

# THE MORNING OF THE MONARCHY STUDIES IN FIRST SAMUEL LESSON 4

## DAYS OF TRANSITION

### I. THE RETURN OF THE ARK 7:1-2

#### A. The Resting of the Ark

When last seen, the ark had just been the occasion of the death of many men of Beth-shemesh. Beth-shemesh was a town given to priests, and the men should have known better than to look into the ark. They called the men of Kiriath-jearim to take the ark. Kiriath-jearim, if translated today, or if a city in America was so named, would be called "Woodland" or "Woodtown." Some kind of a sanctuary may have been there. We do know that in that area there was a huge rock, on which the tabernacle or a part of it was probably set up, and certainly where the ark was placed. A huge outcropping about 30 feet by 50 feet is still there. It is 10 feet high above the surrounding area. The men of "Woodtown" brought the ark to "the house of Abinadab on the hill [actually, on this huge rock] and consecrated Eleazar his son to keep the ark of the LORD (1 Sam. 7:1).

#### B. The Yoke of the Philistines

The twenty years of 1 Sam. 7:2 does not refer to how long the ark stayed at Kiriath-jearim; it stayed there much longer than that. The twenty years refers to the fact that they lamented after the Lord. In other words, twenty years went by before there was any deliverance from the yoke of the Philistines.

#### C. The Sorrow of Israel

The young grandson of Eli, Ichabod, was now twenty years old and Israel was not delivered. Why does God withhold Himself? They finally come to Samuel and he told them what to do (1 Sam. 7:3). They had lamented, grieved, and complained for twenty years but it had done them no good. Why? Because they tried to compromise with God. They wanted to hold on to the worship of God and their own idols, too. They still wanted to play around with Ashtaroth. Their cry was not repentance; it was mere sorrow for the situation.

### II. THE REPENTANCE OF ISRAEL 7:3-4

In response to Samuel's admonition, they did repent. "So the sons of Israel removed the Baals and the Ashtaroth and served the LORD alone." It no doubt took some time for them to get rid of their gods, to break down the high places where they worshipped them, to stop the celebrations that went along with the worship of Baal and Ashtaroth, and serve God alone. When Samuel saw that they were serious, he said, "Gather all Israel to Mizpah." We don't know exactly where Mizpah was geographically. It means a "watchtower." It may be a place about seven miles north of Jerusalem where there is a high place and a hill. Some have identified it with Mount Scopus, which means "watchplace" and is just on the east side of Jerusalem, and north of the Mount of Olives. It was a place where they had gathered before, and, later in Israel's history they gather there again.

### III. THE REVIVAL AND VICTORY AT MIZPAH 7:5-13

#### A. The Offering of Samuel 5-6

Samuel "drew water and poured it out before the LORD." This is the only mention of this kind of an offering with the exception of the New Testament practice. For example, at the Pool Siloam during the Feast of Tabernacles they poured out water as an offering. (It was at that point that our Lord cried out, "I am the water of life, he who drinks of Me shall never thirst" -- John 7:37.) But

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there is no command for this kind of an offering. It may have recognized the scarcity of water in a dry land and it would have been symbolic of their offering one of their most precious things to God.

### **B. The Attack of the Philistines 7**

Now when the Philistines heard that the sons of Israel had gathered at Mizpah, the lords of the Philistines attacked. It may be that they took advantage of them celebrating a holy day as Egypt and Syria did a few years ago at the Day of Atonement War in Israel. They may have attacked because they thought if Israel was having a religious rally, that pretty soon she was going to want to throw off the yoke of tyranny. "And when the sons of Israel heard it, they were afraid of the Philistines." Well might they be. Those mighty iron chariots were a terror to them.

### **C. The Sacrifice for Israel 8-10**

"Then the sons of Israel said to Samuel, 'Do not cease to cry to the LORD our God for us, that He may save us from the hand of the Philistines.'" Samuel was no military man. He offered no military strategy at any point in his lifetime. He was a man of God who was a man of prayer and he knew the necessity of sacrifice (1 Sam. 7:9). A burnt offering in Scripture is always a picture of dedication. It was a picture of the offering of the pure body of Christ to the Lord on the cross of Calvary. When Israel was dedicated to the Lord, He answered with a confusing thunderstorm.

### **D. The Defeat of the Philistines 11-12**

The Philistines were subdued and they did not come any more within the border of Israel. This does not mean that the Philistines were run out of the land, nor that they did not control some of it, but at least there was peace and Israel was given back many of the cities that had been taken in the war twenty years before. The word "Ebenezer" means "a stone of help." Ebenezer was a memorial that was to remind them that God had helped them.

### **E. The Pattern of Repentance**

This incident is a tremendous picture of what true repentance is:

- 1. Crying out to God, realizing the need, was not enough.**
- 2. There had to be a confession of sin (v. 6). They said, "We have sinned against the Lord."**
- 3. Also there was a turning from idols. "If you return to the LORD with all your heart."**
- 4. The evidence of that return was to remove the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from them.**

### **F. The Pattern of Judgment**

There were three major judgments in Israel's history, all of them ending with the destruction of the sanctuary. When Shiloh was destroyed, a major era in Israel's history came to an end. The period of the judges ended, and the period of the kings began with the destruction of the sanctuary at Shiloh. The second period ended at the Babylonian captivity when Jerusalem was trodden down by the Gentiles and the temple was destroyed. That began the period of the Captivity. Some of them returned for a brief period during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah and built the second temple. The Second Temple remained through New Testament times and that period also ended with a judgment, when in 70 A.D. Jerusalem was taken by Titus and the temple was left without one stone upon another. This present era will also end with judgment when the man of sin places himself and his idolatry in the sanctuary in Jerusalem. It always ends with the temple and with idolatry.

### **G. The Reasons for Idolatry**

There were several reasons why Israel was always going back to its idolatry:

#### **1. It was pleasurable.**

The worship of the pagans around them was entertaining, whereas the worship of Jehovah was very plain, very stark and very somber.

#### **2. It was fashionable.**

The fashion of all of the Canaanites was the worship of Baal and the worship of Ashtaroth. The Israelites coming into that land were the minority. They looked different, acted differently and were out of style.

#### **3. It was non-demanding.**

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There were no moral demands; there were no commandments. Only Hammurabi, an Ammonite, had any kind of law in those days and religion had nothing to do with it.

### **4. It was successful.**

The Israelite would look at all the grain in the fertile valleys and, not knowing anything about agriculture, would believe his Baal-worshipping neighbors when told that the fertility rites gave them the harvest. Israel could have had the same success if she had remained true to Jehovah.

### **5. It was sensual.**

We have already talked about the immorality.

C.S. Lewis was once asked by a group of college students, "What religion will make me the happiest?" Lewis thought for awhile and then he said, "Well, I don't really know an answer to that, but I guess if I had to answer right off, I'd say, first of all, that the religion that won't make you happy in this life is Christianity." That shocked me when I first heard that. But he continued, "I guess if I had to say a religion that will make you the happiest in this life would be the worship of yourself." All other worship comes down to that -- a worship of self-gratification, a worship of wanting to use God to get things for yourself, and that's idolatry.

## **H. The Memorial of Ebenezer**

But Israel repented and put away the Baal and the Ashtaroth and they began to worship Jehovah alone. Then God gave them victory. And so they raised the Ebenezer. "Hitherto hath the Lord helped." Did you recognize the place "Ebenezer"? It was at the very place where they had been defeated twenty years before (1 Sam. 4:4) -- the same battleground where now God gives them success -- that is where Samuel put the stone. The battleground of defeat became the memorial of success.

## **IV. THE MINISTRY OF SAMUEL 7:15-17**

### **A. As Priest**

After the destruction of Shiloh, Samuel returned to his home at Ramah (1:1), where he built an altar. It would appear that the tabernacle was in some way damaged or desecrated at Shiloh, and/or with the deaths of Eli's sons there were no consecrated priests, so God allowed a temporary provision for sacrifice at other sites through Samuel (cf. 1 Sam. 16:2-5) until the tabernacle was once again established at Jerusalem. God is God and He can by-pass His own appointed institutions when they fail to perform His will.

### **B. As Judge and Prophet**

The period of peace gave Samuel the opportunity to act as a circuit-riding judge and educator, beginning at Ramah and going to the sacred places of Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah where people would be likely to congregate. The greater part of his life was spent in this ministry. He probably began the "school of the prophets" at this time (1 Sam. 19:20; 10:5, 10; see also the "sons of the prophets" with whom Elijah and Elisha were associated -- 1 Ki. 20:35). They were small communities of men who banded together, especially in decadent times, for encouragement and instruction from each other in exercising their prophetic gifts.

## **V. THE REQUEST FOR A MONARCHY 8:1-5**

### **A. The Failure of Samuel's Sons**

Samuel's sons did not live up to their names and Samuel's high hopes for them (Joel = Yahweh is God; Abijah = Yahweh is father). However, it is hard to believe that their failure in Beersheba, which had no political or religious significance, was cause enough to warrant the call for a king. Although their conduct, perhaps learned from Hophni and Phinehas, was abominable, the elders simply used it as an excuse to launch their desires for a monarchy.

### **B. The Reasons for the Request**

The attraction of an institution like a monarchy was the stability it gave the country because of the centralization of power with its efficiency and single approach to problems. Israel was in sore need of such unity. Each tribe had gone its own way with no real leadership continuity since Joshua. So to the elders, a monarchy made good sense; but their demand left God entirely out of account. Israel's problems had not been political; they had been spiritual and moral. The Book of Judges

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teaches that clearly. A monarchy would allow the leaders to sidestep such issues. They gave three reasons for wanting a king:

1. **To judge us (v. 20)**
2. **To lead us in military conquest (v. 20)**
3. **To be like all the other nations (vs. 5, 20).**

### VI. THE IMPLICATIONS OF A MONARCHY 8:6-18

#### A. The Implications for Samuel 6-7

Samuel took the request personally, although a just king would be more of a theocracy than the rule by Samuel's unjust sons.

#### B. The Implications for God 7-9

God assures Samuel that it is God Himself that they are rejecting by refusing to make the theocracy work.

#### C. The Implications for the People 10-18

Samuel spelled out for the people what a king would require. Even a good king would bring with his reign several burdens:

1. **Military conscription 11**
2. **Forced labor 12-13**
3. **Appropriation of land 14**
4. **Taxation 15, 17**
5. **Appropriation of laborers 16**
6. **Misery 18**

### VII. THE DIVINE APPROVAL OF THE MONARCHY 8:19-2

In spite of Samuel's bleak picture, the elders still insisted on a king. God's plan all along had been a monarchy within the theocracy, culminating in the rule of the Messiah as the God-king (Gen. 49:10; Dt. 17:14; Lk. 1:32-33). This request was a rejection of God because it was from the wrong motives of attempting to escape the real issue of the nation's broken covenant with God, and their wanting to reject their holiness and be like other nations. Nevertheless God acquiesced to their desires.

### VIII. THE SELECTION OF THE FIRST KING 9:1-27

#### A. Saul's Family 9:1-2

His family tribe was Benjamin (v.1). This small tribe's geographic position made it the ideal tribe for a king. Being a neutral buffer-zone between the two powerful tribes Ephraim and Judah, a king from Benjamin would be no threat and would be able to unite the tribes or at least reduce the rivalries that had so often kept them from uniting for victory.

#### B. Saul's "Coincidental" Search for Samuel 9:3-10

Saul is pictured as a donkey herder (perhaps a jibe at the stubbornness of the nation) who is completely ignorant of the political and religious situation, knowing nothing about Samuel. In fact, it is a series of coincidences which brought them together. But it is obvious in the story that God overruled in all these apparently trivial circumstances. Saul's interest was in his search for some lost donkeys of his father's, and the only reason he sought out Samuel was that he was known as a "seer" and could "see" what other people could not ("seer" was thus the old name for prophets, mentioned in 9:9).

#### C. God, Samuel and Saul 9:11-27

Throughout this passage Samuel is presented as a prophet. He realizes that he will have to relinquish political leadership to Saul, but God reaffirms his position as a prophet. His prophetic office is proven by three things:

1. **He could foresee the future (v. 15f.).**
2. **He knew events hidden from others (v. 20).**
3. **The Word of God came through him.**

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These prophetic gifts provided a balance for the monarchy and welded it together with the theocracy, making the prophet invaluable. Verse 16 shows that one of the reasons God allowed the monarchy at this time was to answer the people's cry for help from the domination of the Philistines. Note Saul's humility in verse 21:

*It is important to note that, in spite of the gloomy analysis of kingship given in chapter 8, and in spite of the glaring defects that Saul was later to exhibit, this chapter presents him in a very good light, beginning with his outstanding physique and appearance (which seem to have been important matters in those days). He was a good man, and his later achievements show that he was in many respects an able man. Everything, indeed, seemed to be favorable; Saul could have been the ideal king for Israel, and at this point in time there was nothing to stop him achieving true greatness. It was not to be; but the fault "is not in our stars, but in ourselves", as Shakespeare has Cassius say to Brutus. -- Payne*

### CONCLUSION:

This section shows the historical circumstances and reasons for the transition from the chaotic period of the Judges to the centralized monarchy. God is still "within the shadows keeping watch upon His own." History is always His story. He is the blessed controller of all things, the One "Who works all things after the counsel of His own will" (Eph. 1:11). For the child of God there is no such thing as "luck" or "chance." And coincidence is but God's way of remaining anonymous.

In the midst of a world that seems to be out of control, the believer must balance two primary attitudes:

**(1) Rest and pray as if it all depended on God.**

**(2) Work and witness as if it all depended on you. In other words,**

"Trust and obey,  
for there's no other way  
to be happy in Jesus,  
but to trust and obey."

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### QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 5

#### READ LESSON 4.

- a) Mark what was new, interesting, or questionable to you.
- b) How do you see the hand of God in the events of the transition period?

#### READ 1 SAMUEL 10-12.

3. What was the private ceremony of coronation between Samuel and Saul? (Compare Ps.23:5)
4. What three signs did Samuel tell Saul he would be given to know that God had chosen him?
5. In 10:9-27, what clues to Saul's early appearance and personality are seen?
7. Samuel probably transcribed Deuteronomy 17:14-20 in 1 Samuel 10:25. Note the fulfillment of Moses' prophecy. What were "the ordinances of the Kingdom"?
8. What means did Saul use to call the tribes together to battle?
9. Locate on a map Jabesh-gilead, Gibeon, Bezek, and Gilgal.
10. Why do you think Samuel chose Gilgal for the national coronation?
11. What trait do you see in Saul's character in 11:12-13?
12. Compare the roles of prophet and king in 12:1-5 and 8:11-18. Which is best characterized by the key word "take"?
13. Why will God not abandon His people (12:22)?
14. Memorize 1 Samuel 12:23.