

## **Lecture #6 – Exposition of I Samuel 12-15**

### **Chapter 12 – Samuel’s Message**

#### **vs. 1-25 – Samuel’s Message**

This chapter is the final public discourse of the prophet/priest/judge Samuel. Though he would not die for a few years more, he is stepping down as *the* leader in Israel. The people have rejected the Judges era theocracy and demanded a king. Samuel disapproved but God allowed it. Saul had been chosen, anointed, confirmed, and now nationally accepted after his deliverance of Jabesh-Gilead.

He first calls the people to acknowledge his righteous testimony in vs. 2-5. This seems to be in contrast to his wayward sons.

In vs. 6-12 is a history review of God’s dealings with Israel, from Moses up to the recent victory by Saul. It is a list of God brought them up and blessed them but also how they rebelled against Him.

Verse 11 is interesting for the names it uses. First, Gideon is called “Jerubbaal” (“contender with Baal”<sup>1</sup>, Judges 6:32). Second, a Bedan (“servile”<sup>2</sup>?) is mentioned as a judge, yet we have no record of a judge by that name. There is another unrelated Bedan in I Chronicles 7:17 so there is proof of the name being used. It is likely a second name for another judge, just as Jerubbaal is for Gideon. Some speculate it may refer to Barak or Abdon (Judges 12:13-15). We may not know exactly who Samuel was referring to, but his listeners certainly did.

Samuel closes with an exhortation and warning to the people and Saul to follow God. This is punctuated with a summer thunderstorm that came in answer to Samuel’s prayer (vs. 17-18).

Note vs. 22 is a great illustration of God’s unmerited grace. Did Israel deserve God’s blessing? No, but none of us do. Yet in His pleasure He called them out and set them up as His chosen people.

What a challenging example of prayer in verse 23!

### **Chapter 13 – Saul vs. Philistines**

#### **vs. 1-4 – First Campaign Against the Philistines**

The opening verse is another time marker like we saw in I Samuel 7:2. It simply means that Saul has finished the first year of his reign and is now in the second.

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<sup>1</sup> Smith’s Bible Dictionary

<sup>2</sup> Strong’s H917

Saul appears to have established a standing army of 3,000 men. The Philistines were still making incursions into Israel's territory and fortifying positions to hold it.

Saul probably should have gone on the offensive against the Philistines before this time. After all, the Philistine threat was a major reason the people demanded a king. He had over 300,000 men in the field at Jabesh-Gilead that he could have marched west on Philistia.

It is Saul's son Jonathan ("the gift of Jehovah")<sup>3</sup> that strikes the first blow against the Philistines by defeating one of their garrisons a few miles from Saul's home. Saul knew this was the proverbial kicking of a hornet's nest and calls for the nation to assemble to form an army.

We note in vs. 4 the first hint of Saul's leadership problems. It was Jonathan that had won the victory, yet Saul seems to be taking the credit. It is not uncommon in military annals for the commanding officer to get credit even if they do not deserve it. Perhaps if we did not know the rest of the story (or chapter) we would not even notice this. Besides, it would have been far better to give the credit to God.

### vs. 5-7 – The Philistine Counteroffensive

The Philistines came in full force. They brought vast numbers of their chariots into the hill country, where they would be more of a show of force since their usage would be limited by the terrain. Some of the people gathered at Gilgal in response to Saul's call, while others hid or ran to the other side of Jordan. There seems to be little hope of survival in the face of the overwhelming odds.

### vs. 8-10 – Saul's Impatience

Samuel the Prophet had forewarned Saul of this event in I Samuel 10:8: "And thou shalt go down before me to Gilgal; and, behold, I will come down unto thee, to offer burnt offerings, and to sacrifice sacrifices of peace offerings: seven days shalt thou tarry, till I come to thee, and shew thee what thou shalt do."

Samuel's delay was the first true test of Saul's character. After all, he had just made a big speech as he was leaving his role as national leader. But he was still God's appointed prophet. While Saul should take the lead it should not be done without God's counsel.

On the seventh day, Saul gives into desperation and offers the appointed sacrifices himself. This was a gross sin on his part, intruding on the office of priest. He was placing his own will above God's.

In his hour of need, Saul turned to himself. Not God or God's man.

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<sup>3</sup> Smith's Bible Dictionary

### vs. 11-16 – Saul Rejected

This is still the seventh day when Samuel shows just as Saul is finishing the sacrifices.

B.H. Carroll writes:

“This was the condition of a test of his character. It is certain that unless there could be assurance from Jehovah that he would lead and manifest his power, the panic would increase. Samuel designedly delayed his coming until the last hour of the appointed seven days. Saul had waited until late in the seventh day; Samuel had not come. It seemed to him that he must, by sacrifices, invoke the help of Jehovah. As he puts it himself, under these conditions: ‘I forced myself to make the offerings to Jehovah.’ Before the offerings were completed, Samuel appeared, but Saul had already sinned. It was an express stipulation of the charter of the kingdom that the king must wait upon Jehovah’s will as expressed through his prophet. Only in this way could the kingdom endure. If the king acted on his own wisdom, as the kings of other nations, then it was certain he would fail. His only hope was to abide absolutely with that provision of the charter which acknowledged the theocratic idea that the earthly king was subordinate to the divine King. The penalty of his failure in this test was not his personal rejection as king, but it was the rejection of his dynasty. He himself remained king, but the monarchy could not be transmitted to his children. The kingly authority was to be removed from Saul’s family, and given to another family.”<sup>4</sup>

### vs. 17-23 – Philistine Maneuvers

The final verses of this chapter are a description of the desperate state that Israel was in at this time. The Philistines had raiding parties rampaging through the land unchecked to the west, north, and east. Israel’s military had only two swords in its possession with no means to manufacture more. Once again, the very existence of Israel seems to hang in the balance.

## **Chapter 14 – Jonathan vs. Philistines**

### vs. 1-23 – Jonathan’s Victory

Saul’s forces have further dwindled to 600 (vs. 2).

Yet in the darkest of times light can be found. Valiant Jonathan, with faith in God, plans an attack on one of the Philistine’s fortified hilltop positions. He and his armorbearer climb the steep ravine into the enemy position and kill the approximately twenty men there.

The commotion of Jonathan’s attack stirred the Philistine forces. Yet there was much confusion as they could not tell anything about the force attacking them. In the confusion God sends an earthquake to further rattle the enemy. They begin to fight each other in the confusion and the Israelites who

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<sup>4</sup> *An Interpretation of the English Bible: The Hebrew Monarchy*, by B.H. Carroll. p. 74.

had been fighting are emboldened to join in the fight. Also note the presence of Israelites in the Philistine forces (vs. 21) and how they rejoined their kindred during the battle.

Saul hesitates to join the battle. In his confusion, he asks the priest to enquire of the Lord as to what to do. However, his rashness returns, and he attacks before the priest can do as requested.

### vs. 24-46 – Saul's Leadership Failure

Saul's selfish nature leads him to make a disastrous proclamation that no soldier should stop fighting to eat until nightfall but instead keep pressing the fight. For one so hesitant to start a battle, it is strange to see him so anxious to continue it. Note also the reason given: "that *I* may be avenged on *mine* enemies." He is working under his own wisdom and power. His missteps will turn this from a day of victory to one of near disaster.

Somehow Jonathan did not hear his father's command to not eat and ate some honey. He then hears of his father's order and knows it was a mistake.

The debacle that follows is all Saul's responsibility. Lee Roberson famously said, "Everything rises and falls on leadership." Here is a great failure of leadership and its followers.

The men are so famished from the days fighting that they wildly fall on the spoils of battle and eat meat without removing the blood. This is a clear violation of Leviticus 19:26 and Deuteronomy 12:16. They only did so because the desperate position Saul had placed them in.

Saul intervenes by butchering the animals correctly and giving meat to his men. He builds his first altar here. I wonder if this was to offer the prescribed portions of the butchered animals to God (see Leviticus 3:4, etc.). If so, he is intruding again into the priestly domain.

Saul wants to continue the battle into the night once his men have eaten and been refreshed. He attempts to enquire of the Lord, but the Lord is silent.

Saul then rashly assumes that the Lord's silence is because of sin and states that the guilty party, even if it was Jonathan, would be put to death. When the lot is cast deciding between the people and the pair of Jonathan and Saul, surely he assumed the sin was on the people and was ready to make an example of them.

Saul is ready to execute his own son, the hero of the day, for disobey his reckless order. Jonathan is only delivered by the intervention of the people. The battle is halted, and all momentum is lost. What could have been a fatal blow to the Philistines was instead a terrible display of leadership.

### vs. 47-52 – Overview of Saul’s Early Reign

These verses are an intermission in the narrative of 15<sup>5</sup> to 20<sup>6</sup> years. These were days marked by war on all sides.

Saul has six recorded children sons by his wife Ahinoam (“pleasantness”): eldest son Jonathan (“whom the Lord gave”); son Ishui (“quiet”) also called Abinadab (“father of a vow”) in I Chronicles 8:33; son Melchishua (“king’s help”); son Ishbosheth (“man of shame”), also called Eshbaal (“man of Baal”); daughter Merab (“increase”); and daughter Michal (“who is like God?”).

Saul also would have two sons by a concubine named Rizpah (“a hot stone”) according to II Samuel 21:8: Armoni (“inhabitant of a fortress”) and Mephibosheth<sup>7</sup> (“destroyer of shame”).

## **Chapter 15 – Saul vs. Amalek**

### vs. 1-5 – Saul Commanded to Destroy Amalek

The Amalekites were a nomadic tribe that roamed the southern part of the Holy Land. We believe them to be descendants of Esau (Genesis 36:12). Though not much space is given to them in the Scriptures, they were some of the fiercest enemies of Israel. Most famous is the Battle of Rephidim (Exodus 17:8-16), but we also see them fighting against Israel with the Caananites (Numbers 14:45), the Moabites (Judges 3:13), and the Midianites (Judges 6:3). Merrill writes:

“The picture that emerges, then, is that the Amalekites were inveterate enemies of Israel who joined themselves to whoever was in a position to do Israel harm”<sup>8</sup>

From the few descriptions we have of the Amalekites, I like to describe them as *terrorists*. They raided, kidnapped, and attacked the rear of their enemy (Deuteronomy 25:17-18). They used guerilla tactics and did not engage in open warfare.

In Deuteronomy 25:19 we find that God instructed Israel to avenge themselves against the Amalekites.

This passage is one that critics of the Bible and Christianity love to go to. How could a loving God command the extermination of an entire nation?<sup>9</sup> I think the answer is in who the Amalekites were. Since they were descendants of Esau, they had a long-standing animosity against God’s people. We see them battling and harassing Israel, using tactics that even today would be frowned upon in warfare. I think there is much lost to history that also led to this. This step was never taken against other of Israel’s enemies, including the Philistines. God gave them centuries to repent of their evil. We can even see the results of Saul’s disobedience in the descendants of the Amalekites that survived. We see

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<sup>5</sup> Reese’s Chronological Bible

<sup>6</sup> *Israel: From Conquest to Exile* by John J. Davis and John C. Whitcomb. p. 204

<sup>7</sup> Not *that* Mephibosheth

<sup>8</sup> *Kingdom of Priests*, p. 207

<sup>9</sup> Sometimes this is labeled *herem*, denoting something that is to be completely destroyed.

echoes of this people as late as Esther's time (Esther 3:5-6) as Haman as described as an Agagite after the king of Amalek, Agag.

John Davis writes:

“Such a command was not an encouragement to the barbaric slaughter of ‘innocent people’ as some have argued, but represents a fully justified act on the part of a holy God who reserves the right to judge sin at any point in history (cf. v. 18). So Sodom and Gomorrah fell under God's judgment (Gen. 19), as did Jericho (Josh. 6) and Ai (Josh. 8). Destructions of this kind were not based on mere political or military considerations, but especially on religious grounds (cf. Deut. 7:2-6; 12:2-3; 20:10-18). Moreover, simply because this command came from God, it, *a priori*, is just, by virtue of the perfect character of God.”<sup>10</sup>

### vs. 6-9 – Saul's Incomplete Obedience

Saul selectively obeys the command of God. He kills the people, but not the king. He kills the worthless animals but keeps the best of the livestock. Since the Amalekites will reappear (as in I Samuel 30), it is clear Saul was not as thorough as he should have been.

Yet Saul will have the audacity to claim complete obedience in vs. 13.

### vs. 10-35 – Saul's Second Rejection

Note again the prayer-life of Samuel. Even though God clearly rejected Saul, Samuel still prays earnestly for him (vs. 11).

Note the condemnation of Saul: (1) he was proud, no longer “little in his own sight” (vs. 17), (2) he disobeyed clear commandments of the Lord (vs. 19), (3) he rejected the word of the Lord (vs. 23).

Concerning vs. 22, Carroll writes:

“The doctrine here is not against the use of the God-appointed sacrifices, but it shows that mere external conformity with the law of types as embodied in sacrifices, and the observance of rituals without faith and the spirit of true worship, is as empty as a blasted nut<sup>11</sup>. The doctrine does not undervalue the form of godliness, but it does show the superiority of the power of godliness. The truth lies, not in denying the need of the form, but in relying upon the form only. This doctrine magnifies the thing signified above the sign, and magnifies the spirit above the letter. The tendency of the priesthood – the types and the rituals – throughout the monarchy was a reliance upon mere empty ceremonies. It was the mission of the prophets to counteract this, as you will find by carefully reading the following passages: Psalm 40:6-8; Psalm 51:16-17; Isaiah 1:11-15; Jeremiah 7:22-23; Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:6-8. These passages should be carefully studied in their context,

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<sup>10</sup> *Israel: From Conquest to Exile* by John J. Davis and John C. Whitcomb. p. 204

<sup>11</sup> I think Carroll is referring to a nut that looks good on the outside, but the inside is rotten. I tried to look up this saying and didn't find much.

otherwise we will never understand the difference in the spirit of the prophetic teaching as contrasted with the letter of the priestly teaching.”<sup>12</sup>

It is not until Samuel reveals his rejection as king that Saul finally makes a confession of sin (vs. 24), but it is not wholehearted and still full of excuses. John Davis writes:

“The ‘repentance’ of God should not be regarded as remorse because of an error in judgment, but deep sorrow in the light of man’s failure in spite of divine provision (cf. Genesis 6:6). God’s laws and decrees do not change (cf. 15:29); but as men change, different laws operate.”<sup>13</sup>

Note the object lesson in vs. 27-28. Saul takes hold of Samuel’s robe in desperation, and it rips. Samuel proclaims it a sign that the kingdom has been torn from Saul and given to another.

Samuel and Saul will meet one more time before Samuel’s death (and once after...). In I Samuel 19:24 Saul chases David to Ramah, where Saul will prophesy before Samuel. This is not a contradiction to “Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death” (vs. 35). That phrase speaks of an official capacity. Neither Samuel nor Saul will seek to meet the other again (until Endor...). The interaction in I Samuel 19 is incidental and unofficial.

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<sup>12</sup> *An Interpretation of the English Bible: The Hebrew Monarchy*, by B.H. Carroll. p. 86-87

<sup>13</sup> *Israel: From Conquest to Exile* by John J. Davis and John C. Whitcomb. p. 220