

1st Samuel

Lesson 12

Just as we paused before to explain the timing of the events in the book concerning the capture of the Ark, its return, and the concurrent stories of Samuel, Saul, and David, we must also begin with a pause to look at the text and notice a change in the human authorship. When we arrived at the beginning of chapter 7, we read, *“And the men of Kiriath-jearim came and took the ark of the LORD and brought it into the house of Abinadab on the hill, and consecrated Eleazar his son to keep the ark of the LORD. ²From the day that the ark remained at Kiriath-jearim, the time was long, for it was twenty years; and all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD.”* (7:1-2)

Until chapter 7, verse 2, the writing of this book matches the style of Samuel’s record in the book of Judges and Ruth. Beginning with verse 2 of this chapter, someone besides Samuel picked up the pen to record Samuel’s story. More than likely, it was the prophet, Gad. Three clues give us this determination. First, from this point on, the writer will frequently use the words, *“Samuel said.”* In the first six chapters and the first verse of chapter 7, the words *“Samuel said”* were used only one time in chapter 3 verse 10, when Samuel was telling us about what the LORD said to him at his call as a young boy. The second clue is found in the fact that to this point in the storyline, after telling us about how the LORD called him to be a judge, Samuel focused on the plight of Israel in particular details. He did not speak about King Saul or the future King David, although King Saul was king at the time, and David had been anointed to be the next king by Samuel by the time of the stealing of the Ark debacle, as we discovered. The third clue is found in the fact that Samuel could not have recorded the words, *“From the day that the ark remained at Kiriath-jearim, the time was long, for it was twenty years.”* Samuel did not live long enough to see the new King David move the Ark from Kiriath-jearim in his seventh year as king of Israel. Samuel died following the event where David hid from King Saul in the cave and cut the hem of his garment, which led to Saul’s repentance from trying to kill him, as recorded in chapter 24. In chapter 7, the next writer, after Samuel, picked up the pen. He covered the stories of Samuel, Saul, Jonathan, and David, but not all in chronological order. Notice how in verse 3, the dialog between individuals and Samuel increases exponentially, whereas before, it was spotty at best. Here is verse 3. *“Then Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying, ‘If you return to the LORD with all your heart, remove the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you and direct your hearts to the LORD and serve Him alone; and He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines.’”⁴ So the sons of Israel removed the Baals and the Ashtaroth and served the LORD alone.” “Then Samuel said, ‘Gather all Israel to Mizpah, and I will pray to the LORD for you.’”* (7:3-5)

Chapter 9

We come to chapter 9 as Samuel begins his search for the first human king of the nation of Israel. We might pause at this point to note that in many ways, Moses and Joshua acted like the human kings of Israel but plainly without the title. But, in another sense, neither, in their capacity as the leaders of Israel, were indeed the king of Israel. Why? It was because the LORD was the King of Israel and both Moses and Joshua were servants of the true King, the LORD of Israel. After the death of Joshua, the LORD intended to continue as the King of Israel. As such, He was all they needed for a king for the rest of time. But, as we discovered in the book of Judges, after the death of Joshua, it took less than a decade for the nation of Israel to forget the LORD’s plan and, in many ways, forget the LORD had designed Himself to be Israel’s only King forever. But over the more than three hundred years since the death of Joshua, Israel had experienced much because of its rebellion. Even under Samuel, the uprising had continued.

Samuel had led the rescue of Israel from the Philistines and the Amorites. As we read, as long as Samuel was alive, the nation of Israel was safe from the surrounding countries. But now Israel wanted a king to be in place when the time came for Samuel to die. Specifically, as we read, the nation did not want either of Samuel's worthless priestly sons to be the judge over the nation. While that was the excuse for the desire for a king, it was not the real reason. The writer will tell us the real reason later. And so, we come to Samuel's next story recorded in the ledger of the Holy Writ. The LORD had instructed Samuel to select a king. The interesting thing about this story is that it actually occurred twenty-seven years before the previous story of capturing the Ark of the Covenant. That story was recorded by Samuel, but the new writer added a conclusion to it and then continued to record all the rest of the following stories.

B. The Nation with a King

1. The Story of the Dedication of Saul by Samuel

a) Kish's Son Handsome and Tall (9:1-2)

As for now, we come to chapter 9, verse 1. The writer began his story of the dedication of Saul by Samuel. We see Saul's specific characteristics. We come to Kish's son, handsome and tall. Verse 1.

"Now there was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish the son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Becorath, the son of Aphiah, the son of a Benjamite, a mighty man of valor. ² He had a son whose name was Saul, a choice and handsome man, and there was not a more handsome person than he among the sons of Israel; from his shoulders and up he was taller than any of the people." (9:1-2)

In verse 1, the writer lists the genealogy of Saul's father's line back five generations. Genealogies were critical to the Nation of Israel. Status was important in the Nation of Israel, and much of that status was based on how you were related to one of the twelve sons of Jacob. Status was also based on the number of prominent men who made up the line of a man's ancestry. In this case, Saul was related to Jacob through Jacob's youngest son, Benjamin. Kish was alive at the time this story was transpiring because he was involved in the story. As for the others in this list, it looks like it is a direct line of Saul going backward to Benjamin, but it is not. In the writer's style, he lists only the prominent men in Saul's line, those that would be immediately recognized by the Jewish community. In the writer's style, and in the style of the Hebrew writers of the Bible, any man in a line was still a father of someone on down in the line though there may have been several generations in between. For example, the grandfather of Saul was still the father of Saul even though there was a person in between the two. The writer's list summarizes that kind, listing only the prominent men in Saul's line. A clue to this point is found in the list. Notice that the writer does not name the sixth father back. Instead, he just calls him a Benjamite. Surely, the writer knew Saul's heritage. These five men were not the direct line of Saul going backward. These men were simply the well-known ancestors of Saul. When we harmonized the descendants of Benjamin to Saul from Genesis 46:21, 1 Samuel 14:51, 1 Chronicles 7:6-8, 1 Chronicles 8:29-33, 1 Chronicle 9:35-39, and this passage in the story, we came up with the following lineage of Benjamin to Saul:

Benjamin, Becher, Aphish (Abiah), Bechorath, Zeror (Zur), Abiel, Ner, Kish, and then Saul.
[Names in parenthesis are alternate spellings found in the English Bible.]

Now we can see what the writer was saying. When the writer listed Aphish last and then said he was the son of a Benjamite, the writer was saying Aphish was the son in the direct line of Benjamin. All of Israel knew Benjamin and the names of his sons, for he had only three – Bela, Becher, and Jediel. We are fortunate to have the books of the Chronicles to help us with this information. They record for us the complete line of Benjamin from his birth all the way through

the return of the Jews from exile and provide the list all the way to the end of the Old Testament. In addition, those books tell us the number of men in Benjamin's line who returned from exile to live in the Promised Land under the control of the Persian government, which was the ruling government of the largest empire in the world at the close of the last verse of the book of Malachi.

At the end of verse 1 in our passage, the writer says, "*a mighty man of valor.*" This reference was directed at Kish, the father of Saul. It indicates that Kish was a man of great strength, great courage, and great fortitude. It does not mean that Kish was a man of great wealth, for the writer will tell us in verse 21 of this chapter that Kish was of the least in the families of Benjamin, not wealthy as of other men in the tribe.

Verse 2 tells us that Kish "*had a son whose name was Saul, a choice and handsome man, and there was not a more handsome person than he among the sons of Israel; from his shoulders and up he was taller than any of the people.*"

We are fortunate that the committee of this English version used the word "*choice.*" Other English versions used the words "*choice young.*" However, the Hebrew word does not offer the thought of a "*young*" man. Saul was simply a "*choice*" man, meaning that he was in the prime of his life and at the appropriate place in his maturity to become the king. The writer speaks of Saul's physical appearance. Not only was he the most handsome man in the nation of Israel at the time, but he was also the tallest Israelite in the nation. As we will see soon, Saul's physical appearance was such that he had difficulty hiding in the crowd.

As a special note here, no one knows the actual age of Saul at this time. We know that he will reign for forty years, but the age at the time he became king is unknown. However, there are some parameters that we can use to come close to his age. First, in the Nation of Israel, there was a long-standing rule that a priest could begin his training at the age of twenty-five and then begin as a full-fledged priest at the age of thirty. If you will remember, in the LORD's divine plan, the priests were the ultimate judges over the religious and civil lives of the people. With the selection of a king, the people were willing to reduce the authority of the priests and place the complete rule of their civil lives under the king's authority. It is hard to believe that the nation would have accepted a king who was not yet thirty years of age for that reason.

Some scholars indicate that Saul was forty years of age when he became king, and that was probably close to being true. They say that because Saul's son Jonathan was a good friend of David, Saul had to be at least forty years of age when he became king. That position breaks down when we look at the timeline in the Bible. As we have already stated, David was born in the tenth year of Saul's reign as king, seventeen years before the Ark of the Covenant was captured by the Philistines. If Saul became king at the age of thirty, he was forty when David was born and fifty-seven when the Ark was captured. After the capture of the Ark and its return, the Philistines would bring Goliath on the scene, facilitating the introduction of David about the age of seventeen when Saul was fifty-seven years old. In 1st Chronicles 8:33, we learn that "*Saul became the father of Jonathan, Malachi-shua, Abinadab, and Eshbaal.*" We do not know if these sons were listed in the birth order. In the Old Testament, if the sons were listed in the order of birth, they were usually identified as with the listing of Benjamin's sons in 1st Chronicles 8:1, which says, "*And Benjamin became the father of Bela his firstborn....*" Because that is not the case in this passage, the writer probably listed the sons of Saul by their order of prominence in the story of the nation of Israel. Thus, Jonathan was the most prominent of Saul's sons but possibly not the oldest.

Nevertheless, because Jonathan was a major figure in the first two years of Saul's reign, he had to be at least twenty years of age when he was serving as a military leader. In chapter 13, we will discover that in Saul's second year as king, Jonathan will control some of Saul's army. That information will lead us to conclude that Jonathan might well have been Saul's oldest son. Therefore, it seems inevitable that Saul could not have been thirty when he became king and the age

of forty is more plausible but probably not accurate either. But there is one more important thing that we need to address here.

When Saul died, David became the King of Judah with his capital in Hebron in the tribal area of Judah. At the same time, King Saul's son, Ishbosheth, became the king of the remaining eleven tribes of Israel. The Nation of Israel was divided between two kings. Why was Ishbosheth not mentioned in 1st Chronicles 8:33 as a son of Saul? The simple answer is he was but by a different name. In 1st Samuel 31:2, we will learn that "*The Philistines overtook Saul and his sons; and the Philistines killed Jonathan and Abinadab and Malchi-shua the sons of Saul.*" Notice that only three of Saul's sons were killed with him in battle. The fourth was not killed. Eshbaal remained alive. We do not know why he was not in battle with his father and brothers, but he was not. Eshbaal means *man of Baal, or Baal exists*. The name Ishbosheth means *man of shame*. The two are the same person. Eshbaal, in 1st Chronicles 8:33 and Ishbosheth in 2 Samuel 3:7, was the same. Eshbaal was his given name, Ishbosheth was his nickname. In our study of the Bible thus far from the Book of Genesis, we have discovered that the Israelites were famous for assigning nicknames to people, places, and things. By the time Eshbaal became king, he was a man of shame. More than likely, he was a man of shame because he was not in the most important battle of his father's life.

Furthermore, in 2nd Samuel 3, we will find out that Ishbosheth was highly insulted when General Abner went into Rizpah, Saul's concubine. The introduction of Rizpah is an interesting twist in the story. She will come again into the story in 2 Samuel 21, which tells us that David "*took the two sons of Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah, Armoni, and Mephibosheth whom she had borne to Saul....*" With that, we learn that Saul had more than four sons because he had two lesser sons with Rizpah by the names of Armoni and Mephibosheth. This Mephibosheth was not the same as Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan. These two were half-brothers of Ishbosheth. It is for that reason that he had the reaction with Abner that he did. Rizpah was near kin through his half-brothers.

When we arrive at chapter 13:1, we will read the following:

"Saul was *thirty* years old when he began to reign, and he reigned *forty* two years over Israel."

Notice that the words *thirty* and *forty* are in italics. That means those two words are nowhere in that verse in the original Hebrew. It is because of this poor translation that many people think Saul became king at the age of thirty. When we reach chapter 13, we will explain completely and thoroughly the true meaning, intent, and correct translation of this verse.

With all that in mind, let us move on with Samuel's story of the selection of Saul as king.