

1 Samuel Chapters 8-15

Chapter 8



So we skip forward after Israel repenting in chapter 7 and renewing their commitment to God. Time passes without much of note, except soon it turns out Samuel makes his sons the new judges of Israel – the problem is

they are almost as bad as Phineas and Hopni (see previous notes) - so the people reject them. This turns into a showdown at Ramah (can you find it on the map? It is just north of Jerusalem), where the people finally ask for what they have been longing for – A King. They want to be just like everybody else.



Reflect – In verses 6-8 Samuel is stung by the rejection of the people. How does he respond? What should this teach us about how to cope with bitter disappointment?



This asking for a King is a deep betrayal of God. You can almost feel God's loss in the following verses. They are not rejecting Samuel, they are rejecting the Kingdom God set up in Eden, they are rejecting God.

The chapter ends with Samuel telling the people about the unpleasant reality of having a King, taxes, royal decrees among many other things. Eventually God has had enough. He will give them what they desire.

Chapter 9

The scene switches again, and another main character is about to enter. He is wealthy, influential, powerful, and apparently extremely tall and handsome. We find out a lot about his personality and looks in the first few verses, but something is strangely missing?

(Hint – His relationship with God and the state of his heart)

In the rest of the chapter we have the journey that leads Saul to his Kingship... the central characters in his royal appointment? 3 donkeys!



Eventually his search will lead him to Samuel, who prophetically speaks about the donkeys, and the chapter ends with Saul's anointing as King.



Reflect – Are there circumstances in your life which are actually more than they appear? Have you been following a seemingly normal path yet God is trying to tell you something?



Chapter 10-12

In these next few chapters Saul is anointed (10:1), indwelt by the Holy Spirit (10:6), is to worship and prophesy, is given a changed heart (10:9), and is selected by 'lots' from the people, but as we know God had already selected him!

As we move in chapter 11 we quickly realise that it will be no ordinary Kingship. Clearly God wants a unique relationship with this King. The word prince is the most common word used in these passages regarding the Kingship implying that unlike the other nations the Israelite leader would always answer to a higher authority – God Himself. Chapter 11 also brings an old adversary back to the spotlight – the Ammonites.

Biblical Mentions of the Ammonites

- Ammonites, they are Lot's Sons and the Ammon Descendants. (Genesis 19:38)
- From their rise to their fall, the Ammonites were strongly bonded with the Moabites tribe. (Judges 5:2)
- The Ammonites is the "Predatory Tribe" who moved from a place to another time after time unlike the Moabites tribe which was highly settled. (Deuteronomy 2:20 ; Genesis 14:5).
- Due to their hostility towards the



Israelites, the Ammonites were given fearful judgments by the prophets. (Zephaniah 2:8 ; Jeremiah 49:1-6 ; [Ezekiel](#) 25:1-5 ; Ezekiel 25:10 ; Amos 1:13-15)

(An ammonite deity sculpture)

This eastern Kingdom is defeated by Saul and the army and people start to see him as a mighty king. Samuel realises this and in Chapter 12 we have his emotional goodbye. He knows that if he stays in the spotlight, Saul might never be able to lead.

Reflect

How hard is it to let others move into leadership and for us to step back?

What is the danger of anointing leaders and then remaining on the scene?

Samuel gives a quick summary of his own ministry, and then gives the people a more extensive history of their journey – how every victory, even the most recent one against the Ammonites is because of God, not because of the judges, and not because of a King. God is the true King.

Chapters 13-15

In these chapters we will address two key elements – **Saul's tragic life beginning, and the command by God to slaughter the Amalekites in chapter 15.**

Saul's descent into madness and inhumanity. (the beginning)

The Philistines are a real problem for Israel and have made several camps within Hebrew territory.

Saul divides his men into two groups, the largest at Michmash (see map) and the other 4 miles away under Benjamin in the mountainous terrain at Bethel where there was a Philistine outpost.

(For a really detailed look with photos at Jonathan's two man crusade in chapter 14 check this link out

<https://holylandphotos.wordpress.com/2015/03/11/jonathan-and-his-armor-bearer-1-samuel-14/>)

Firstly Saul takes credit for Jonathan's act of bravery in the beginning of Chapter 13. This is the first act of jealousy and self-centredness we see in this complex character.

Secondly as the threat of the Philistines comes more real, Saul's new heart is tested at Gilgal as he waits for Samuel to come and lead the people in worship. Kings are in charge of civic authority, Priests are uniquely appointed to offer sacrifices and lead the people in this way. Saul though seeks to hurry it along and

offers a sacrifice himself. (Interestingly King Uzziah in 1 Chronicles 26 does the same and God sends Leprosy upon him – serious business).

Saul is a King, and even has been gifted in prophecy, but now he assumes a role he has not been called to – priest. He could have prayed to the Lord, he could have led the people in corporate prayer, but instead he chose a calling that was not his – priest.

His heart was shown in that moment, and God rejected Him as a true king. Now God will find someone with the right heart.

This heart problem continues into the next chapters as Saul uses religion in an inappropriate way with his rash vow in chapter 14 for the army not to eat. Because of this, their hunger drives them to sin by feverishly even eating the blood of the animals. More than that Saul is prepared to kill his own son because of his vow. Saul is becoming more and more inhuman to the point where even the people knew that God does not want rash vows to be held in His name.

Can it get any worse for Saul?



The Amalekite Problem

In chapter 15 we come to one of the most controversial passages in the Bible. The call by God to eradicate the Amalekites, even their animals. This passage is widely used to discredit the Bible, the Old Testament, and God himself.

It is a passage to wrestle with and not just read on past. The Old Testament is a real story, with real people and real scars. It is not a fairy tale full of fluffy clouds and pots of gold.



(Samuel orders the execution of King Agag)

The Amalekites are a real people, who almost 400 years previous had attacked a weary band of newly released slaves – see Exodus 17:8.

They are a violent people, rape and slaughter was their world.

Melissa Florer-Bixler says these words about the Amalekites –

‘They are a people who generations of interpreters have charged with moral turpitude, a filthy and disgusting people. They are said to be such an infectious curse that the Bible records God’s call to eradicate them from the earth. The Amalekites hold an exceptional place in the Old Testament. No other people are assigned a permanent place of dishonor, generation after generation.’

Here are some things to consider when thinking Biblically about this passage –

- The Amalekites were given 400 years to repent, and actually increased in their wickedness.
- There are other moments in the Bible where God knows that such wickedness needs to be completely blotted out – the Flood.

- It is difficult for modern readers to understand the complexities of this ancient world. Would I feel the same struggle if my fledgling family lived in fear of an Amalekite invasion or hunting party?
- We know that God takes no delight in destruction (see the end of Jonah), He always offers the chance for repentance, but He also is a God who will deal with evil. He does not sit in Heaven having philosophical arguments, rather He will judge the World. We can trust Him in that.

Further reading –

<https://www.christiancentury.org/article/critical-essay/biblical-amalekites-are-israelites-enemies-and-their-kin>

<https://bible.org/seriespage/saul-and-amalekites-1-samuel-151-35>

Some Questions to reflect –

1. *Do we read the Bible with realistic hearts? Or do we expect the Bible to be so irrelevant that when it comes to actual evil we are surprised when God deals with it.*

2. *At the end of the Amalekite mission, Saul saves the King and everything else that might bring him money. How is this deeply disturbing? Can we see now how God needs a new king?*