

THE MORNING OF THE MONARCHY STUDIES IN FIRST SAMUEL LESSON 1

INTRODUCTION

For dramatic power, colorful characters, and sheer interest, 1 Samuel is unsurpassed. Where else can you find a religious leader the equal to Moses, a prince-hero as dashing as he is dedicated, and a dark lord, himself bigger than life? The book gives us a thundering giant, a beautiful woman, a murderous servant, and a frightening (and frightened) witch. Here are daring raids, narrow escapes, hideous holocausts, super-heroic escapades, pathos-filled friendships, and confrontations as touching as they are courageous. The characters seem to come to life again in its pages, evoking emotions in the reader that range from sympathy to indignation, admiration to disgust. Could you ever forget Samuel, Saul, Doeg, Abigail, Jonathan or David? Few ages demonstrate so well the biblical values of loyalty, trust, love, courage, respect, prayer, obedience and self-sacrifice. Everywhere is the evidence of God's providential Hand.

*Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And departing leave behind us
Footprints in the sands of time.*
- Longfellow, "A Psalm of Life"

1 Samuel is the book about Israel's transition from a loose tribal confederacy under a succession of national leaders, called judges, to a centralized monarchy. The narrator focuses upon three major characters: Samuel, the last of the judges; Saul, the first of the kings; and David, the greatest of the monarchs. It is the story of a people who got exactly what they asked for. They wanted a premature monarchy; they got an immature king. At another level *"the book provides us with an example of that pattern of obedience and blessing, disobedience and doom, which is written also into the Book of Judges and the Books of Kings. It provides an example in story form of the demands expressed so plainly in the exhortations of the book of Deuteronomy."*

-- The Cambridge Bible Commentary

But the book is both broader and deeper than all of this. It pictures the personal God working out His purposes, patiently condescending here, setting aside institutions there, letting men run with the tenuous reigns of freedom, and at the same time determining all outcomes by the counsel of His own will. The pure theocracy was too spiritual for the unbelieving character of the people. A mediated theocracy would better fit their temperament. The judges are no more, but kings and priests and prophets now filled the stage of history. Ultimately the book is about the great questions of life: How does God deal with men? What is the nature of His purpose and what is the required human response?

I. BIBLICAL BACKGROUND

It all began with Abraham. Called by God, he left his home in Chaldea and traveled to the shores of the Mediterranean land then called Canaan. God promised him all the land from the river of Egypt to the river Euphrates (Gen. 12:7; 13:14-17; 15:18-21), and reconfirmed that covenant with his son Isaac and his grandson, Jacob. Because of famine Jacob had to leave the land. With his eleven sons and their families he joined his rejected but now prominent son, Joseph, in Egypt (Genesis chapters 46-50). Egypt became the incubator for the young band of twelve brothers with two factors contributing to their growth. They were favored by Joseph's Pharaoh connection to be given one of the most fertile delta areas called Goshen, and since being a shepherd was a distasteful occupation to the Egyptians, they were left alone. Even when a later Pharaoh subjected them to slavery, they continued to increase. By the time of the Exodus, some 400 years after Abraham, they recorded a population of two million people. Through a

THE MORNING OF THE MONARCHY, LESSON 1

series of miraculous plagues, God forced the Egyptian government to allow the tribes to emigrate under the leadership of Moses. Taking a large crowd of riffraff and a great deal of wealth with them, they crossed the Red Sea and set out to claim the promise of Canaan. A year later, at Sinai, the God who had liberated them gave them the conditions of His covenant. They were to keep a code of laws governing civil, moral and religious life; if the covenant was broken, atonement had to be made. God told Moses to construct a portable sanctuary and to appoint the family of Aaron as a priesthood to offer animal sacrifices (Exodus). After constructing the Tabernacle, the men were mustered into an organized army and the tribes left Sinai with banners waving and trumpets blowing. The future should have been all brightness and success.

But despite the fact that God provided food, clothing, water and victories, there was a constant spirit of discontent, grumbling and rebellion on the part of the people. This culminated in their fearful and faithless refusal to enter the strongly fortified land at Kadesh-barnea, on the border of southern Canaan. As an act of judgment for their rebellion and disbelief, God refused them entrance and caused them to remain in that area for 38 more years until all the first generation died in the wilderness.

One of the two men who had remained faithful at Kadesh was a young general named Joshua. He was appointed to take Moses' place of leadership and direct the new generation in the military liberation of the land of Canaan. Following the death of Moses, Joshua rallied the troops, crossed the Jordan and began the conquest. Aaron's son Eleazar was the high priest and the ark of God was in their midst. It took them only seven years.

In three lightning stabs, Joshua broke the back of the Canaanite nations and in the seventh year the two million Israelites were partitioning the land on both sides of the Jordan. Joshua released the tribes from military unity to go each to his own inheritance. The first phase of the conquest had been completed; now the settlement and colonization had to begin.

Moses had previously granted land on the east bank of the Jordan to Reuben, Gad and one half of the tribe of Manasseh. The other nine and a half tribes received a portion of the land by lot. However, the actual possession of the territory assigned each tribe was only gradually achieved. The boundaries and allocations were extremely idealistic and very seldom ever realized by any of the tribes. The major concern of the tribes at the time of the death of Joshua is reflected in the question raised in Judges 1:1, "...Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites...?" (The term "Canaanite" referred to all the ethnic groups of Canaan). This marked the beginning of a very long, slow process covering a period of about 350 years.

That age of the world was the dim twilight of history. It was a time of much movement, of great heroes and heroic characters, of the birth of nations destined to greatness. History, both mythical and real, tells of the clashing of race with race, fierce struggles for territory, and the wars of new settlers with old inhabitants. There was a recklessness about human life, and there were exciting stories of the heroic deeds and wild adventures of a few great leaders. The various cultures all sported a taste for riddles and a habit of making vows. The literature of the time shows the interference of gods and angels in human affairs and consultations of oracles as commonplace. Throughout most of the known world there was the same general condition of human society at the same epoch of the world.

It was an age when the organized political and social structure had given way to individualistic, charismatic leadership, with all of its attendant values and excesses. Such an era is commonly known as an "Heroic Age." The tribal or national feelings that bind people together give way to an emphasis on personal leadership, often from the aristocratic warrior or landowner class. Individualism predominates. The ingredients that make up the heroic character are bravery, an exaggeration of physical prowess, passion, hospitality and a commitment to romantic love. Music and poetry, the stuff of which oral epic is made, often mark the hero's life as much as his abilities in war or work.

The age of the Judges was such an age. It differed widely from the centralized and disciplined time of the Exodus and the conquest. From the death of Joshua onwards, there was a complete change in the political and social structure. When last seen in the Book of Joshua, the twelve tribes were gathered in unity at Shechem renewing their covenant and unity before Yahweh. They were bound together by common loyalty to God, the Tabernacle and their leader. In the book of Judges, however, not half of the tribes were able to work together and the basic values tended to be individualistic rather than national. The Tabernacle is never mentioned; the ark only once. In spite of the charismatic leadership of nine

THE MORNING OF THE MONARCHY, LESSON 1

political and military leaders called "Judges," the moral and political and religious climate continued to deteriorate.

The intermixing of various religious and moral values had taken the heart out of the worship of Jehovah. Even the Tabernacle worship seems to have been contaminated with religious profiteering and prostitution (1 Sam. 2:12-17, 22-25). Victories of this time cannot in any way be ascribed to the leadership of the men involved. Weak, vengeful and caught up with the world's value system, they are evidences that the purposes of God cannot be stopped by the wiles of Satan or the weaknesses of the men God chooses to use. The stage was being set for the entrance of the monarchs.

In fact, Judges seems to be a tract produced to promote the acceptance of a king and the institution of the monarchy. Israel was supposed to have been a model for all nations of a theocracy (a rule by God), but her disobedience resulted in personal and national chaos. The request for a king in 1 Samuel 8:5 looks both backward and forward. Judges was written about this time or in the early days of the monarchy to give portraits of typical judges (Judges chapters 3-16), and to show how, in spite of these great charismatic leaders, there was a steady decline in the religious (chapters 17 and 18), moral (chapter 19) and social (chapters 20-21) life of the nation. All of this was attributed by the writer to the absence of kingship when "everyone did that which was right in his own eyes" (Jud. 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). But God never deserted them. Neither did He just let them go their own way. He actively punished them until they would in repentance turn back to Him. So it is with God's people in every age.

In the shadows of that darkness stood our God. He interwove international, national, and personal events to bring about His purposes of teaching them the devastation that comes with unfaithfulness and His gracious rescue that comes with repentance. God is truly the hero of the book. Man's weakness and sin is incurable. The last chapters review the religious, moral and political degeneration of the people and leave us longing for a righteous judge and a flawless hero and a stable government. Enter Samuel and the monarchy.

II. ISRAEL'S ARCHENEMY - THE PHILISTINES

The events of the books of Samuel are played out against the background of the continuing hostilities of a rival population who had appeared in Canaan around 1200 B.C. with the arrival of a wave of "sea people" known in the Bible as "Philistines."

A. Their Territory

The Philistine people migrated from the Aegean region, particularly Crete, Biblical Caphtor. Though in Canaan during patriarchal times, they came in force about the first quarter of the twelfth century, BC. But even by the time of Moses, the Philistines had created a separate nation in the land and possessed fully the seacoast plain from the river of Egypt to Ekron in the north. They had a confederacy of five cities (originally Canaanite): Gaza (the leading one), Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath and Ekron (always put last). Each city had its tyrant (Jos. 13:3 "lords").

Philistia, where they had settled, is an undulating plain, 32 miles long and from 9 to 16 miles wide, ranging from 0 to 30 to 300 feet above sea level. Their long narrow plain gave its name to the entire land -- "Palestine" meaning "Philistine land." It was famed for its fertility in corn, vines, and olives (Jud. 15:5), so that it was the refuge from times of famine (2 Ki. 8:2). Its flatness was suited to war chariots, while the low hills of its eastern side afforded sites for fortresses. For Egypt, Arabia and Phoenicia it was the major thoroughfare for commerce.

B. Their Culture

We know more of the Philistines than almost any of the other inhabitants of Palestine, both from Scripture and archaeology. The Philistines were of a higher cultural class than either the Canaanites or the Israelites, and had accumulated great wealth (Jud. 16:5, 18). They were skilled as blacksmiths (1 Sam. 13:19-22), and their images, carvings of golden mice and "tumors," and their armor imply excellence in the arts (1 Sam. 6:11). They were equally religious, carrying their idols with them in war (2 Sam. 5:21) and recounting their victories in the house of their gods (2 Sam. 1:20). They worshipped Dagon (Jud. 16:23) (called the father of Baal by the Canaanites), Ashtaroth (1 Sam. 31:10), Baalzebub (2 Ki. 1:2-6), and Derceto (probably the female deity, with the face of a woman and body of a fish of whom our mermaid is derived). They had priests and fortunetellers (1 Sam. 5:5; Isa. 2:6).

THE MORNING OF THE MONARCHY, LESSON 1

Our modern use of the word "Philistine" for a rude and barbaric person does not come from their lack of culture but perhaps from the fact that they were uncircumcised. Samson's father used the term (Jud. 14:3) as a typical pejorative epithet in a time when most other ancient Middle Easterners were circumcised.

C. Their Military History

1. Patriarchal times

A few Philistine settlements had been present in Palestine (cf. Gen. 21:32-34; 26:1-18) as far back as the days of Abraham, but the Philistines arrived in large numbers during the invasion of the Sea Peoples from Crete about the time of Israel's entry into Canaan.

2. Conquest and judges' periods

Though the Philistine land was allotted to Israel, it was never permanently occupied (Jos. 13:2; 15:45-47; Jud. 1:18; 3:5, 31; 13:1-16:31). Neither Shamgar nor Samson delivered Israel permanently from the Philistines. Planting advanced military posts in Israel's territory (1 Sam. 10:5; 13:3, 17), the Philistines sent out marauders so that travelers could not go by the highways (Jud. 5:6) and the Israelites hid from the Philistines in caves or else fled beyond the Jordan (1 Sam. 13:6-7).

3. The time of the monarchy

The effort to deliver the nation from the Philistines was continued unsuccessfully under Eli (1 Sam. 4), successfully under Samuel (1 Sam. 7:9-14), Saul (1 Samuel chapters 13, 14, 17), and David (2 Sam. 5:17-25; 1 Chron. 11:16-18; 14:8-16).

David took their images, and pursuing them to Gezer, and then taking Gath, so won the supremacy from the Philistines that from then on they were contained in their own land. (1 Chron. 18:1; 2 Sam. 8:1; 21:15-22). Solomon made them pay tribute (1 Ki. 4:21). The Egyptian Pharaoh took Gezer at the north head of the Philistine plain and gave it as his daughter's marriage payment to Solomon (1 Ki. 9:16-17). Solomon fortified both Gezer and Beth-horon, allowing him to command the passes from the Philistine plain to the central region.

4. The captivity era

Nebuchadnezzar overran their cities on his way to Egypt (Jer. 47:), but after the Babylonian captivity, the Philistines again renewed their old hatred of Israel causing Ezekiel to predict their destruction (Ezek. 25:15-17). Alexander the Great, fulfilling prophecy (Zeph. 2:4-5; Zech. 10:5-6) bound the governor Betis to his chariot by thongs thrust through his feet, and dragged him around the city. Alexander killed 10,000 and sold the rest as slaves.

D. The Philistine Cities

1. Timnah

Timnah was a subsidiary of Ekron located about 3½ miles east of Ekron. It was about 5 miles from Zorah. The border between Philistia and Judah ran between the two cities.

2. Ashkelon

This sea coast city was about 30 miles southeast of Timnah.

3. Gaza

Another major Philistine capital visited by Samson, Gaza was over 40 miles toward the coast from Zorah. Hebron, toward which Samson carried the gates of Gaza, was about 40 miles east of Gaza.

III. THE WRITER(S) OF I SAMUEL

After the Pentateuch (the first five books of Moses in the Old Testament), it is impossible to dogmatically assign an author or a date to the historical books. In the Hebrew text, 1 and 2 Samuel are simply "Samuel." They are part of three sets of "double books": 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament (called the Septuagint and completed before the time of Christ), 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings are entitled the book of the "Kingdoms."

The title "Samuel" cannot indicate authorship, since Samuel's death is recorded before the end of the first book. Although he is a major figure in the first book, the title probably does not refer to him as subject because David plays by far an even greater part. The events recorded cover over a century and many accounts read like eye-witness reports or contemporary documents. The work seems to be not so much a history composed from a study of sources as a series of biographies written by compiling the

THE MORNING OF THE MONARCHY, LESSON 1

sources themselves. Because of references to "Israel" and "Judah" as separate (11:8; 17:52; and 18:16) and the expression "kings of Judah" (27:6) we know that the writer(s) must have lived after Solomon's death (930 BC) and the division of the kingdom.

But if Samuel was not the writer, the name still is fitting because it was Samuel who brought the nation out of the shadows and into the dawning of an entirely new era. He was at the same time the last of the judges (Acts 13:20), the first of the (official) prophets (Acts 3:24; Heb. 11:32), and the crowner of Israel's first king and of her greatest king.

IV. THE DATE OF EVENTS

By the last third of the period of the Judges there were two or more conflicts being waged at the same time, and two or more judges working contemporaneously. Eli, a priest who was practically a father to Samuel (the major figure in the first book that bears his name), was a contemporary of Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon, and Samson. Elon, Abdon, and Samson were still judging when Samuel began to serve. The phrase "the land had rest" is never used in the second period of the book of Judges. Some nation somewhere was always stirring up trouble. It would seem that as sin more and more eroded the social and religious structure, there was a greater need for leadership to give an extra measure of civil control. God not only raised up more minor judges during this brief time but also gave a greater concentration of major judges to this period. This is seen when Eli and Samuel (from the Book of Samuel) are added to the list of Jephthah and Samson.

The period covered by the two books of Samuel stretches for about 150 years. It begins with Eli who had already been judging Israel in 1120 B.C., with the birth of Samuel, and ends with the passing of the monarchy to Solomon at about 970 B.C. Except for the dates of David's birth and death (2 Sam. 5:4-5), most other dates can only be approximated. A possible chronology would be as follows:

- 📖 1225 ? Eli was already a priest (30 years old -- see Nu. 4:3) when Samuel was born. He lived 98 years and was a judge for 40 years (1 Sam. 4:15-18)
- 📖 Birth of Samuel (1 Sam. 1:20) Samuel is well up in years when Israel asks for a king (1 Sam. 8:1-4).
- 📖 Birth of Saul
- 📖 1078-1072 - Jephthah
- 📖 1075-1055 - Samson
- 📖 1050 - Saul anointed to be king (1 Sam. 10:1)
- 📖 Birth of David
- 📖 David anointed to be Saul's successor (1 Sam. 16:1-13)
- 📖 1010 - Death of Saul and beginning of David's reign over Judah in Hebron (2 Sam. 1:1; 2:1, 4, 11)
- 📖 1003 - Beginning of David's reign over all Israel and capture of Jerusalem (2 Sam. 5)
- 📖 David's wars (2 Sam. 8:1-14)
- 📖 Birth of Solomon (2 Sam. 12:24; 1 Ki. 3:7; 11:42)
- 📖 David's census (2 Sam. 24:1)
- 📖 End of David's reign (2 Sam. 5:4-5; 1 Ki. 2:10-11)

V. THE PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

We have recorded in these books the change in the governments of Israel from a theocracy to a kingdom with a monarchy. Samuel is to the kingdom what Moses was to the theocracy (rule by God) and sets the monarchy in the greater context of that theocracy by calling the people to repentance and a renewed covenant with Jehovah (1 Sam. 10:25; 11:15-12:25). The purpose is not simply to tell us about Samuel's virtues, Saul's defects and David's successes, but about God's activities during an important phase of Israel's history. The books of Samuel are not just history but theology too. Above all, they provide a study in ideal leadership. From them we are to learn that:

1. God overrules in human affairs and plays an active role in them.
2. God always acts in the best interests of His people.
3. God has designed appropriate leadership for His people.
4. God is present with His people and frequently reveals His presence in a variety of ways -- in the sanctuary, through the prophets, in the actions of history for their benefit.

(adapted from Payne's Daily Study Bible Series)

THE MORNING OF THE MONARCHY, LESSON 1

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 2

1. READ LESSON 1 AND:

(a) Mark the ideas that were new and/or especially interesting to you.

(b) Since there were prophets before Samuel, why do we call him "the first of the prophets"?

READ 1 SAMUEL, CHAPTER 1

2. What were the circumstances behind Hannah's prayer?

3. What did Hannah vow to the Lord?

READ 1 SAMUEL, CHAPTER 2

4. What characteristics (or attributes) of God do we learn from Hannah's praise in 2:1-10?

5. What are some characteristics of a Godly woman that we can learn from Hannah in both chapters?

6. How were Eli's sons misusing their office of priest?

7. What prophecy did the man of God give concerning Eli's wicked sons?

8. List some contrasts between Hannah and Eli as persons and parents.

READ CHAPTER 3

9. How did Samuel show himself fit for the office of prophet?