

PEOPLE OF GOD HAVE LEADERS
Early Leaders in the Rise of the Nation
Monarchy

October 21, 2020

Hebrew Word – Judges

In Exodus 18:22 the word is *shaphat* which means *to govern* (internal arbitration).
Same Hebrew word is used in the *Book of Judges* (military action / given by the Spirit).

Decline of the Confederacy

In our studies we see that the Israelite Confederacy was an ineffective organization. They were not bound together by a centralized government (like the other nations). Confederacy by its very nature encouraged a high degree of tribal independence. God alone was the ruler of the Israelite tribes. Common devotion to God and their religious responsibilities kept them connected. Divine rule was made known through charismatic judges and the current High Priest. Only when religious festivals were held at the confederate shrine did the tribes come together. As time went on the Tribal Confederacy became vulnerable to the Philistines.

In Judges 8 we see a first attempt to establish a centralized government at Shechem. Shechem was the very place where the Tribal Confederacy was established at time of Joshua. In the narrative the charismatic leadership of Gideon proved effective. Israelites wanted to make him king due to his success over local nomadic peoples. They also wanted a leader to quell the increasing tensions with the Philistines. When the proposal to be king was made (8:22) Gideon knew it would change his authority. A non-hereditary and charismatic judge would become a hereditary monarch. Change would have modeled the kingdoms of the Transjordan (Moab and Ammon). Gideon was firm that he would not rule over them nor his son. Only God would rule over them and only God could be their king.

In Judges 9 there is a second attempt to establish a monarchy. In this account the idea was driven by Abimelech, the son of Gideon. After the death of his father, Abimelech persuaded the people of Shechem to make him king. Some citizens of Shechem agreed and crowned him king. But the conservative circles of the Israelite Confederacy only wanted God to be their king. Those who supported Abimelech advocated for a Canaanite form of government. For three years Abimelech was able to rule over a sizeable territory. Soon a revolution broke out in Shechem and Abimelech met his death in the city of Thebez. Monarchy failed but it was an indication that the Tribal Confederacy was coming to an end.

As we transition into 1 Samuel we find the Israelites in a troubled state. Shiloh was still the central sanctuary of the Confederacy. It was still customary for the Israelites to make a pilgrimage each year to offer sacrifices to God. It was hoped that the tribes would be united around the priestly rule of Eli and his sons. Alternative to the monarchy was a hierocracy (hereditary rule of priests).

In 1 Samuel 4 the war between the Philistines and the Israelites is recounted. Ark of the Covenant was brought to the battlefield but still the Israelites were defeated. Ark of the Covenant was taken into the Philistine territory as a trophy of war.

* From this point on in the story (1 Samuel 4-7) there is no reference to Shiloh.

Shiloh disappeared from the history of Israel.

In 2013 archaeologists discovered a broken pottery vessel and ashes at Shiloh.

It suggests a large-scale destruction to the Israelite capital.

Israel was in a desperate plight.

A devastating blow had been struck at the very foundation of the Israelite Confederacy.

Central sanctuary of Shiloh was burned to the ground.

Ark of the Covenant had been seized by enemies.

Philistines were on their way toward making Canaan a Philistine empire.

But the one factor they could not deal with was the faith of the people in God.

We have seen in the past the resilience and vitality of this faith in time of crisis.

For the Israelites God had the power to discipline the people with disaster.

God also had the power to bless them with victory.

Crisis was an occasion for the people to search their hearts and to renew their allegiance.

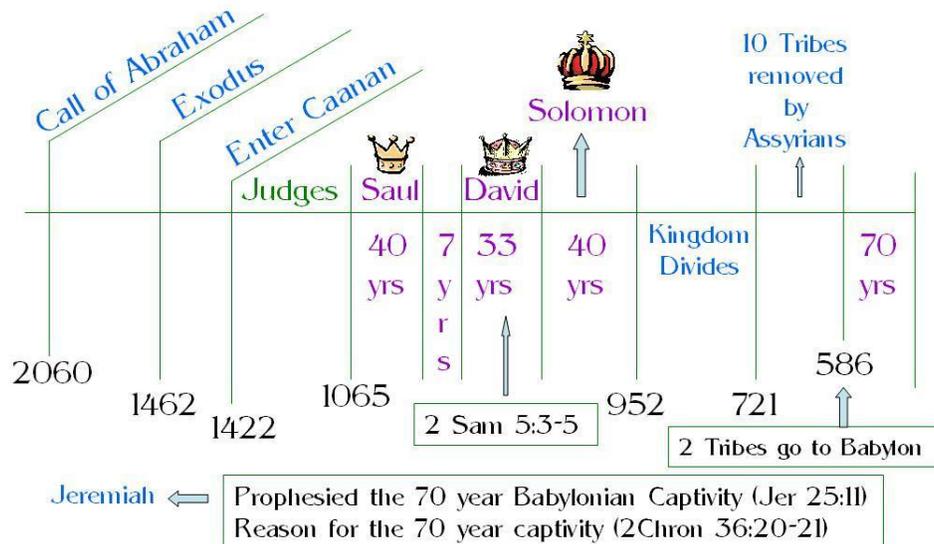
Such a renewal took place under the prophet-judge named Samuel.

He is considered the greatest spiritual leader of Israel since the time of Moses.

He marked the transition from the old type of charismatic leadership to that of a prophet.

Under his spiritual guidance Israel made the shift from Tribal Confederacy to a monarchy.

History Of Israel



Leadership of Samuel is described in two different traditions.

In both Samuel played an important role in the fateful decision to establish a monarchy.

Saul Tradition is found in 1 Samuel 9:1-10:16 and 1 Samuel 11.

Samuel was a priestly authority and prophet who could (in the name of God) appoint a king. Samuel took the initiative and secretly anointed Saul as *prince* over the people.

According to this tradition, Saul was not publicly acclaimed king until victorious in battle.

This time the conflict was not with the Philistines but with the Ammonites.

Saul was near the area when he overheard the plans of the Ammonites.

Suddenly the divine *charisma* came mightily upon him in a manner reminiscent of the judges.

Inspired by his leadership the Confederacy brought about the decisive defeat of Ammonites.

Israelites offered the crown to Saul.

Unlike Gideon he accepted and was crowned in Gilgal before the Lord.

Samuel Tradition is found in 1 Samuel 7:3-8:22 and 10:17-27 and 1 Samuel 12.

In this tradition Samuel is not a seer but a judge (the last and greatest judge of Israel).

He settled legal disputes and triumphed over the Philistines (by prayer and sacrifices).

But here the idea of a monarchy was displeasing to Samuel and to God.

Perhaps to appease the people . . .

Samuel tried to change the role from a charismatic office to a hereditary one.

He appointed his own sons as judges but the Israelites came asking for a king.

Israelites wanted a stable government by imitating the nations around them.

But the Lord rejected the idea and Samuel tried to dissuade the people from their plan.

Samuel warned them that it would limit their freedom and subject them to tyranny.

People insisted and Samuel grudgingly consented to go along with them.

Saul was selected by lot from the tribes of Israel.

Saul was acclaimed king at the city of Mizpah.

Jewish scholars note a third tradition found in 1 Samuel 10:17-27 (subset of Samuel Tradition).

Shift to this scene is not smooth and no passage of time is noted.

But the Saul who was chosen by lot and acclaimed king was not the boy in the previous episode.

Samuel does not seem to know him now.

Could be an independent story of how Saul became king.

In its present position it functions as the public acclamation of Saul as king.

Remember that it was a secret until this moment.

Here the people become involved in acknowledging God's choice for king.

Reflection on the whole idea of a monarchy given these three strands:

Struggle between faith and culture was expressed in temptation to worship Canaanite gods.

Second struggle was about nationalism.

Cultural situation seemed to demand that Israel should become like the other nations.

It seemed a matter of life or death.

Yet this step threatened to undermine the distinctive character of the Israelite community.

From the onset Israel was bound together by its relationship to the Lord.

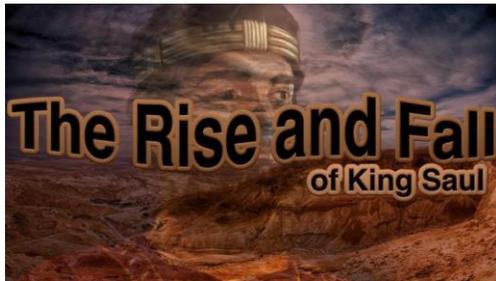
In view of this history the elder's request for a king would have been a shocking thing.

It threatened to destroy the true identity of Israel as the *people of God*.

In becoming a nation, Israel would become a powerful state and no different from other nations.

In 1 Samuel the establishment of the Israelite monarchy reflects this ambivalence. Samuel Tradition reflects the later un-happy experiences of the monarchy. It also represents the early criticism made by representatives of the Tribal Confederacy. According to them the Israelite state was not founded with divine blessing. It was allowed as a grudging concession. Even in the Saul Tradition it is not regarded as a divine kingdom. It was a providential development in history occasioned by the chaos caused by Philistines.

But Israel could not become a nation like the surrounding nations. Answer: Religious faith of the Confederacy survived and found new expression in the prophets.



1 Samuel 9-15

Real point of the story of how Saul is called focuses on the God who calls. We finally hear that it was by the initiative of God and his Spirit. Elders wanted and expected a general, an administrator, and a royal symbol of authority. Instead they got Saul, seized by the power of the Spirit that amazed everyone.

Saul was chosen by God, was anointed by Samuel, and received the Spirit of God. The result was that Israel had its first king. On an individual level, Saul was reluctant to be chosen (no surprise there). Like Moses and Gideon he did not think his was the one to save Israel. It was not up to Saul alone to save but it was God with Saul. On the surface Saul seemed like one of the charismatic deliverers of Israel. He was empowered by the Spirit of God at a time of crisis. Crisis here was caused by cruelty and oppression by the Ammonites.

In Chapter 11 we have no knowledge of Saul connected with kingship. There is no indication of any previous anointing (10:1) or public acclamation (10:24). Narrative is very positive toward Saul as he is pictured as a hero and deliverer of Israel. Chapter 11 may have originated as another independent tradition about Saul. Coming of the Spirit of God (11:6) empowered him not to prophesy but to lead Israel. Renewal of the kingship in Gilgal (11:14) now marks the start of his active rule.

Chapter 12 is an important text for reflection on the meaning of leadership in faith community. Samuel and the new unnamed king are both accountable to the same covenant as the people. Samuel opened his conduct as a leader to the judgment of the people and to be a witness. He challenged them to covenant obedience and warned them of the dangers of disobedience. No distinction was made between the behaviors of the king and the people. Recognized leadership was not a privileged position. His admirable traits included unswerving in his determination not to use office for personal gain. Samuel recognized God as the true shaping force of history. Although with warnings he made a place for the new reality of kingship in Israel. He promised to be unceasing in prayer and instruction in good and right ways.

In the rest of the chapters we see the exploits and rejection of Saul.
Narrative on Saul is brief and unpleasant.
Samuel confronted Saul with violations of covenant obedience and sacred laws.
Samuel also announced God's judgment.
In the end the Lord was sorry that he had made Saul king over Israel.

Story of conflict between Samuel and Saul was set in a context that called for exercise of power.
Military power was to be exercised in the face of the Philistine threat.
Power of leadership was called for to maintain readiness and morale among fighting men.
Power of religious authority was crucial in Israel because all wars were to be holy wars.
In all these areas decisions needed to be made and actions taken.
Issues of power could not be decided in the abstract.
They became entangled in the personalities of Samuel and Saul.

Samuel was a reluctant participant in the issue of kingship.
He was fearful that kingship would erode the covenant tradition.
At the same time the inexperience of Saul was matched by the inexperience of Israel with a king.
He was faced with an overwhelming military challenge.
He seemed naïve in his understanding of his relationship with Samuel.
Conflict continued into total rejection of Saul and ended when Saul took his own life.
In these chapters we have the feeling that we were not really hearing about the reign of Saul.
We are being prepared for the appearance of David.

 **Abigail: Wisdom and Generosity**

- Abigail from the Bible
Abigail's husband, Nabal, was a very wicked man, who thought only of himself. By Abigail's quick wisdom and generosity she not only saved her entire family from death, but was miraculously delivered from an evil husband, and given a godly husband in his place. Abigail was one of the truly virtuous women in the Bible.



1 Samuel 25

This is the second account in a sequence of three chapters dealing with the temptation to violence that comes with power.

In each account, the innocence of David of such violence is demonstrated and his coming kingship is cleared from suspicion of any blood-guilt.

In 1 Samuel 24 and 26 David restrained his impulse to do violence against Saul and refused to take the life of the king.

In this chapter David must be restrained by the intervention of Abigail.
She kept him from incurring blood-guilt on her husband, Nabal, for revenge.

Scholars have suggested this to be an unrealistic narrative.
A fair maiden is freed from the wicked ogre and marries prince charming.
Observation does not diminish the important role of this chapter.

Character of Nabal seems to represent Saul in many details:

Like Saul he was spared from the vengeful hand of David.

Nabal was also one who returned evil for good.

His name and actions were marks of a fool which Saul admitted about himself.

In Hebrew his name means *glutton, miser, one who does not believe in God*.

His response to David was to treat him as a servant breaking away from a master.

It reflected the same treatment of David by Saul.

Finally the death of Nabal by the hand of the Lord prefigured the death of Saul.

David was saved from incurring blood-guilt by Abigail.

However we are exposed to a darker side of David than we have seen so far.

David is willing to kill and to do so on a major scale in wiping out all the males in household.

Side of David foreshadows a later time when his willingness to kill is not restrained.

Remember when he sent Uriah to his death in order to take Bathsheba for himself.

Abigail is the central character in this narrative.

She is the agent through whose gifts the Lord is at work to restrain David from violence.

Abigail recognized in David the future king of Israel.

She understood the danger that blood-guilt would constitute to that kingship.

It was through her remarkable human gifts that the word and will of God were made clear.

It enabled David to step back from the danger.

Her gifts included intelligence, beauty, excellence in speech, and resourcefulness.

She also had a willingness to act.

Scholars see her as the model of the wise woman and relates her to the ideal woman.

Others see her as a figure with prophetic connections.

She spoke God's word to David and pronounced the first prophecy of a sure house for David.

Abigail was the bridge between Samuel and Nathan who were both prophets.

She is also seen as the mirror image of Bathsheba:

Uriah was a good man but Bathsheba could do nothing to save him.

Nabal was a worthless man but Abigail went to great lengths to save him.

David was drawn to Bathsheba in an encounter of illicit sex.

Abigail married David but was not involved sexually with him (marriage was legitimate).

For Bathsheba, David kills and for Abigail, David refrains from killing.

Abigail is an important model of moral courage and peacemaking.

She dealt with both the evil of Nabal and the danger of David in a forthright manner.

She also put aside the risks to her own well-being.

She could have experienced violence from Nabal or from David.

Significant that as a woman of wealth and privilege she had the trusted confidence of servants.

Abigail modeled peacemaking in her ability to see issues at stake beyond the immediate.

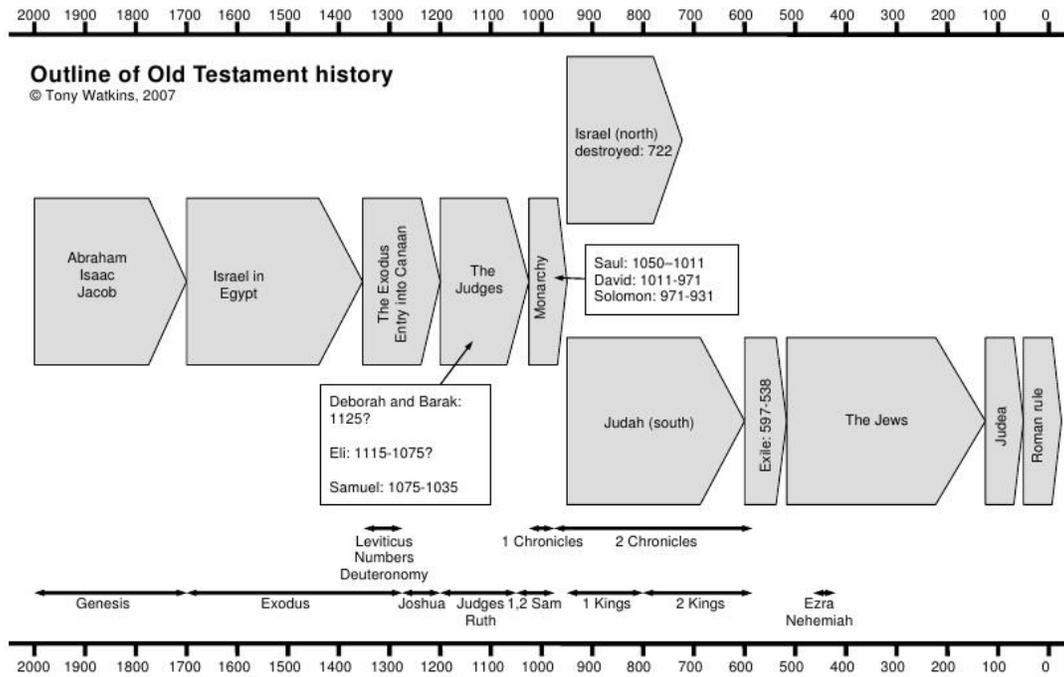
She enabled David to see the long-term consequences of immediate acts of passion.

In her own initiatives Abigail never lost sight of the larger movement of divine initiative.

She related present moral action to the larger vision of God's future.

She dared to place herself in a position to mediate the present in light of that vision.

She acted boldly and helped shape the future of God's kingdom.



Assignment for October 28

Story of David and Elijah

2 Samuel 2-23 and 1 Kings 17-22 and 2 Kings 1-2