Dr. Robert Vannoy, Samuels, Lecture 2

As we noted at the end of our last session, kingship as requested by the people of Israel was a denial of the covenant and a rejection of Yahweh, who was their King. But when Samuel gave Israel a king at the Lord's command, he did so in a manner that would be consistent with the covenant and integrate human kingship into the structure of the theocracy. The first hint of this is found in the ceremony at Mizpeh where Saul was publicly chosen by lot to be Israel's first king. We find the Mizpeh ceremony described in 1 Samuel 10:17-27. In that passage, after the lot fell on Saul, he was presented to the gathered assembly by Samuel as the one the Lord had chosen to be their king. Saul was an imposing figure of royal stature. He stood taller than anyone else at the assembly (verse 23). He was immediately hailed with enthusiasm by the people who shouted, "Long live the King!" (verse 24). This was exactly the kind of king they wanted. Samuel, however, did not want the people to think that just because they had been given a king this meant that their king would rule in the same way as the kings did in the surrounding nations.

So Samuel was very careful to explain to them what is termed in the text of regulations of the kingship - more literally, the manner of the kingdom. 1 Samuel 10:25 where you read in the NIV translation, "Samuel explained to the people the regulations of the kingship." By so doing, Samuel took a first step toward resolving tensions between people's sinful desire for a king and the Lord's acquiescence to their request. Unfortunately, no copy of the written regulations that Samuel deposited in the sanctuary has survived. You read in verse 25b, "He wrote them down on a scroll and deposited it before the Lord." Whatever the precise content of those regulations may have been, it seems clear they would have been a more complete description of the duties and responsibilities of the Israelite kings that Moses had given in Deuteronomy 17:14-20--a passage which is often called the "Law of the King." And certainly they would have established kingship in what might be described as a constitutional monarch. In other words, Israel's kings would not have autonomous power. They would always be subject

to the laws of the Sinai covenant and the words of the prophets. Kingship in Israel would be integrated into the covenantal structure of the theocracy. It would be consistent with the continued sovereignty of the Lord over the nation and was intended to serve as a vehicle for the Lord's rule over his people. After being publicly designated as the one whom the Lord had chosen to be king, Saul returned to his home in Gibeah. We read of that in 1 Samuel 10:26. Saul went to his home in Gibeah. And He continued to work in the fields as he did before. In chapter 11 verse 5 we find that Saul was returning from the fields behind his oxen when messengers came to tell him about the Ammonite threat. So he returned to his home and took up his work as before.

The designation of Saul as king elect by the private anointing in 1 Samuel 9:1-10:16, and then by this public selection by lot in 1 Samuel 10:17-27 represented the first stage in a three stage process by which the monarchy was placed in operation in Israel. The three stage process involved designation: he was anointed, he was selected by lot, that then it involved confirmation, and finally inauguration. 1 Samuel 11 describes the second and third phases. Saul has been designated as king elect but it's in 11 with Saul's victory over the Ammonites that you find confirmation of his appointment to the royal office, and that's recorded in 1 Samuel 11:1-13, and that led immediately to his inauguration as king in a covenant renewal ceremony held at Gilgal convened by Samuel and described in 11:14 through the end of chapter 12, verse 25.

When Nahash the Ammonite attacked and laid siege to Jabesh Gilead, a city located in the north east region of Israel, the elders of Jabesh Gilead sent messengers to Saul at his home in Gibeah asking for assistance. Upon learning of the crisis facing Jabesh Gilead, we read in 1 Samuel 11:6 that the spirit of God rushed upon Saul, he burned with anger, he summoned the fighting men of Judah and Israel to muster at Bezek, a place at northern Israel about 17 miles directly west of Jabesh Gilead. And he summoned them by sending dismembered pieces of two oxen through the land along with the message that the oxen of those who did not respond to the summon sent by Samuel and himself would be given the same treatment. The result was that 330,000 fighting men

quickly assembled at Bezek. Saul's anger and his resulting action prompted by God's Spirit empowered him to rise to the occasion to defend the honor of the Lord and his people Israel and that work of God's Spirit in Saul was accompanied by God's causing fear to come upon those to whom the summons was sent so that they regarded it as something they dare not ignore, we read that in verse 7b. Saul sent a message back to Jabesh with the assurance that by the middle of the next day, the city would be delivered from the Ammonite threat, we read that in 1 Samuel 11:9. Upon receiving that good news, the leaders of Jabesh cleverly told Nahash that on the next day they would "come out to him" implying, but not literally saying, that they would surrender; now I say that contrary the NIV translation that does use the word "surrender," but it is not in the original text. But they said we will come out to you, and that then he could do with them as he pleased (verse 10). But during the night, Saul led his forces in a surprise attack against the Ammonite camp, and by noon of the next day the Ammonite forces had either been killed or driven away. And the Lord gave Samuel a resounding victory over the Ammonites.

When some of the people demanded that those who had questioned whether Saul was fit to be king, which had happened in the aftermath of the Mizpeh public selection by lot, should be rounded up and put to death. Saul declared no one would be put to death because, he said, it was not he, but the Lord who had delivered Israel (verse 11, chapter 13) Saul said, “No one shall be put to death today, for this day Yahweh has rescued Israel.” Saul’s response at that point shows clear insight into the true nature of covenantal kingship. Israel’s security did not rest upon the existence or performance of a human king. It rested on the grace and promises of a covenant-keeping God. Saul rightly discerned that it was the Lord who had given Israel her victory over the Ammonites. So Israel’s victory over the Ammonites under Saul’s leadership provided a clear confirmation of his appointment to the royal office, and it led to the inauguration of his reign, and that’s described in I Samuel 11:14-12:25. Here the striking thing is that when Samuel called for all Israel to come to Gilgal to inaugurate the reign of Saul, he did so in a ceremony in which kingship was established in the setting of a reaffirmation of

allegiance to Yahweh. This brings us to consideration of the proposition kingship as instituted by Samuel was consistent with the covenant. Remember, kingship as requested by Saul was a denial of the covenant. Now we find kingship as instituted by Samuel was consistent with the covenant. Building upon Saul's confession, the credit for the victory over the Ammonites was to be given to the Lord rather than to himself.

Samuel called for an assembly to be held in Gilgal in order to quote, "renew the kingdom." I Samuel 11:14, "Let us go to Gilgal and renew the kingdom." It's often been argued that the kingdom that Samuel wanted to renew was the kingdom of Saul. This understanding, however, I think brings up a host of questions, not the least of which is the question of how Saul's kingdom could be renewed if he had not yet begun his reign. After the Mizpeh assembly, Saul had gone back to his home in Gibeah and resumed working in the fields (I Samuel 11:5). He had not officially begun his reign as king. In fact, making Saul king, that was inaugurating his reign, was one of the things Samuel intended to do at the Gilgal assembly as we're told in verse 15. "Let us go to Gilgal and renew the kingdom." You read in verse 15, "They went to Gilgal and made Saul king in the presence of the Lord."

Among source and tradition history analyses of the sequence of events in I Samuel 9-11, the most common conclusion has been to view the phrase "Let us go to Gilgal and renew the kingdom," and 11:14 as a redactional or editorial insertion that has attempted to transform the tradition of Saul becoming king by acclamation after the victory over the Ammonites, described in I Samuel 11, to turn that into a renewal of his kingship. Why do that? In order to harmonize this Gilgal tradition with the allegedly conflicting tradition that he became king after being selected by lot at an assembly at Mizpeh in 10:17-27. In other words, the idea is that you have two conflicting traditions about how Saul actually became king, and an editor has attempted to harmonize these two by making one into a renewal. B. C. Birch gives a representative summary of this position when he says, "Most scholars have regarded this verse, 11:14, as the clearest evidence of redactional activity in this chapter, and there would seem to be little reason for challenging this conclusion. It

would seem clear that an editor has, in the process of ordering the traditions as we now have them, attempted to harmonize an apparent duplication." Saul has already become king in 10:24. So the instance in 11:15 has been transformed into a "renewal." If, however, you understand the word "kingdom" in this phrase as a reference to Saul's kingdom, it's difficult, although perhaps not impossible, to explain how Saul's kingdom could be renewed if he had not yet been made king (verse 15). It's therefore preferable, I think, to understand "kingdom" in this phrase not as a reference to Saul's kingdom, but rather as a reference to the kingdom of Yahweh.

Now I might make a comment here about the NIV translation. If you read this verse in the NIV, I think the NIV has attempted to ameliorate the problem in these two verses by translating the Hebrew word *hadash*, which means "renew" as "reaffirm the kingship" instead of "renew the kingship." The NIV says, "Samuel said to the people, let us go to Gilgal and reaffirm the kingship." And they have also translated in verse 15, "So all the people went to Gilgal and made Saul king," they've translated it as "confirm Saul as king." However, the word there means, "inaugurate the reign of a king." There are 49 occurrences of the Hiphil, of the verb form there, and in every case they don't mean "confirm the reign of king," they mean "to make someone king." The TNIV, Today's New International Version, has improved on the translation of the NIV of this verse, and it reads, "Let us go to Gilgal and there renew the kingship." They use the word "renew" instead of "reaffirm." So all the people went to Gilgal and made Saul king, instead of reaffirm the kingship. So depending on what translation you read, you may not get the full thrust of what's going on in these two very important verses (I Samuel 11:14-15).

But as I said before that aside, I think it is preferable to understand "kingdom" in this phrase, "Let us go to Gilgal and renew the kingdom," as a reference to the kingdom of Yaweh. In fact, when you look at all that's going on in I Samuel 8-12, Israel's disavow of the kingship of Yahweh is the central issue that runs through the entirety of I Samuel 8-12. When Israel asks for a human king, they rejected the Lord, who was their king. It is explicit in 8:7, 10:19, 12:12, the rejection of the kingship of the Lord subverted the covenant relationship between the Lord and his people that had been established at Sinai.

In spite of this wickedness, as it is termed, on the part of Israel, I Samuel 12:17 and 19, the Lord, in his grace and mercy, told Samuel to give the people a king. So now that the time has arrived for Saul's inauguration, Samuel chose to accomplish that in a ceremony that not only inaugurated the reign of Saul, but also, and I would say even more importantly, restored the broken covenant relationship between the Lord and his people.

The significant thing that happens in 1 Samuel 11:14 to 12:25, is that kingship in Israel is established in the context of covenant renewal. It is only in connection with Israel's affirmation of her continued recognition of the Lord as her divine King that human kingship could assume it's proper place in the structure of the theocracy. So 1 Samuel 11:14-15 introduces and briefly summarizes the transactions of the Gilgal assembly. A much more detailed account of the same assembly is given in 1 Samuel 12, the entirety of the chapter, verses 1-25. If you compare those two, perhaps, originally independent literary units, 1 Samuel 11:14-15 and 1 Samuel 12:1-25, I think you will find that both units reveal agreement in their major emphases. They describe the Gilgal assembly from slightly different perspectives, but the full sight of attention in both is this: One, transition in leadership; and two, restoration of covenant fellowship after covenant abrogation.

In 1 Samuel 11:14-15, the transition in leadership idea is seen in the reference to the inauguration of Saul. They made Saul king (verse 15). The restoration of covenant fellowship after covenant abrogation theme is seen in the reference to the sacrificing of peace offerings, mentioned in verse 15, and the rejoicing of the people. Literally, the people rejoiced greatly.

In chapter 12, the transition in leadership theme is seen in the testimony that Samuel gives of his own covenant faithfulness during his past leadership of the nation, as well as his continuing prophetic function in the new structure of the theocracy as human kingship assumes a legitimate place in the structuring of the theocracy. The restoration of covenant fellowship after covenant abrogation theme focuses on Samuel's legal demonstration of Israel's apostasy in requesting a king (that's in verses 6-12), and then

on Israel's confession on their sinfulness in their wrongly motivated desire for a king, and that's described in verses 16-22.

In both passages, 11:14-15 and 12:1-25, the primary purpose of the assembly is renewal of allegiance to Yahweh. That purpose is far more prominent in the detailed description of the Gilgal assembly in chapter 12 than is the inauguration of Saul. Yes, the inauguration of Saul as king is referred to in both passages, but that happens only in connection with the reaffirmation of a continued recognition of Yahweh as Israel's true sovereign. And you find that really focused on in that statement, "Let us go to Gilgal, and renew the kingdom, Yahweh's kingdom" in 11:14, and then in 12:14-15. It is this perspective that explains how Samuel could say, "Come let us go to Gilgal to renew the kingdom," when in fact this is the same ceremony at which Saul would be made king. The renewal of the kingdom is not the renewal of Saul's kingdom; it's the renewal of the covenant relationship with Yahweh. When 1 Samuel 11:14-15 is taken in this way, and directly linked with the covenantal focus of 1 Samuel 12, it becomes apparent that Samuel's primary concern at the Gilgal assembly was to provide for covenant continuity during this important restructuring of the theocracy, as well as transition of leadership of the nation from himself to Saul.

This is not the first time that covenant renewal has been linked with transition in leadership. When Moses' death was imminent, he led Israel in a covenant renewal on the plains of Moab. The purpose of which was to insure covenant continuity through the transition from his leadership to that of Joshua. And that, in fact, is one of the major themes of the book of Deuteronomy. The transition of leadership, you might call it dynastic succession, from Moses to Joshua, but placed in the context of renewal of allegiance to Yahweh. When Joshua was old and well and advanced in years, he called for an assembly at Shechem (Joshua 24). In which, Israel was challenged to renew their commitment to Yahweh as they entered the period of the judges. So again, covenant renewal is an important transition in leadership for the nation.

1 Samuel 11:14-12:25 describe the next significant change in leadership for the nation, because this action at the Gilgal assembly marks the end of the period of the

judges and the beginning of an entirely new structure of the theocracy - the period of the kingdom. And here again, covenant continuity, through a period of transition in leadership, is something that is extremely important. Human kingship is now to become an instrument of the Lord's rule over his people. This is the beginning of the kingdom period in ancient Israel. And right at its inception, kingship is integrated into covenant. From this point forward, kingship and covenant will be inseparable. Covenant will provide the norm for kingship, and kingship will function as an integral feature of covenantal administration.

Now, let's take a closer look at the detailed description of this covenant renewal ceremony held in Gilgal that we find in chapter 12 of 1 Samuel verses 1-25. Here we find a description of the ceremony in which Samuel challenges Israel to renew her allegiance to Yahweh on the occasion of the introduction of kingship into the structure of the theocracy. When Samuel presented Saul to the people as their newly inaugurated king, the first thing he did was to secure from the people a judicial vindication of his own covenant faithfulness during the previous conduct of his office as the spiritual and civil leader of the nation. We find that in verses 3-5. The implications of this vindication is not only that Samuel's leadership has been the kind of leadership that a newly installed king should seek to emulate, but also that Samuel's past integrity provides a solid basis for future confidence in his continuing role as a prophet and a spiritual leader of the nation.

Some people have given a title to 1 Samuel 12 as "Samuel's farewell address." It is not a farewell address. He will have a very important continuing function in the theocracy. But Samuel, we are told in those early verses, has not used his position of leadership for any personal advantage. He's not obstructed or perverted justice and most particularly, he has not "taken" from the people. Do you remember that warning in 1 Samuel 8 that a king like the nations would "take." We read here that Samuel has not taken, he's not defrauded anyone, he's not oppressed anyone, he's not taken a bribe. His leadership has been a leadership that has been fully consistent with the requirements of covenantal law. He had performed his duties throughout his life as a true servant of the

Lord and the Lord's people.

In verses 6 to 12 Samuel turns from the character of his own previous leadership of the nation to the matter of the people's request for a king. Samuel viewed their request as a covenant breaking act and a serious apostasy. After asserting Yahweh's primacy in the establishing of the nation, you read in verse 6, Samuel said, "It is the Lord who appointed Moses and Aaron and brought your forefathers up out of Egypt." And after asserting that Samuel initiated the second legal preceding of the Gilgal assembly in verses 7-12. And contrary to what you might expect Samuel did not make the people's behavior in requesting a king the initial focus of attention. Instead, he used the judicial scrutiny of the righteous acts of Yahweh as a foil for illuminating their wicked conduct and thereby as an instrument for their indictment. You read in verse 7, Samuel says, "Now then stand here because I am going to confront you with evidence before the Lord as to all the righteous acts performed for you and your fathers (that's the NIV translation). More literally it is, "stand here because I am going to enter into legal proceedings with you before the Lord."

The summary of the Lord's righteous acts in verses 8-11 is designed to emphasize the constancy the Lord's covenant faithfulness toward his people in their past history. In contrast to their own unfaithfulness. It is the Lord who had delivered Israel out of Egypt. He had given them the land of Canaan. But Israel had repeatedly turned away from the Lord to idolatry.

It is significant that Samuel placed his own name among the list of deliverers that the Lord had sent. He does that in verse 11 because by so doing he brings this historical summary of the Lord's mighty righteous acts up to the point in time that the people expressed their desire to have a king like the nations round about. It is clear even in Israel's recent history the Lord had continued to provide for their security. In chapter 7 of 1 Samuel, it's Samuel who led the Israelites over the Philistines when the people repented and turned from their idols and returned to the Lord.

The climax of Samuel's historical summary is found in verse 12 where the people's desire for a king in order to find deliverance from the threat of Nahash the

Ammonite is explicitly represented as a rejection of the kingship of Yahweh, and thus the last in a long series of apostasies. You read in verse 12, Samuel says, “When you saw that Nahash the king of the Ammonites was moving against you, you said to me, ‘no we want a king to rule over us,’ even though the Lord your God was your king.” In verse 13 Samuel presented Saul to the people and emphasized that it was the Lord who had given them a king. Here’s the positive statement. Verse 13, “Now here is the king you have chosen the one you asked for, see the Lord has set a king over you. It was in God’s eternal purposes for Israel to have a king. So in spite of Israel’s apostasy it was the Lord’s desire to give Israel a king. Kingship from that day forward was intended to function as an instrument of the Lord’s rule over his people.

That brings us to verses 14 and 15. Verses 14 and 15 are important. Here Samuel confronts Israel with her continuing obligation of complete and total loyalty to Yahweh. Now that human kingship is being integrated into the structure of the theocracy. I think if you look at verses 14 and 15 you will find it in terms that you might call in the covenant formulary, the basic fundamental obligation that Israel has to Yahweh. These verses represent the basic stipulation of the Sinai covenant. And Samuel places that basic stipulation here in conditional terminology “if” in order to confront the people with the alternatives now open to them as they enter this new era of the monarchy. Obedience or disobedience to this basic stipulation will determine whether Israel experiences God’s blessing or curse in their future life as a nation.

Now that brings us into a translation issue in verse 14. There has long been general consensus of interpreters that verse 14 has a protasis that is the subordinate clause expressing the condition in the conditional sentence but lacks an apodosis. And the translation usually adopted for verse 14 is similar to that that you will find in the Revised Standard Version as well as in the NIV and it reads as follows, “If you will fear the Lord and serve and hearken to his voice and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord and if both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the Lord your God it will be well” is what the RSV says. The NIV just has the word “good.” If you will do all these

things good. Now that last phrase "it will be well or good," does not occur in the Masoretic text in the Hebrew Bible and it has to be added in order to complete the sentence if you have the protasis and no apodosis. That rendering of 1 Samuel 12:14 contrasts with the translation of the King James Version, the New American Standard version, the New Living Translation second edition text that all have in their translation what is really legitimately in the Hebrew text and that is that there is a protasis and an apodosis, both. And the verse breaks in the middle usually with the translation of the Hebrew there with a "then." So it reads this way. "If you fear the Lord and serve him and listen to his voice and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord [protasis] then [you start the apodosis] both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the Lord your God."

H.P. Smith, a commentator on First and Second Samuel, long ago argued and his conclusions have been followed right up to this day by many, to begin the apodosis in the middle of the verse with "then" [such as the King James and the NASB etc. do] is grammatically the right thing to do." Yet Smith claims that to do that produces a redundancy because it "makes an identical proposition." "If you fear Yahweh etc. then you will follow Yahweh." When one compares the structure of verse 14 with that of verse 15, however, it's clear that the apodosis does begin with "then" in the middle of the verse, as it's the same structure in verse 15. Smith's interpretation turns on his understanding of the last phrase: "Then you will follow after Yahweh," or more literally, "you will be after Yahweh." What's that mean? If you fear Yahweh then you will follow Yahweh. If you fear Yahweh, you serve him, listen to his voice, don't rebel against God, then you will follow Yahweh or be after Yahweh. That phrase occurs in identical wording in a number of other places in the Old Testament, including 2 Samuel 2:10, 15:13, 1 Kings 12:20, 1 Kings 16:21. If you look at its usage in those other places, in every one of them it is used to indicate that the people of Israel or a segment of the people have chosen to follow one particular king in a situation where there was another alternative. In 2 Samuel 2:10, the expression refers to the decision of Judah to follow David while Ish-Bosheth reigned over the remainder of the nation. And it says, "The

house of Judah, however, followed," or, was "after David." In 1 Kings 12:20, Judah followed the house of David instead of Jeroboam at the time of the division of the kingdom where you read, "Only the tribe of Judah remained loyal to the house of David," literally "was after the house of David." It's the same wording as in 1 Samuel 12:14.

When one understands the expression in this way and applies it to the situation of Israel at the time of the Gilgal assembly, then one can say that with the introduction of human kingship into the theocracy what you have created is the potential for divided loyalties between Yahweh and the human king. That has become a very real and potential danger. So what does Samuel do? He takes the old covenant conditional that has been stated many times through Exodus and Deuteronomy and Joshua, and it's given a new dimension. Samuel is challenging the people and their newly installed king to renew their determination to obey Yahweh and not to rebel against his commandments and to listen to his voice and to serve him, etc. And by doing so, to demonstrate that they continue to recognize Yahweh as their sovereign. Literally, they continue "to be after Yahweh."

Given this understanding of the phrase, it's not necessary, as Smith does, to conclude that the expression "if you fear Yahweh, and obey him, listen to his voice, and don't rebel against him, then you will follow Yahweh," is a redundancy, or an identical proposition. Rather than a redundancy, this is the expression of the covenant conditional in the terms of the new era that Israel was now entering. If Israel and her new king fear Yahweh and serve him and obey him and do not rebel against his commands, they will show what? That they continue to recognize Yahweh as their sovereign. Even though human kingship has been introduced into the structure of the theocracy. In other words, these two verses are saying that Israel must not replace her loyalty to Yahweh by loyalty to a human ruler should there ever be a conflict between the two, because if Israel rebels against the Lord, as verse 15 says, then the hand of the Lord will be against her just as it was against her disobedient ancestors. So these verses are saying quite pointedly, that Israel must continue to recognize Yahweh as her sovereign even after kingship has been

introduced into the structure of the theocracy. And Israel's human king must also recognize the supreme sovereignty of Yahweh over the nation.

In the final analysis, this means that Israel's expectation that a human king would guarantee national security was a fundamentally flawed idea. If Israel and her king do not submit themselves in trust and obedience to the Lord, the monarchy will be of no value. Everything still depends, even as it did in the past, on Israel's relationship with Yahweh.

In verses 16-22, the Lord gave his gathered people thunder and rain as a sign from heaven, at Samuel's request, to demonstrate that a right relationship with the Lord is the source of the wellbeing of the nation and to convince them of the seriousness of the apostasy in asking for a king. It was the time of wheat harvest, that's the middle of May to the middle of June; a time when it almost never rained. The sudden appearance of thunder and rain during this dry season startled the people into recognition and confession of their sin in asking for a king.

Let me just insert aside here: it sometimes suggests that this event should be understood not only as an authenticating sign, but as a theophany as well. And whatever position you might take on that question, its clear the people understood that the thunder and rain were not just an attestation of Samuel's words, but, at the same time, a revelation of the power of God. So while the authentication seems to be the primary function of the sign it may carry theophanic aspects as well, by revealing something of the awesomeness of the Lord's power. I think it's noteworthy that on this occasion, when Israel is being challenged to renew her loyalty to Yahweh, a sign is given that is similar to the one that accompanied the establishment of the covenant at Sinai when there were "thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain," Exodus 19:16. It is also a reminder of what happened at Mizpeh when the Lord thundered against the Philistines, throwing them into a panic so they were routed before Israel. Certainly it was a demonstration that the Lord was and is Israel's true deliverer. Samuel gave words of assurance to the people then. He said, "don't be afraid," after their reaction to the demonstration of God's power, and then admonished them to worship the Lord with all

their hearts and not turn away from following after him. That's the same wording, to go back to verse 14. They were to be after the Lord, to continue to recognize him as their sovereign.

Verse 20 says, "'Do not be afraid,' Samuel said, 'you have done all this evil, yet do not turn away from the Lord. But serve the Lord with all your heart.'" That statement, in a nutshell, is the fundamental obligation of the covenant relationship. Here, Samuel brings to focus the central issue in the controversy surrounding the establishment of kingship in Israel. The evil was not kingship in itself, but rather it was turning away from following after the Lord. The supreme obligation of the children of Israel has not changed with the establishment of the monarchy.

Their duty now, as it always has been, was to follow after the Lord, which was to worship the Lord with all their heart. The alternatives for Israel are clear. Verse 21: "Do not turn away or follow after useless idols (literally, nothingness). They can do you no good nor can they rescue you because they are useless." They could follow the Lord and find prosperity and security, or they could follow after, be after "nothingness." of anything that would exalt itself against the Lord. What I think Samuel is saying here was that Israel should not follow anything that subverted or replaced their worship of the Lord, be that a person, a king, a nation, a god, an idol, anything! For to follow anyone or anything to the detriment of the Lord was to follow a nothing and a nothing cannot deliver you.

Samuel followed this admonition with a restatement of the wonderful promise that the Lord would never abandon his people. For the sake of his great name, the Lord will not reject his people because the Lord was pleased to make you his own. Then in verses 23-25, Samuel described his own continuing function in the new order of the theocracy, that's in verse 23, and he concludes his remarks with a repetition of Israel's central covenant obligation, that's verse 24, followed by the threat of covenant curse if Israel apostatizes in verse 25. Samuel's statement in verse 23 is a clear indication he did not intend to withdraw from his role as national leader. This was not his "farewell address."

Verse 23 says, “As for me, far be it for me that I should sin against the Lord by failing to pray for you, and I will teach you the way that is good and right.” Samuel would continue not only to intercede for the people, a priestly function, but he would instruct them in their covenantal obligations. He would teach them the good and the right way. What’s the good and right way? It’s the way of the covenant. This continued activity of Samuel would prove to be of great significance for Saul. As Saul takes up his responsibilities as king, his actions will always be subject to the scrutiny of Samuel who would not hesitate to rebuke him should his conduct deviate from the regulations described in the law of the king (Deuteronomy 17) or from the regulations in the manner of the kingdom of 1 Samuel 10:25 from covenantal law, generally, or even from the word of the Lord given through himself, Samuel, or some other prophet.

But even more importantly, Samuel’s continuing activity, will set a pattern that will remain valid for all future occupants of the throne of Israel. Kings in Israel from this time forward would never possess autonomous authority. They would always be accountable to the prophets who followed in the line of Samuel. In Acts 3, it speaks of Samuel as first among the succession of prophets.

In verse 24, Samuel describes how the people could walk in that good and right way. He says, “Fear the Lord, serve him faithfully with all your heart. Consider what great things he has done for you.” Much as Joshua before him in Joshua 24, Samuel framed the core of Israel’s covenant obligations in words that demanded complete loyalty to Yahweh a loyalty born out of heartfelt gratitude for the great things that he had done for them. These great things included the Lord’s provisions for his people that Samuel had summarized earlier in the chapter in verse 8 and the following, but they also included the more recent victory over the Ammonites, the giving of a king in spite of the sinfulness of the peoples’ request, the sending of the thunder and rain as a sign of the Lord’s concern for the peoples’ well-being. Certainly the Lord had been gracious and faithful to his people. Their obligation was complete and total loyalty to him in gratitude for all he had done for them.

Samuel concluded the assembly by warning the people that persistence in turning

away from the Lord would ultimately lead to the destruction of the nation and of her king. This chapter has been treated in more detail than some others in First and Second Samuel because of its pivotal significance, not only in the books of Samuel, but in the whole of the Bible. The issues addressed in this chapter set the course for the flow of redemptive history throughout the remainder of the Old Testament into the New Testament, and for that matter, all the way into the *eschaton*. The reason for this is, this chapter tells us about the inauguration about the kingship in Israel. Kingship in Israel was distinctly different from kingship in any other nation, because it was a covenantal kingship. That is, it was designed to be an instrument of the Lord's rule of his people. Kingship carries a central role in the ongoing flow of redemptive history because of its close linkage with messianic expectation and the promise given to David in 2 Samuel that his dynasty would endure forever. When Israel's kings failed to live up to the covenantal ideal, the prophets began to speak of a divine human king who would some future day would establish peace and justice on the earth.

The New Testament records the initial coming of this king to his people, and the person of Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth. At his birth, and during his teaching ministry, Jesus was recognized and affirmed as the son of David. Just before his crucifixion, he came into Jerusalem riding on a donkey to publicly proclaim that he was the one whom the prophets had said would someday sit on the throne of David. Subsequently he affirmed before the Sanhedrin that he was the Messiah, even though at his first advent, his primary mission was to come in the role of the suffering servant who would make atonement for the sins of his people. The early church clearly understood that Jesus was indeed the Messiah promised in Old Testament scriptures, and the apostles were careful to explain why it was that Jesus was crucified, resurrected, and ascended to heaven. Both Jesus and the apostles spoke of a future day when Jesus would return and restore all things. In the last book of the Bible, the coming of the royal figure of the house of David, Revelation 22:16, was pictured in all the fullness and glory of the Messianic expectation of the Old Testament prophets.

So as we return to our discussion of First and Second Samuel, the striking thing is that the reign of Saul, Israel's first human king, proved to be a failure, because he did not live up to the requirements of his office. When he was rejected as king because of his disobedience to the word of the Lord, given to him through the prophet Samuel, he was replaced on the throne by David, who was characterized as "a man after God's own heart." David was then given the remarkable promise that his dynasty would endure forever (2 Samuel 7). This, however, brings us back to the theme of kingship and covenant and to the observation that kingship as practiced by Saul failed to correspond to the covenantal ideal. We'll consider this proposition in our next lecture.

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