

Major Ideas in 1 Samuel

I. *Regarding God as Holy*

God has constituted Israel as a holy nation unto Him (**Ex. 19:6; Lev. 20:26**). Part of the people being holy is that they are to regard and treat God as holy. This is something they are to do from the heart but the particular actions that are required of them is to observe the worship of the tabernacle in exact accordance with what God has commanded. In particular, God requires this conduct of those who are specially called to serve Him (**Lev. 10:3; 21:6**). Failure to regard God as holy has been the occasion for judgment upon God's chosen leaders in the past (**Num. 20:12; 27:14; Deut. 32:51**). In the books of Samuel, God will make a show of striking down those – even His anointed leaders – who will not reverence Him and His holy articles in the tabernacle but will preserve and exalt those who show proper honor.

II. *The Anointed of God*

- A. **Setting apart as holy.** Anointing was a special part of the process of setting things apart to God to be holy (**Ex. 30:22-33**).¹ God commanded that all the articles of the tabernacle and the priests be anointed with His holy anointing oil, to set them apart as chosen and cleansed by God for His service. Now, with the establishment of the kings, God commands for them to be anointed as well (**1 Sam. 9:16; 10:1; 16:12-13**).
- B. **Representation.** Although God is the one who primarily chooses those who will serve Him in sacred office, in the case of kings, He does not do so apart from the affirmation of the people. Saul and David both receive God's anointing from Samuel as God's representative but must also be coronated by the people as a whole. The king rules over the people as God's representative but he also does so by their consent as their representative. Therefore, when the king walks in righteousness or sins, this reflects on the people as a whole and vice versa.
- C. **Respect for God's anointed.** Those who had been anointed by God for holy service were not to be treated normally. To attack the representative of God wrongfully was the same as attacking God Himself. Though an anointed servant of God was not free from error or being called to account, no one had the right to attack them or shrug off their rule. For this reason, David always refused to take action against Saul, but deals swiftly with those who were not afraid to strike against an anointed one. Throughout the books of Samuel and Kings, God always brings back the blood of those who fight against His anointed on their own heads.

III. *God Looks Upon the Heart*

Though the outward elements of the covenant were essential to God's plans and necessary for the people to observe according to the command of God, they are not sufficient for covenant keeping. From the beginning, God has not been concerned merely with outward obedience, but has required obedience from a heart of love (**Deut. 6:4-5; 10:12-16; 30:1-6**). More important than whether one is an anointed servant of God is whether one has a heart after God. God will defile and cast off those who were once anointed and consecrated if they pervert their way, but God will never cast off the one whose heart belongs to Him.

¹ There were secular uses for anointing as well, but the significance of the tabernacle being anointed and certain individuals being identified as "anointed ones" is that they are uniquely chosen, cleansed, and set apart to serve God in holiness.

Samuel and the Honor of God (1 Samuel 1-7)

I. *The Rise of Samuel and the Fall of the House of Eli (1 Samuel 1-4)*

The birth and call of Samuel sets the stage for all God is going to do in the raising David. Just as David is one raised up to follow God from the heart and replace the current king, so Samuel represents the same in regard to the priesthood. We learn of the great wickedness of the sons of Eli, the high priest, and Eli's unwillingness to deal with them rightly. Because of the unfaithfulness of Eli and his family, the Lord determines to bring an end to his house and to raise up a priest who will reverence Him (**1 Sam. 2:27-36**). God's judgment upon the house of Eli culminates in the defeat of the people against the Philistines in which the ark is captured and the death of Eli and his sons. This is a stark judgment of God, as it constitutes not only his rejection of Eli and his house, but also of His dwelling in Shiloh on account of the unfaithfulness of the people (**Jer. 7:8-15**). God is able to raise one who will serve Him, even apart from the ark and the tabernacle.

II. *Restoration Wrought by God (1 Samuel 5-7)*

- A. **Divine battle.** The peoples of the ancient near east viewed their wars as not being simply between nations but between the gods of the peoples. Therefore, when the Philistines not only defeat Israel but capture the ark, they believe it is because their gods have triumphed over the Lord in divine battle. For this reason, they take the ark and place it in the temple of Dagon as an emblem of the victory they believe their god to have won.
- B. **The Lord's vindication.** However, God is not slack to vindicate His name, even when His people profane it by their sin (**Ezek. 36:16-23**). Though the armies of Israel lie slain on the battlefield, God is alive and His glory undefiled. He humiliates Dagon and afflicts the Philistines with many plagues. Apart from the work of any of His people, the Lord causes the Philistines to cower in fear at His might and to return the ark to Israel. Samuel calls the people to renew themselves before the Lord and the Philistines gather to war against them. However, this time, God defeats the Philistines by His power and gives Israel a measure of rest.

Saul and the Call for a King (1 Samuel 8-15)

I. *Saul's Rise (1 Samuel 8-12)*

- A. **The request for a king.** As Samuel's years draw to a close, Israel asks him to appoint a king over them. Israel's desire for a king is not in itself sinful, for God had allowed for a king in the law (**Deut. 17:14-20**). However, we see that their motivation for doing so is sinful, in that they desire to reject God in doing so, that they may be like the other nations. Though Samuel was against it, the Lord has His purpose in it and assents to the people's request. Yet, He gives the people a stern warning, the king they so long for will bring them much affliction.
- B. **Saul's call.** Israel's first king is Saul of the tribe of Benjamin. His beginnings are humble, as he is from the tribe and clan that is least in Israel, tainted with the sin chronicled in **Judges 19-20**. However, he is God's choice in response to the request of the people. God sends Samuel to anoint him as king, and empowers him with the Spirit to execute his office. The people receive him once they see that he is the tallest and most imposing man in all Israel.
- C. **Saul's success.** Saul's start as king is a hopeful one. He rallies the people to the defense of one of their towns that is being threatened and defeats the Ammonites. He also graciously spares those who spoke against him when he was chosen as king. With this, Samuel and the people gather to coronate Saul and Samuel charges both the king and the people to walk in obedience to the Lord.

II. *Saul's Fall (1 Samuel 13-15)*

- A. **Sinners like the sons of Eli.** Though things look promising for Saul's rule at the outset, we quickly see that he is a man who is unfit to be king. He displays a character that reflects the people under the rule of the judges rather than a heart that seeks after God. Like the people under Eli's sons, he does not regard the command of the Lord but uses the worship of God for his own ends. He does not seek the Lord out of love or to give Him glory in worship but so that he may be blessed in the coming battle. This is a pagan use of worship, where one gives worship in order to get something in return, rather than worship given in gratitude to bring glory to God. This pattern of paganism will persist in Saul's life. In response to this, Samuel declares that God will raise a new king.
- B. **Sinners like Jephthah.** In fighting against the Philistines, Saul's son, Jonathan, shows great valor and trust in the Lord. Saul, however, displays foolishness and distrust in the Lord. First, he seeks to inquire of the Lord but does not wait for the Lord's response. Second, he makes the army swear not to eat before gaining victory, not for the sake of God's glory, but to motivate his army to win. Instead of motivating the people it weakens them so that they do not gain as complete a victory as they might have and provokes some to give into the temptation of eating meat with blood, in opposition to God's law, after the battle is over. When Saul seeks an answer from the Lord but receives none, he learns that Jonathan transgressed his oath not to eat and seeks to put him to death. Like Jephthah, Saul's rash oath would cause him to put his child to death, but this time, the people intervene to save Jonathan.
- C. **Sinners like Achan.** The Lord through Samuel calls upon Saul to eradicate the Amalekites for their treatment of Israel. All the Amalekites and their belongings were to be devoted to destruction. Saul goes to battle and gains victory over the Amalekites but does not devote everything to destruction. He saves the king and the best of the spoil for himself and his army and only gave what was worthless over to destruction. This is just like the sin of Achan in taking from that which is set apart to the Lord for destruction. It shows great disdain for God in that he only gives to God what is worthless but keeps the best for himself. He later claims that these things have been saved to sacrifice them to the Lord, but had that been the case, they would have destroyed them at first. This sin also reflects the general sin of the people while in the land in refusing to destroy the Canaanites. Saul has demonstrated that he will not fulfill his office by doing what God commands. For this reason, the Lord declares that He is tearing the kingdom from Saul to give to another.

The True Anointed King (1 Samuel 16-31)

I. *Saul vs. David (1 Samuel 16-26)*

- A. **The rise of David.** The Lord calls Samuel to anoint a new king, David of the tribe of Judah. Unlike Saul, who looked the part of a king, David is chosen because of his heart for God. The Holy Spirit no longer empowers Saul to be king but now rests on David, whereas an evil spirit now plagues Saul. The contrast between Saul and David is seen immediately. Saul assembles the army to go against the Philistines but is stymied by Goliath. The tallest man in Israel pales in comparison to the champion of Philistia. While all Israel is afraid to fight the giant, David is concerned that the name of God is dishonored by this situation and volunteers to fight. David does not confront Goliath in human strength but in dependence upon the Lord and gains the greatest victory against the Philistines Israel had ever had. David's successes in battle cause the hearts of the people to prefer him to Saul and Saul to see him as a rival, rather than an asset.

B. Two examples of responses to David

1. **Saul and Jonathan.** Though Saul was unaware that David had been anointed as king by Samuel, he recognized David as a threat to his reign. He knew that God had declared that He would give the kingdom to another and Saul identified David as the logical choice. However, though the Lord had declared that He would take the kingdom from Saul, that did not mean that this had to end in Saul fighting against the next king and dying as his enemy. Saul had the option of submitting to the Lord and His new choice for king. This unprecedented move is exactly the course of action taken by Jonathan, who relinquishes his claim to the throne to support David as king.
2. **The principle.** These two are a microcosm of the options that have always been given to humanity in response to God's chosen ones. Ishmael and Esau refused to submit to their brothers who were chosen by God, whereas Joseph's brothers eventually did submit and were blessed. The gentile nations had the option of submitting to Israel and seeking God through them. The world must either submit to Christ and His church to be reconciled to God or remain as His enemies. Submitting to God always requires a heart changed supernaturally to accept God's sovereign rule over one's life. The normal course is to reject God in favor of doing one's own will.

C. Two examples of kingship

1. **The holy things of God.** David and Saul serve as contrasts of what a king could be. This is seen in a number of areas concerning the things of God. David regularly seeks to inquire of God through His priests, whereas Saul will only occasionally seek the will of the Lord and would even resort to seeking it through witchcraft. David respectfully seeks the help of priests and protects them, whereas Saul disregards and murders them. David refuses to raise his hand against God's anointed king even when being hunted by him, whereas Saul is unafraid to raise his hand against the one he knows God has chosen and who has been a champion of his people.
2. **The people of God.** This also exemplified itself in the way that David and Saul treated the Israelites. David never takes up arms against the people of Israel but time after time goes to battle in their defense. In one instance, he is tempted to fight against an Israelite but is convinced to leave vengeance to God. Even when he goes to the Philistines, David secretly battles against the pagan peoples while making a show of fighting against Israel. Saul is willing to fight against the leaders of his people and even hunt David and those with him, who have done nothing to threaten Saul's kingdom. Like the bad judges, Saul oppresses his own people.

II. The Lord Destroys Saul (1 Samuel 27-31)

- A. **David's reception with the Philistines.** These things culminate in the final chapters of 1 Samuel. David has fled to the Philistines to escape from Saul. David ingratiates himself to the king of Gath. The sad irony is that David is more welcome in Goliath's hometown than in the court of the king of Israel. Despite all of this, David remains true to Israel. The Philistines gather for battle against Saul and Achish intends to take David into battle. Based on David's past actions, we are intended to understand that he would turn against the Philistines to come to Saul's aid. However, the lords of the Philistines suspect this and send David back.

- B. **David's battle.** David returns from the Philistine lords to find his town has been raided and all the people taken. Some of the men with him desire to stone him, but he strengthens himself in the Lord and follows God's counsel to pursue the raiders. After finding a man who had been left for dead by the raiders, he is able to overtake them and recover all that had been taken. If David had been allowed to go into the battle with Saul, all that had been taken would have been lost, but the Lord allowed him to save his family and those of his men.
- C. **Saul's battle.** Saul is greatly fearful of his impending fight against the Philistines. He inquires of the Lord, but the Lord will not answer. Whereas David strengthens himself in God and seeks God's will through the priest, Saul does not seek the Lord but only knowledge of his fate, which he desires so much that he seeks the witch. God finally answers through the witchcraft, pronouncing his doom. The Philistines overtake and kill Saul, his sons, and his army. They all die because Saul had rejected God and His champion. If Saul had embraced David, neither he nor his house and army would have died on the battlefield that day. God honors those who honor Him (**1 Sam. 2:30**) but even His anointed king will be judged if he does not honor Him.

Applications from 1 Samuel

I. Regarding Church Officers

Just as God established His rule in Israel through prophets, priests, and kings, He has done so in the church through elders and deacons. The leaders that God has appointed err and are tainted with sin and must be rebuked and resisted when they go astray from God's word. However, we are also to have a healthy reverence for God's officers. Just as they are responsible before God to execute their offices by instructing and caring for us according to His will and for His glory, so we are responsible to submit to them in the Lord and to seek their good as they perform their duties.

II. Presumption

We must always be careful not to presume on the grace of God. If God was willing to cast off and bring judgment against His anointed prophets, priests, and kings and against His chosen people under the old covenant, we must not think that any position that we hold will safeguard us from the same judgment (**Heb. 2:1-3; 10:26-31**). Though we can have assurance and security in Christ, we must never allow that assurance to cause us to value the things belonging to Christ and to His kingdom lightly. God spares no one because of their position or deeds but only those who are found in Christ.

III. Evaluating Our Hearts

We are called to a right examination of our own hearts before the Lord. Though we will never in this life reach a place where we can look upon our hearts and see nothing but purity, we must always be seeking to receive the truth of God's word in our hearts and to live our lives for the glory of God from the heart. Many have served in the church or lived the Christian life while seeking their own agenda. We need regularly to seek to renew our hearts in the grace of God and to recommit ourselves to seeking God's purposes in our lives. It is good for us to ask with David for the Lord to search us and know us (**Psalms 139**), that we would know our faults, repent of them, and seek evermore to walk in newness of life before the Lord.