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A JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE

Reading: 1 Samuel 2:27-36

10. THE BOOK OF 1 SAMUEL

In the original Hebrew Bible 1 and 2 Samuel formed one book, as also did 1 and 2 Kings and 1 and 2 Chronicles. These three books were first divided by scholars working on the Septuagint, when they translated the Old Testament into the Greek language. The reason for the division in each case seems to have been that written Greek requires at least one third more space than Hebrew. *So the translators were forced to divide each of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles into two, either because there was a limit to the length of scroll available, or in order to make the scrolls easier to handle.* Now in our English Bible 1 and 2 Samuel appear among the historical books in the Hebrew Bible however, they are considered as one book among the former prophets. Now how should we approach this book of 1 Samuel ? Well, we could we approach it,

1. Geographically:

We need to keep in mind that the majority of action in both books of Samuel took place in and around the central highlands in the land of Israel. The nation of Israel was largely concentrated in an area that ran about 90 miles from the hill country of Ephraim in the north

(1 Sam 1:1 9:4) to the hill country of Judah in the south (Josh 20:7 21:11) and between 15 to 35 miles east to west. The major cities of 1 and 2 Samuel are to be found in these central highlands. Shiloh, the residence of Eli and the tabernacle, Ramah, the hometown of Samuel, Gibeah, the headquarters of Saul, Bethlehem the birthplace of David, Hebron, David's capital when he ruled over Judah and Jerusalem the ultimate "*city of David.*" 1.

2. Historically:

Abraham the father of the Jews lived around 2000 B.C. King David came to the throne around 1000 B.C. So this first book of Samuel covers the history of Israel from the time of the Judge Eli the priest (1060 B.C.) to the death of Saul (1010 B.C.) Now do you recall that the Old Testament can be divided into 4 equal parts of roughly 500 years each ?

1. From 2000 to 1500 B.C. Israel was led by **Patriarchs**, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, though they were not a nation at time.

2. From 1500 to 1000 B.C. they were led by Prophets: from Moses to Samuel.

3. From 1000 B.C. to 500 B.C. they were led by **Princes** or kings from Saul and onwards.

4. From 500 B.C. and leading up to the time of Christ they were led by Priests: from Joshua a priest who returned to Judah from exile under Zerubbabel's rule to Caiaphas in

the time of Christ. Now none of these leader types were ideal and each person brought his own flaws to the task. *You see, the nation needed a leader who was prophet, priest and king and they found Him in the Lord Jesus.* Each stage therefore was a foreshadowing of the ideal leader who was to come. You see, like the book of Acts in the New Testament, the first book of Samuel is a book of transition, a book of change. The long period of the judges with its unsettled government, religious apostasy and social problems was about to end. The theocracy was about to be replaced by the monarchy. So 1 Samuel, is a book of transition. So we can approach this (a) (b)

(c) Spiritually:

As we have said the first book of Samuel is the book of transition from the Theocracy to the Monarchy. Now it was always God's intention to give Israel a king. As far back as (Gen Ch 49) Jacob had prophesied “ *The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, not a lawgiver from between his feet until Shiloh come and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.* ” (Gen 49:10) In the law of Moses instructions were given as to who could or could not be king, and restrictions were placed upon such a king. My the great sin of Israel in this book was anticipating the purpose of God and insisting on the king of their choice instead of waiting for the king of God's choice. Do you see their request in (7:4-9) You see, they wanted to become “ *like all the nations.* ” (8:5) Do you know believers this and they have become spoiled because they wanted to become like the people of the world around them ? But did you notice the deeper meaning

here ? Look if you will at (8:7) “ *they have not rejected thee but they have rejected me that I should not reign over them.* ” Is this not the central spiritual message of this book ? The Lord had called Israel into a unique relationship with Himself and God Himself was Israel's invisible king. Through disobedience the people had brought chastisement upon themselves from time to time, but they attributed this to the fact that they had no human and visible king, such as the surrounding nations had, but now as Samuel ages, and his sons prove corrupt, the people take the opportunity to press for a human king. You see, they wanted the seen not the unseen, the visible not the invisible, the human not the divine, the second best, not God's best.

**God has His best things for the few
Who dare to stand the test
God has His second choice for those
Who will not take His best**

Incidentally, God's ideal form of government is not a democracy or a republic, It is not government of the people, by the people for the people. That is man's ideal form of government, the very best that man can produce. But God likens it to a mixture of iron and clay. But God's kind of government, the government yet to be imposed on this planet during the millennium will be theocratic or Christocratic, that is government by Jesus Christ.

(d) Biographically:

For the Bible deals honestly with its main characters.

I wonder have you notice the contrasts or comparisons in this book ? Eli and Samuel, David and Saul, and Jonathan and Absalom. Now first Samuel is the story of four men, Eli, Samuel, Saul and David. Their stories are so interwoven that the story of Eli overlaps that of Samuel, the story of Samuel overlaps that of Saul, and the story of Saul overlaps that of David.

(1) ELI & SAMUEL Chapters 1-8

This first section of the book has what Raymond Brown calls “*a true to life*,” mixture of joy and tragedy. The story of Samuel’s birth and Hannah’s delight dominates Chapters 1 to 3, while the tragedy of Ichabod’s birth and Eli’s grief makes sad reading in (Ch 4) You see, the events in these opening chapters centre around,

(a) HANNAH: A GODLY MOTHER:

For she put the Lord first, she believed in prayer, she kept her vows and she gave God all the glory. (2:1) Hannah was the wife of Elkanah and her name means “*gracious*,” and she was one of the most gracious women in all the Bible. Driven to desperation because she was unfruitful she besieged the throne of God promising that if God would give her a son she would give him right back to God. And so she did. When her little boy was born she called him Samuel “*asked of God*,” as though to constantly remind herself of her promise. You see, she did not want to fall into the sin of Eli and put her son before the Lord. So she gave him to Eli and said “*you train him to be a man of God*.” (1:28) How she must have upheld

that little boy in prayer day and night. She had prayed for the **gift** of that son but now she was praying for the **growth** of that son. Over her whole life can be written just that one sentence that she uttered to Eli when she brought the boy to him, “*for this child I prayed*.” (1:27) A little girl was spending the night far away from home. At bedtime she knelt with her hostess to pray, expecting the usual prompting. Finding her hostess unable to help her, she prayed, “*Please, Lord, excuse me. I can’t remember my prayers, and I’m staying with a mother who doesn’t know how to pray*.” Are you a mother who knows how to pray ? For good or bad, for heaven or hell, a mother’s influence is very great. It’s not surprising to learn that Lord Byron, the prominent poet lived a reckless and vicious life, for his mother was rash and violent. Nero was fourteen years Emperor of Rome. He was one of the most evil of all men, and his mother was a murderess.

On the other hand the mothers of Sir Walter Scott, Wesley and Augustine were remarkable for their graciousness, godliness and intelligence. Like mother, like child. That’s what led one great man to say, “*Give me a generation of Christian mothers, and I will undertake to change the face of society in twelve months*.” Isn’t it interesting that Hannah’s trial drove her to the place of worship ? Did you notice (1:19) Is that not a challenge ? You see, it seems to be the pattern that when believers face difficulties, afflictions and disappointments, they do not pray, they do not worship. They stay at home, or take a weekend break from their church in order to cheer themselves up. My the solution to your problem is never found in absence from the assembly of God’s people. (Heb 10:24-25)

Hannah was a woman of prayer, and so it's no surprise that Samuel was a man of prayer.

(b) ELI: A CARELESS FATHER:

Who was Eli ? Well, religiously he was the high priest (1:9) nationally he was a judge for Eli “ *judged Israel forty years,* ” (5:18) but domestically he was a father who had lost control. How tragic when a servant of the Lord and a High Priest at that fails to win his own sons to the Lord. Do you see what (2:12) says ? You see, grace doesn't run in our blood stream. Unbelieving parents have children who become Christians, and Christians have unbelieving children. But believing parents ought to do their best to lead their children to the Lord. You see, because Eli was a priest, his sons became priests. To them it wasn't a calling, but a career, not a passion, but a position. They remind me of the preacher of whom it was asked, “ *Was you sent, or did you just went ?* ” These sons “ *just went.* ” They weren't interested in the Lord, only lust, for the Bible says they seduced the women who assisted in the temple. They weren't concerned about the Master, only money, for the Bible says they stole from the people they were to serve. They didn't care about the Scriptures, only about self-indulgence, for the Bible says “ *they knew not the Lord.* ”

Now it is not always a man's fault if his children are unsaved. There is many a godly parent who has an ungodly child. Have you unsaved children ? Does the Devil hammer you over the head about it ? My leave them with the Lord. Sometimes God waits that He might

keep your heart tender toward others who are not saved. But in Eli's case the fact that his children were unregenerate is noted among his other faults. I mean Eli *rebuked* them but he did not *restrain them* (2:23) and therefore he came under the judgment of God. (2:29) Sometime ago a columnist in one of Chicago's daily newspapers received a letter from a distraught mother. She said, “ *My son is seventeen years of age he will not listen to a thing I say. He's in with the wrong crowd, he's in trouble with the police. What can I do ?* ” The columnist's answer was brutally frank, “ *Shrink him down to seventeen months and start all over again.* ” How many wish they could. But what we cannot do, God can for the gospel is not a reduction in age, it's a new birth altogether. Eli failed with his sons but he didn't fail with Samuel.

(c) SAMUEL: A DEVOTED SON:

Now the Jews regarded Samuel as a national leader second only to Moses. (Jer 15:1) Samuel was to lead the people out of the times of the judges into those of the kings “ *and lay the foundation for a prosperous development of the monarchy.* ” He bridged the gap between the priests and the kings and founded the prophetic order in Israel. He was the last of the judges and the first of the prophets. (3:20 7:15) He became Israel's man of destiny, an educator, who founded the “ *school of prophets,* ” a kind of theological seminary where young men could be trained in the Scriptures, (10:5 19:20 2 Kings 2:3-7 15-18 6:1) a prophet, who put the Word above the world, a man who offered priestly sacrifices,

(1 Chron 6:34-38) a judge, who put integrity above indulgence; a king-maker, who put greatness above glory. My Moses was the deliverer who created a nation. But the nation sinned and went down deep in defeat and despair. Just when Israel's national situation and spiritual condition appeared hopeless, Samuel restored them and recreated them, and he led them on from victory to victory. Now during those days messages from the Lord were rare. And one night, while Samuel was sleeping in the temple, the Lord called him. Eventually he said, "*Speak Lord for thy servant heareth,*" (3:9) Later on the Lord would say to Samuel, "*Speak servant for thy Lord heareth,*" for Samuel became a man of prayer. Are you living where the Lord can speak to you and use you ?

1. Samuel ministered at a time of Animosity:

We read, "*And the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel.*" (7:13) Samuel was there standing for the truth right in the forefront of the battle.

2. Samuel ministered at a time of Apostasy:

The emergence of a prophet in Israel always signals a time of backsliding. The priesthood had failed so God raised up a prophet to preach the Word of God.

3. Samuel ministered at a time of Activity:

For when Israel demanded a king we read "*But the thing displeased Samuel and Samuel prayed unto the Lord.*"

(8:6) You see, up to now God had not spoken to the people in wide spread visions (3:1) but now everyone knew that Samuel was God's prophet and that the Word of the Lord was with him. Do you know what his first task was ? To declare Eli's doom. (3:18) This was the start of Samuel's prophetic ministry and it was not the last time that the word he gave would be hard to receive. (a)(b)(c)

(d) ISRAEL: A SUPERSTITIOUS NATION:

Now the **Ark** is the main theme in these chapters. We see, 1. The Arks Capture: by the Philistines (Ch 4) 2. The Ark's Victory: (Ch 5) 3. The Ark's Return: (Ch 6) 4. The Ark's Rest: (Ch 7)

You see, the Philistines are still occupying parts of Israel on the west coast posing a real threat to the nation. Israel lost 4,000 men in the preliminary battle, and this should have told them that the Lord was displeased. *Did they repent ? Did they turn to the Lord in confession and prayer ?* No. Instead they resorted to superstition and they took the Ark to the battlefield. And because Israel put their trust in the Ark of God rather than the God of the Ark, God allowed the Philistines to defeat them. The Ark was taken, Hophni and Phinehas the sons of Eli were slain and Eli hearing the news died. (4:18) You see, instead of revering the Ark as the symbol of God's presence they turned it into a religious relic. (Num 10:35) My can the same mistake not be made with regard to Christian symbols ? (1 Cor 11:29-30) You see, when we rely on the outward form without the internal reality we just become like the Pharisees. (Matt 23:25-28) Now do you

see what's happening here ? After Eli's grim death responsibility as judge in Israel falls to Samuel, so we move to the second section of the book,

(2) SAMUEL & SAUL Chapters 9-15

Now Samuel formed the living link between the theocracy and the monarchy. It had always been God's intention to eventually give Israel a king, in His own time way. Israel's impatience forced the issue and so the Lord gave them the kind of king they demanded, Saul. Later, in His purpose, the Lord gave them the King He had intended to give them all along, David. John Hunt was a missionary in the 19th century to the cannibals of Fiji. Writing to a missionary colleague on one occasion about holiness he urged his friend to join him in the prayer that they would escape "*the curse of a useless life.*" The curse of a useless life. God had rich purposes for Saul life's but it ended in tragedy. But it was not always so for look at,

(a) SAUL'S INITIAL DEVOTION:

In his old age (8:1) Samuel anoints Saul King. Indeed,

1. Saul was Anointed at Ramah: (9:10-16)
2. Saul was Appointed at Mizpeh: (10:17-27)
3. Saul was Acclaimed at Gilgal: (11:1)

It all began so well. I mean Saul is attractive (9:2) strong (9:2) considerate (9:5, 7) meek (9:21) controlled (10:26-27) just (11:26) and courageous. (11:7-11) He stood head and shoulders above his countrymen. He was

handsome and humble, strong and tall and every inch a king. When the Israelis saw him they shouted, "*God save the king,*" (10:24) God tried to, but Saul interfered. He started well. There was initial devotion. Can you recall your initial devotion to the Lord ? Do you remember the freshness of your first love ? Do you remember when it was springtime in your soul ? How you learned to yearn more of the Word ? When you heart was filled with love for Christ ? When you loved your fellow believers ? When you had a passion for souls ? That was then, what about now ? From devotion to decline for notice,

(b) SAUL'S GRADUAL DECLINE:

Someone has said that power corrupts and Saul changes. Dr. George Sweeting says this, "*Collapse in the Christian life is rarely a blow out its usually a slow leak.*" Spiritual decline can be so gradual that before we know it we have fallen. My Saul began that downward spiral that ultimately led to his defeat, disgrace and death. The Lord says in (15:10) "*For he is turned back from following Me.*" What brought about this decline. Well,

1. Saul was Impatient:

Samuel was supposed to come to Gilgal in seven days to make a sacrifice (10:8) but when he is late, Saul takes matters into his own hands, "*and he offered the burnt offering.*" (13:9) As king, Saul has no right to make a priestly sacrifice. But in the stress of the moment, his fault line of impatience cracks, and he rushes ahead of the Lord. The result ? He lost his crown. Are you like that ?

It's interesting to notice that the Early Church did not start with *Activity but with Passivity*. It begins with a story about people who obeyed the Lord by waiting. (Lk 24:49 Acts 1:4) Is “ *steady patience*, ” what you need ? (Heb 10:36) Patience to face the problems of family life, to confront the discouragement's of church life, to meet the frustrations of secular life. 1.

2. Saul was Irreverent:

Do you recall God's Word concerning Amalek ? Look at (15:3) The word “ *destroy*, ” refers to the giving of things and persons to the Lord often by totally destroying them. In other words this spoil was to be devoted to God but look at (15:9) Saul kept the best for himself and gave the leftovers to God. (Mal 1:18) Are we guilty of that ? My we talk about worldliness in the church, but what about worldliness in the Christian ? Do you know what a worldly believer does ? *He attends first to his own needs*. Saul kept the best for himself and gave the leftovers to God. Are we only giving to God that which is left over ? What about your ***Time*** ? Have you time for sport, personal interests, socialising, how much time do you give to the Lord ? What about your ***Energy*** ? “ *Oh*, ” you say “ *I have not much of that*. ” Well, you've enough to work, have you enough to worship ? You've enough for pastimes, have you enough for prayer ? You've enough for family, have you enough for fellowship ? What about your ***Money*** ? Do you just give the leftovers off your money to God ? Do you just tip the Lord ? Is God coming in for the leftovers in your life ?

3. Saul was Insubordinate:

“ *Thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God*, ” kept ringing in Saul's ears. (13:13) “ *To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams*. ” (15:22) Do you know what God wants from His people in this 21st century ? The same thing that He wanted from His people in the 1st century. ***Obedience***. Aretta Loving, a Wycliffe missionary, was washing her breakfast dishes when she saw Jimmy, the five year old neighbour, headed straight toward the back porch. She had just finished painting the back-porch handrails, and she was proud of her work. “ *Come around to the front door, Jimmy*, ” she shouted. “ *There's wet paint on the hand rails*, ” “ *I'll be careful*, ” Jimmy replied, not turning from his path. “ *No, Jimmy. Don't come up the steps*, ” Aretta shouted, knowing that Jimmy had a tendency to mess things up. “ *I'll be careful*, ” he said again, by this time he was dangerously close to the steps. “ *Jimmy stop*, ” Aretta shouted. “ *I don't want carefulness. I want obedience*. ” As the words burst from his mouth she suddenly remembered these words to King Saul, “ *to obey is better than sacrifice*. ”

How would Jimmy respond, Aretta wondered. To her relief he shouted back, “ *All right Loving, I'll go around to the front door*. ” As he turned around the house, Aretta thought to herself, “ *how often am I like Saul or like Jimmy, wanting to go my own way ? I rationalise, ‘ I'll be careful, Lord, ’ as I proceed with my own plans*. ” But my the Lord does not want carefulness. **He wants obedience**. Tell me, is your spiritual decline due to a lack of obedience ? Are you keeping the commandment of the

Lord in relation to the *Lord's Table* ? (1 Cor 11:24) To *attendance* ? (Heb 10:25) To *Prayer* ? (Lk 18:1) To *Love* ? (Jn 13:34) To *Go* ? (Matt 28:19) Is God saying to you through His Word, “ *thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God,*” The late President of The Moody Bible Institute in Chicago William Culbertson often prayed, “ *Lord, help us to end well.*” The saintly British preacher F. B. Meyer said at the close of his life, “ *I don't want my life to end in a swamp.*” My how did Saul end ? (a) (b)

(c) SAUL'S EVENTUAL DEFEAT:

Its interesting that Saul's career as King began at *Dawn*, as the sun was coming up, (9:26) his career as King ended at *Dusk*, with the sun going down. At night Saul disguised himself, and went to consult a witch (28:8) then he went out to the battlefield and was slain. (31:6) My God's intention for Saul's life was “ *Captain that he may save.*” (9:16) but the captain became a captive to his own selfish desires and changing moods. Saul failed God, he failed the people of God, he let himself down, he lost God's blessing, his crown and his life. Saul ended his life in disgrace, in defeat, in disaster. What a contrast he was from Saul of Tarsus. One chose the *path of rebellion* against God, the other chose the *path of submission* to God. The first Saul *died a suicide* and lost his crown, the second Saul *died a martyr* and gained a crown. The first Saul died saying, “ *I have played the fool,*” (26:21) The second Saul died saying, “ *I have fought a good fight.*” (2 Tim 4:7) My which one represents you ? The Risen Lord says, “ *Behold I come*

quickly, hold that fast which thou fast that no man take thy crown.” (Rev 3:11) **Don't lose your crown.** Be faithful to the Lord so that one day He can present you before God's throne and give you a crown of glory. Now as I said each section in this book overlaps but notice the final part,

(3) SAUL & DAVID Chapters 16-31

Saul was the first king, but David was Israel's finest king. All the kings of Judah are measured by David. I love what John Phillips says,

Saul was a herder of mules but David was a keeper of sheep. Saul was used to driving, David to leading. The first time we see Saul he had just lost his father's mules and had not the slightest idea where to find them, the first time we see David, he was keeping his father's sheep and was willing to give his life for his flock. So we see,

(a) DAVID THE SHEPHERD:

For as everyone was watching Saul's reign sink, in a secluded field in Bethlehem God was raising up a youth named David, a nobody nobody, noticed, but someone who would change the course of Israel's history forever. “ *The Lord hath sought him out a man, after his own heart.*” (13:14) God had sought out a man, only a man but what a man he was. Scholars tell us that he was about 15 or 16 years of age here. Do you recall what Jesse said about him ? “ *He keepeth the sheep.*” (16:11 Ps 78:10) When you live in the field's tending sheep its solitude that nurtures you. Think of it, nature was his nurse,

companion, teacher. Some years ago when we were out in Israel we stayed at a hotel indeed the only Kibbutz Hotel in Jerusalem, the Mitzpeh Rachel, it was situated on the south side of Jerusalem. You could step out onto the balcony of your room and there before you were the very hills where David tended his sheep, wild, gaunt, strong, the very place where David's character was nurtured. You see, David's training exposed him to the danger and threats of reality. He says, “ *the Lord delivered me out of the paw of the lion and out of the paw of the bear.*” (17:37) While David was tending sheep God put steel in his bones. The Lord used **obscurity, monotony, and reality** to bring David from the place of *Humility to the place of Honour*. Do you recognise that faithfulness in little things is God's appointed way to bigger things ? (Matt 25:21) Before entrusting David with the nation, what did God do ? He gave him a flock of sheep to protect.

Could it be that the Lord has placed you in some sphere of service for Him which is obscure ? Are you unseen, unknown, unappreciated, unapplauded, and it's monotonous? The question, are you faithful ? For though man may forget you, God will remember and reward you.

(b) DAVID THE SERVANT:

For David's pre-king years are most well known for,

1. His Fight with Goliath: (Ch 17)
2. His Friendship with Jonathan: (Ch 18)
3. His Fame with Israel: (18:6)

Do you know how he refers to himself time and again ? As a servant. (17:32, 34, 36) After piloting their spacecraft on its 250,000 mile journey back to planet earth, James Irwin noted, “ *As I was returning to earth I realized that I was a servant not a celebrity. So I am here as God's servant on planet earth to share what I have experienced that others might know the glory of God.* ” Have you that servants heart ? (a) (b)

(c) DAVID THE STALKED:

For David is now separated from Saul's court and is considered an outlaw and a rebel. You say, “ *what is God doing ?* ” He is removing the props from underneath David until David is brought to the place where He is leaning on God alone. It's all part of his preparation for the throne. He needed to learn to suffer in the wilderness to learn not to trust men and how to trust the Lord. Do you see the activity of God in the life of David ? The Lord is pulling up out the props from underneath him. His position gone. His wife gone. His counsellor gone. His closest friend gone. His self respect gone. My are you in the same position this ? Are you in the process of having every crutch removed from your life ? For some it is represented by a broken romance, the person you felt was God's choice has vanished. For some it's been the death of a dream. For some it's been the loss of a job, the loss of friend. You say, “ *What's God doing ?* ” He is bringing you to the place where you are leaning on Him alone. Do you know the words ? ***We must trust Him wholly, All for us to do They who trust Him wholly: Find Him wholly true.***

