Samuel records the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham concerning the extent of Promised Land. God's promise to Abraham that his descendants would possess the land of Canaan was one of the central elements of God's covenant with Abraham. You find reference to the land promised in Genesis 12 when the covenant was originally presented to Abraham, Genesis 12:7. It's elaborated on in Genesis 15:18-21 where borders to this land are described. It was further confirmed in Genesis 17:8, and repeated in numerous other places, including Numbers 34:1-12, Deuteronomy 1:7, Deuteronomy 11:24, Joshua 1:4, Psalm 105:8-11, and there are other places as well. That promise to Abraham was initially fulfilled when Israel took the land of Canaan at the time of the conquest under the leadership of Joshua. In Joshua 11:23, we read, "So Joshua took the entire land just as the Lord had directed Moses, and he gave it as an inheritance to Israel, according to their tribal divisions." And you might think, "Well there is the fulfillment." However, if you go on to Joshua 13, you read that that initial conquest still left large areas of land still to be taken, and the various tribes did not complete the job in their own territories. You read further details of that in Judges chapter one. And in addition, the promise to Abraham describes borders that extended all the way to Egypt up to the Euphrates River. The fulfillment of this promise did not come until the reign of David. You read about that in 2 Samuels 8, where there is a list of David's conquests. David not only defeated the Philistines who were the immediate threat, upon the death of

Saul, but he extended Israel's sovereignty all the way to the Euphrates River. I won't take the time to read that in 2 Samuel 8, but the record is there. When you go to 1 Kings 4 David hands his kingdom over to his son Solomon. You read there the borders extended all the way to the Euphrates. So in 1 Kings 4: 21 and 24 you find that the promise given to Abraham has been fulfilled.

So I think you can say that in those rather mundane statements of 2 Samuels 8 where you have this list of David's conquests there's another profound truth as well and that is, God is faithful to his promises. What He says will come to pass. He will accomplish what He says.

During the time of Samuel and Saul possession of the territories promised to Abraham looked impossible, probably even unthinkable. But in the providence of God the great nations of the Fertile Crescent; Egypt, Babylon, Syria, the Hittites, had been brought to weakness during the reign of David and the reign of Solomon so that their kingdoms were able to grow to the extent that the Lord had promised to Abraham. So there's one step in the forward movement of redemptive history.

A second one; Samuel records how Jerusalem became the political and religious center of Israel. After David came to the throne he took the Jebusites city of Zion and made it his capital city. We read of that in 2 Samuel 5. It became the political center of Israel. In 2 Samuel 6 we read of another significant event. David in 2 Samuels 6 brings the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem making it not only the political center, but also the religious center of the nation.

That act carried a very important symbolic significance; we'll talk more about this later. But that significance is that David still recognized Yahweh as the supreme ruler of the land. Remember the Ark of the Covenant containing the tablets of law given to Moses on Mt. Sinai was viewed as a throne seat of Yahweh. Although David was the human ruler and was the human king his bringing of the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem showed that he regarded Yahweh as Israel's divine king and Israel's ultimate sovereign. From the time of David forward, throughout the rest of the Old Testament period and on into the New Testament time Jerusalem remained at the center of God's dealings with his

chosen people Israel. It does so even up until today. I'll say more about that later when we discuss the kingship of David.

But then thirdly as far as advances in redemptive history 1 Samuel describes the establishment of kingship in Israel and the association of anointing with kingship. It's in the book of Samuel that the phrase "the anointed of the Lord" comes to be used as synonymous with king. The significance of this is seen when it's realized that the English words "anointed" and "messiah" are the translation and transliteration of the same Hebrew word *meshiah*, a noun that means anointed coming from the Hebrew root *mashah* meaning "to anoint." So the English words for "anointed one" and "messiah" are the same word in Hebrew.

In the Greek language *christos* is the word used to translate *meshiah* in both the Septuagint and the New Testament. This Greek word *christos* comes from a Greek root meaning "to anoint" and of course is known to us by the transliteration "Christ" in our English Bible version. So the words "Christ" and "Messiah" that are so familiar to us today find their initial biblical setting in First and Second Samuel. This means that the roots of the messianic idea, which is certainly a very important Biblical concept, have significant connections with the narratives of First and Second Samuel.

The Stories of how Saul and David were anointed are found in 1 Samuel 9:1-10,16 for Saul and 1 Samuel 16 for David. The designation, the anointed of the Lord as a designation for Israel's King's is found in numerous times in First and Second Samuel. In 1 Samuel 2:10, 24:10, 26:9, 2 Samuel 1:14, 1:16, 19:21, 22:51, 23:1, there may be some others.

It's important to understand that the establishment of kingship in Israel does not appear without previous expectation. That is it doesn't come just out of the blue. It's at first alluded to in God's promise to Abraham and Sarah that kings will come from them and be among their descendants, Genesis 17:6 and 16. It is more explicitly referred to in Jacob's prophesy concerning the tribe of Judah when he said that "the scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs" (Genesis 49:10). Balaam prophesied that there would be a king in Israel in

Numbers 24:7 “their king will be greater than Agag, their kingdom will be exulted.” And in 24:7-19 he said “a star will come out of Jacob, a scepter will rise out of Israel, he will crush the foreheads of Moab, Eden will be conquered, a ruler will come out of Jacob.” Moses in Deuteronomy chapter 17 included the “Law of the King,” so called, in his renewal of the Sinai Covenant on the plains of Moab anticipating the time of kingship would come in Israel.

At the beginning of 1 Samuel, Hannah anticipated the day God would give power to his king and increase the strength of his anointed one. 1 Samuel 2:10 where she speaks of “the anointed one and the king,” even before the kings have been anointed. So when kingship finally came it was clear that God intended Israel to have a line of kings who would anticipate and point forward to the great Messianic king of the future. It’s not until, 1 Samuel 8-12, however, that kingship came to be established in Israel.

1 Samuel 8-12 describes the establishment of kingship in Israel in 5 literary units. The chapter divisions in chapters 8-12 are really not at the best places, so let me just quickly show you how those narrative units divide. 1 Samuel 8 is Israel’s request for a king; 1 Samuel 9:1 to 10:16, Samuel anoints Saul privately to be king; and you have narrative unit. In 10:17-27, Samuel calls an assembly of Mizpeh where Saul is publicly selected to be king. In chapter 11, verses 1-13, Saul’s choice to be king is confirmed by a victory over the Ammonites. And then in 11:14 to 12:25, Saul’s reign is inaugurated. It’s inaugurated in a covenant renewal ceremony called by Samuel to be held at Gilgal.

When we read these narratives I think what we find is that even though kingship was within God’s purpose for his people, it did not originate in the way we might have expected. In 1 Samuel 8, we find the elders of Israel approached Samuel and asked him to give them a king like the nations round about. That’s 1 Samuel 8:5 and 1 Samuel 8:19 and 20. But the events of the chapter take place long after the description of Israel’s miraculous delivery from the Philistines as described in chapter 7. In chapter 7, Samuel is first recognized as a judge in connection with that victory over the Philistines. But in chapter 8, he’s already in his old age. We read that in 8 verse 1, and because of his advanced age, Samuel had appointed his sons Joel and Abiah to assist him in making

legal decisions. But unlike their father, they perverted justice for monetary gain. We read that in 1 Samuel 8:2 and 3. This gave Israel's national leaders an opportunity to ask Samuel to give the people, "a king to judge us like all the other nations have." Verse 5 – seems likely that the corruption of Samuel's sons was a convenient excuse used to vindicate their desire for a king. Those leaders really wanted something much more far reaching than merely the disciple of Samuel's sons. They wanted to create a new social order by restructuring the theocracy in a way that would allow for a human king. The role they described for the king reveals that their deepest motivation arose out of a lack of confidence in Jehovah much more so than it did out of a concern for the corruption of Samuel's sons.

The request was upsetting to Samuel, we read that in verse 6. Not only because he took it personally, as an insinuation that he was no longer sufficiently competent to provide human leadership for the nation. But also he was disturbed because it suggested that a direct theocracy, that is one in which Jehovah alone ruled the nation as Israel's divine king, was no longer good enough for Israel. The request implied that Israel was inferior to the neighboring countries, simply because she had no human king to go out before her and to lead her in battle; we read that in verse 20. They wanted a king who would go out before them and lead them in battle particularly in the face of the Philistine and Ammonite threats.

At its core, this attitude was a rejection of the kingship of Jehovah and that is stated explicitly in verse 7, and it's stated again in 10:19, 12:12, 12:17, 12:19. It becomes a theme that runs through 1 Samuel 8 to 12. Your request for a king was a rejection of the Lord who was your king. And as such, it was a denial of the covenant. This was a rejection of the very thing that set Israel apart from the other nations. It was a denial of the confession of Psalm 44:2 to 8, where you read, "You, Jehovah, drove out the pagan nations by your power and gave all the land to our ancestors. You crushed their enemies and set our ancestors free. They did not conquer the land with their swords. It was not their own strong arm that gave them victory; it was your right hand and strong arm and the blinding light from your face that helped them. For you loved them. You are my king

and my God. You command victories for Israel, only by your power can we push back our enemies, only in your name can we trample our foes. I do not trust in my bow, I do not count on my sword to save me. You are the one who gives us victory over our enemies; you disgrace those who hate us. O God, we give glory to you all day long and constantly praise your name.” That should have been the confession of Israel, but these elders come to Samuel and they want a king like the nations round about to go out and lead them in battle. It was an attempt to replace the rule of Jehovah with a human institution that was viewed as more visible, more trustworthy, and better able to guarantee the security of the nation.

In spite of this, the Lord instructed Samuel to grant the request of the Israelite leaders. He told Samuel that the central issue was not so much that they had rejected him, that is, Samuel, but rather that they had rejected me, Jehovah. And that they did not want Jehovah to be their king any longer. Verse 7: So while Samuel was instructed to give them what they wanted, he was at the same time told to warn them about what having a king like the nations have, what that would entail; that’s in verse 9. If you read through verses 11 to 18, I think they’re best understood as a description of the routine practices of a typical Canaanite city-state king of that time. And you read through those verses, the word that stands out and clearly characterizes those kings is the word, “take.” It’s used four times in verses 11, 13, 14 and 16, and implied several more times. Samuel told the leaders that a king like those of the surrounding nations would be a king who would *take* their sons, verse 11. He would *take* their daughters, verse 13. He would *take* the best of their fields and vineyards, verse 14. He would *take* a tenth of their grain, verse 15. He would *take* male and female servants, verse 16. He would *take* the best of their cattle and donkeys, verse 16. He would *take* a tenth of their flocks, verse 17. And the result would be; the people of Israel would be reduced to slavery, much like what they had experienced in Egypt.

Samuel gave them that warning; but the warning fell on deaf ears. After listening to him, the leaders insisted even more strongly than they had before; compare verse 5 and verse 20. They wanted a king “to judge us and lead us in battle.” So they wanted a king

for the wrong reasons; yet God told Samuel three times in this chapter, “Do as they say,” in verses 7, 9 and 22. Here’s a situation in which the Lord consented to the people’s wicked request but then turned their evil aspiration into something that would ultimately work for the good of the nation. We are reminded here, I think, of the words of Joseph, to his brothers in Genesis 50 verse 20; “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done; the saving of many lives.” When kingship was finally established by Samuel and Saul was introduced to the people it was a different kind of kingship than for which the people had asked.

Kingship in Israel, as defined by Samuel was to be a covenantal kingship, that is one in which the duties and responsibilities of a king in Israel would be radically different from those of the kings of the surrounding nations. Kingship in Israel would be designed in a way that integrated human kingship into the administration of the covenant. So this chapter, 1 Samuel 8, marks the beginning of an important new initiative in God’s plan of redemption. Kingship will now be incorporated into God’s redemptive purposes for his people. As Israel’s history further unfolded, it was the consistent failure of her human kings that eventually gave rise to the hope for a future Messianic king, in the line of David, who would be both human and divine. You see that theme increasingly developed in the prophetic books, ultimately it will be Jesus, the root and offspring of David, Revelation 22:16, who will completely fulfill this ideal of the true covenantal king. When all of history reaches its final consummation, we’re told by the apostle Paul, that Jesus will turn the kingdom over to God the Father, having destroyed every ruler, and authority and power (1 Corinthians 15:24).

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