

"WALK THRU THE BIBLE: I SAMUEL."

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for Sermon: I Samuel 1:1-2; 8:4-9, 19-22; 15:22-23

Introduction:

We come to the three double books of the OT that cover the entire history of the rise and fall of the Israelite monarchy, I and II Samuel, I and II Kings, I and II Chronicles. These six books cover about 500 years of the kings of Israel (1095 -586 BC). In these books we learn about Israel's transition to a monarchy and how that monarchy succeeded and failed.

In the original Hebrew Bible they were three books, one scroll each. They weren't separated until the OT was later translated into Greek, called the Septuagint, these books were divided into two parts around the second century BC.

Samuel is the likely author of I Samuel, and I Chronicles 29:29 indicates that II Samuel may have been written by Nathan or Gad and members of the school of the prophets.

Of course the real author is the Holy Spirit through the instrument of men.

II Peter 1:21 No prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

I Samuel.

I and II Samuel contain stories well-known to Christians and non-Christians. These books have inspired movies, novels, poetry, and countless sports analogies. Who doesn't love a good David and Goliath victory and defeat, like Sweden beating China in table tennis.

I Samuel covers the period of from the time of the last judge, the birth of Samuel, through his prophetic ministry to the rise, fall and death of King Saul the first king of Israel, a period of about 110 years, 1120 to 1011 BC.

II Samuel covers the period of the reign of King David, about 40 more years.

The story of God's redemptive purposes for history takes some huge steps forward in these two books. I Samuel is another foundational book and is key to understanding the next five books about the monarchy and key to understanding the rest of the Bible and God's kingship and kingdom.

In Judges we charted the path through about 200 years of social upheaval and chaos with everyone doing what was right in their own eyes. That period of Judges ended with the statement "In those days there was no king in Israel."

I Samuel follows the lives of three great leaders of the nation of Israel during a time of great leadership crisis that led to a historic transition in Israel. The birth and life of Samuel, the rise and fall of Saul, and the early life of young David, the future anointed king.

The book divides clearly along the lives of these three men. The tale of three leaders.

I Samuel 1-7, Samuel, the last of the judges and first of prophets.

I Samuel 8-14, Saul, the first of the kings.

I Samuel 15-31, David, the greatest of the kings, a man after God's heart.

We are all keenly aware of the importance of good leadership and of good government. And we are keenly aware of the chaos and trouble that comes from bad leadership and bad government.

We should regularly thank God for the mercy and grace of living in America as opposed to Haite, Somalia, North Korea or Venezuela.

Leadership is supremely important, not just in our day, but in every culture in every age. Leadership matters in politics, business, sports, entertainment, religion, education, and home and family. Leadership touches all our lives all the time.

We all allow certain leaders to influence our lives, and we reject the leadership influence of others. Furthermore we all have leaders in our lives and we are all leaders somewhere, somehow to someone.

Two factors influenced the leadership crisis in Israel, one outside and one inside. Outside the Philistines were gaining a foothold along the Mediterranean coast and were a growing menace pushing into Israel. On the inside, the prophet Eli was aging and his two sons were worthless men, abusing their leadership and power in evil ways. Their leadership was corrupt.

God's solution to Israel's leadership problems will not come from the expected places. We must die to our pride and insistent expectation that what we need or are looking for will come from the famous, powerful, rich, influential, impressive by world standards. We are too drawn to impressive leaders, not godly ones.

God raises up a leader from an obscure place from an unknown barren woman. Samuel takes the place of Eli whose sons were evil. One phrase sums them up, "They did not know the Lord" (I Samuel 2:12).

So Samuel begins. Then in chapter 8 we read:

I Samuel 8:4-6 Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah 5 and said to him, "Behold, you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations." 6 But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us."

This is the central message of the book, the request for a king and the beginning of the monarchy, a foreshadowing of a coming great and final king.

Included in this is their rejection of God and God's authority and leadership. God acquiesces to their demands and puts forward Saul, an impressive leader, but not a godly one.

I Samuel 9:2 Saul, a handsome young man. There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he. From his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people.

I Samuel 10:17-19 Now Samuel called the people together to the Lord at Mizpah. 18 And he said to the people of Israel, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'I brought up Israel out of Egypt, and I delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of all the kingdoms that were oppressing you.' 19 But today you have rejected your God, who saves you from all your calamities and your distresses, and you have said to him, 'Set a king over us.'

They wanted a king like the other nations, but their king was not supposed to be like the kings of other nations. They were to rule under the authority, direction and power of God, depending on God.

The fall of Saul.

Saul is a contrast to Samuel and to David. He is the embodiment of the idolatry and unbelief that plague Israel all through OT history.

I Samuel 13:12-14 I said, ‘Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the favor of the Lord.’ So I forced myself, and offered the burnt offering.” 13 And Samuel said to Saul, “You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command of the Lord your God, with which he commanded you. For then the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. 14 But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you.”

God gave Saul everything to be successful, but by his own neglect and lack of faith in God, he failed miserably. His beginning humility turned to pride and self-reliance. Saul was an excuse maker, preoccupied with preserving his image rather than truly exalting God. Thus, his small sins cost him everything. He didn't love God.

I Samuel 15:22-23 Samuel said, “Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord?

Behold, *to obey is better than sacrifice*, and to listen than the fat of rams.

23 ...Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has also rejected you from being king.”

Another central chapter in I Samuel is 16 where the prophet/judge Samuel anoints David and the next king. Everything before is prologue to that moment, and everything after that is just the unfolding story of the king after God's own heart (I Samuel 13:14).

The book ends on an especially dismal note. In fact the whole book is pervaded by a sadness.

The first section about Samuel ends with a rejection of his prophetic leadership, they want a king. The second section on Saul ends with a disintegration of royal leadership, the rise and fall of a king.

The last chapter is filled with utter tragedy, the king and his three sons, the princes of Israel dead. The leadership of Israel is annihilated, their territory is overrun by the Philistines, the bodies of soldiers litter the slopes of Mount Gilboa. Israel is like sheep scattered without a shepherd.

Yet there is a glimmer of hope. Yahweh has chosen a shepherd, a man after His own heart, to gather those scattered sheep. All hope is never lost in God's scheme, in God's plan.

It is a testimony to the truth of God's Word that the storyteller refuses to ignore either the good or the bad aspects of the characters. The story rings true to human experience.

Major themes.

The themes of 1 Samuel are the kingship of God, and His providential guidance, often seen in the reversal of human fortunes, in the way God turns things upside down.

Church and State:

In the period of the judges, the people of Israel were governed by magistrates, judges who were also prophets. Samuel is the last of the judge/prophets. In this we see a combination of state and church. In the transition to the monarchy that Samuel objected to, the new constitution separated the office of magistrate from the office of prophet. Samuel was willing to go along with this, provided the king heeded the words of the prophets.

This is precisely what Saul wound up not doing, and what David, a man after God's own heart, was willing to do. Kings are God's authorities, and they are to honor, respect and submit to God's authority. Kings are to follow God's Word, keep God's law and listen to God's voice.

Most of the commentaries on I Samuel describe what happens as a transition from a theocracy to a monarchy, but that's not accurate. Yes, there is a separation in the way civil government is ordered, but it was always under the authority of God.

The earth is the Lord's, and He is Lord over all the nations of earth. He is King of all the kings; no human king can assume kingship except as a deputy of the divine King. God has been enthroned as King from eternity.

Sovereignty/providence.

As I have said repeatedly, the real character of I Samuel is God who continues to act and reveal Himself to Israel. These stories reveal a God who speaks, acts, chooses, loves, judges, saves and redeems.

God is showing not only his power, control, patience, salvation, and righteous judgment but also the fact that He often brings about his purposes in surprising, ironic, and seemingly upside-down ways.

God delights to use impossible situations to bring about miraculous results. The story opens with another barren woman and God turning a contentious relationship with her husband's other wife into good. Samuel becomes the judge and prophet in Israel instead of Eli's sons.

God led Samuel to find Saul who has out looking for lost donkeys, and Saul is chosen king even though he is from a lowly tribe in Israel.

God caused David to find out about Goliath while taking lunch to his brothers on the front line, and then gives him courage and victory over the giant.

God fulfills a promise He made to Jacob that the scepter would never depart from the tribe of Judah, and raises up David, though he was the youngest of Jesse's eight sons.

God's ways are not our ways, God upends normal human ways. We see the outside, God sees the heart.

Why is God's sovereignty and God's providence such a prominent theme in all of Scripture? Because we are finite and flesh, we are weak and foolish, we forget and need constant reminder. We need to be told again and again God's grace and power are sufficient.

Jesus.

There is a common phrase in the NT, "from before the foundations of the earth." God's plan is not an afterthought, it is from before the beginning. Everything flows from it.

The path of our being choose in Christ leads straight through every book of the OT, straight through Samuel.

The birth stories of Samuel and Jesus have many parallels. Both conceived by miracles, both mothers prayed great prayers of thanks to God. Both boys served in the house of the Lord. Both are said to grow in stature and in favor with God and man (I Samuel 2:26; Luke 2:52).

David is the anointed one who points to God's purposes in the coming anointed one, the Messiah who comes to rule and to save. David is a man of faith who points us to the object of our faith.

God uses the monarchy to ultimately point the way and pave the way for Jesus who is called the son of David, who will establish the throne of David forever, and whose kingdom will never end. God is the faithful, steadfast God who keeps His promises and accomplishes His purposes.

Philippians 2:9-11 God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Implications and application.

Is there any more important time to learn the lessons of I Samuel than our current political climate. People have always fallen into the temptation to trust in human government rather than God. In I Samuel the people were convinced that all of their problems stem from the fact that they don't have a king and if they just had the right person in the right office, their problems would disappear. Despite Samuel's warnings no one listened.

Every election cycle, both major political parties work to convince us our problems will be solved if we elect the right candidate. And if we elect the wrong candidate our worst fears will be realized. And we believe them. Why else would people celebrate like they do when their candidate is elected, or yell in frustration when their candidate isn't?

There is your evidence of idolatry and messianic complex.

Two things to learn and remember.

First, our greatest heroes of the faith are all flawed sinners. Saul started well and then disobeyed. David fell deeply into serious sin (adultery and murder). No human being is perfect, which is why we need a perfect Savior and should place our trust only in Him.

Second, no human government is perfect. The people thought they would be better off if they had a king like all the other nations. We think we will be better off if our party is in office.

Don't put your trust, hope, faith in man, even heroes. He is a wisp, a puff of smoke.

No man is indispensable. Who is the constant? Who is the one who is perfect and faithful and trustworthy? God rules and reigns over all rulers and all nations. History is His story, and nothing hinders the flow of God's salvation plan and purpose.

Psalm 20:7 Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.

Psalm 146:3-4 Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation.

4 When his breath departs, he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish.

Psalm 118:8-9 It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man.

9 It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in princes.

God is still sovereign in the twenty-first century. He will accomplish His purposes with or without our cooperation. But as was true in the lives of Samuel, Saul, and David, our response to God's call affects our outcome. Will we obey Him as Samuel and David did and live lives marked by blessing? Or will we, like Saul, try to live on our own terms? "To obey is better than sacrifice," Samuel told Saul (1 Samuel 15:22). That truth still speaks to us today (Chuck Swindoll),

1 Samuel 15:22 To obey is better than sacrifice.