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**Day 87 - March 28**

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## **Israel as a Monarchy (1100 – 930 BCE)**

### ***Saul Appointed King***

**Reading: *1 Samuel 8:1-12:25***

#### ***Reflections:***

- Some commentators suggest that Saul is an unlikely choice. They say this because of how evil Saul becomes. In the story itself, Saul is actually presented as the obvious choice in his outward appearance. In time, his heart is revealed to be self-centered and opposed to God. Israel wants a king. Their first lesson is that the classic “man’s man” leader may look good by his appearance but not when it comes to his heart. Remember, this whole overarching lesson from Israel’s story is to teach us “what doesn’t work.” We will see that the story of Saul is just the first of many lessons around why having a king doesn’t work to change the hearts of God’s people.
- The reason the people want a king is for completely legitimate reasons. Samuel’s sons are perverting justice by accepting bribes. Here again we see that even the godliest of people in the Old Testament are far from being these flawless people with flawless families. Samuel is godly but his kids are not. When the people ask for a king it is apparent that both Samuel and God are displeased. Key verse: “it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king.” God goes on to say, “...warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will do.” You see, right from the beginning God is making it clear, as he did with the law when he gave it to Moses, that these things will not actually work to change Israel. God announces at the beginning that none of this will work. Once you look for this pattern in the Old Testament you see it so clearly.
- Samuel’s warnings and the people’s response is so revealing. Samuel points out how costly and oppressive it will be to have kings leading Israel and yet they still want the human security and prestige of a king. Key statement: “We want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles.” You see how they are completely rejecting God as their defender and the one to lead them and fight their battles for them.
- God’s judgment here as in most other places is simply giving people what they ask for. They demand something he does not want for them and after pleading with them to not

go in a direction, he finally gives them what they ask for that they might learn by experience why this is not a good thing. For this reason it is important to pray as Jesus did in the garden. "Lord, here is my will and what I want. But Lord I pray that not my will, but your will be done."

- Saul is selected from the tribe of Benjamin. There doesn't seem to be a reference back to the huge sin of this tribe in Judges but the writer may expect us to make that connection. Anyway, Saul is an obvious choice by appearance: "an impressive young man without equal among the Israelites - a head taller than any of the others." He is the tall, good looking and probably charismatic sort of leader. He is the obvious choice from all appearances.
- Interesting historical note about how historically prophets were called "seers" but now they are just called prophets. It shows that oral tradition was quite detailed in its transmission of the stories over the generations. Here we have a detail in the story that when written down later, with the use of certain words changed, the writer actually makes that note.
- The story of Saul looking for donkeys and leading them to Samuel may be a sign that this is how God got Saul and Samuel connected. Or it just might be the circumstances that had Saul wandering around in Samuel's vicinity.
- As soon as Samuel sees Saul, God confirms that he is the one to lead Israel. Samuel's exchange with Saul shows how accurate God's word is to Samuel. He already knows about the donkeys and he declares that he will tell Saul everything that is in his heart. This aspect of God's spirit working is later developed as a key to God speaking to his people. God's desire is to speak directly to people's hearts and to reveal what is within their hearts. This is something that Jesus is able to do (John 2:25) and would be carried on through the church (1 Corinthians 14:25) as God through Jesus and his Spirit works to change people's hearts.
- Saul can't believe that he is chosen because of his heritage. Again we see God here is choosing someone from the smallest and weakest of the tribes. God delights in choosing from the weak. Saul himself as a man is the exact opposite. He is a man who stands head and shoulders above the rest. He is the king Israel wants. We should note that Saul appears at first to be very aware of his humble origins and demonstrates humility when Samuel selects him. Sometimes people are humbled by their circumstances but as soon as they are placed in power, their pride comes out. Clearly Saul appears humble at first but as we will see, things go drastically wrong.
- Samuel anoints Saul with oil. This becomes the ongoing sign for being chosen as a king, to be anointed with oil. This is why the Messiah (or in Greek "the Christ") is used as a term to describe the coming king that brings salvation. The word Messiah or Christ both mean "The anointed one." Samuel confirms this with a word that Saul can test by telling him what will happen in the near future.

- Samuel then gives Saul direction that is rich with meaning. Samuel explains how the Spirit of God can work in a person's life. We should note that in the Old Testament, because Jesus had not come yet and through his death, opened the way for perfect communion between God and his people, the activity of God's presence (his Spirit) is limited. So although Saul is given the Spirit in a powerful way, it is not the same way it will be given to people in the New Testament. After Christ's death and resurrection, the Spirit is given in power to actually change people from the inside out in an ongoing permanent way. Here it happens in Saul but it is more limited or in part as we will see.
- Still this teaching about the Spirit tells us what we should expect when the Spirit comes into a person's life: "The Spirit of the Lord will come upon you in power, and you will prophesy with them (the prophets); and you will be changed into a different person. Once these signs are fulfilled, do whatever your hands find to do, for God is with you."
- Three things to note: 1) God's power results in him speaking his word through you. This means intimate communion and communication with God. 2) God's power means you are changed and start to become a better version of yourself. In the New Testament this change is referred to as the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:24-26) and the gifts of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12). 3) God's power working in you frees you to pursue the desires he has placed within you. God doesn't want to turn us into robots but into children he can partner with to continue his co-creative process of transforming the world.
- Samuel reminds the people once again that they are rejecting God as king before he installs Samuel as king. So the reader can not be confused that this is going to end badly.
- Note again that the people are excited about Saul as their leader because he is tall and strong. It is all about his outward appearance. There is no mention of his heart truly being after God, as we will see with David.
- Still God gathers some "valiant men" to help Saul. Even though some don't respond well to Saul, in these early days Saul shows integrity and capability and leadership. Saul's leadership leads to success in battle. Saul also gives God the credit for the victory and chooses not to be ruthless in executing the prisoners. It would appear at this phase that all is well.
- Samuel's farewell address shows his faithfulness and integrity as a leader. It is fascinating again that even though everything looks good with Saul, at the end of Samuel's life Samuel and God are making it very clear that Israel asking for a king is evil in God's sight. The people seem to be afraid of what they have done but Samuel reassures them to remain focused on serving God alone. Samuel doesn't remove the king but turns the people back towards serving God with all their hearts. We must understand at this point in the story, God is still working to reveal his truth even through the disobedience of his people. As we will see, God is revealing that no human leadership whether it is a "Saul", who looks great on the outside or a "David" who has a

true heart after God, or a Solomon who is the wisest of people can ultimately change people's hearts.