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1 Samuel - Lesson 8-9

Chapters 8 & 9

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- As we move into 1 Samuel 8, we begin the next major section of this book
 - We're at the end of the historical period in Israel called the period of the Judges
 - It's the time when men were doing what was right in their own eyes
 - Which is to say they were not doing right in God's sight
 - The entire Jewish society has gone from bad to worse since Joshua
 - And even when a judge was raised up to direct the people, it was temporary at best
 - And in the end the people rebelled again, even worse than before
 - The best proof of how far the people have fallen is found in the children of those called to lead the people
 - Earlier in the book we met the High Priest, Eli, and his sons
 - These men were charged with leading Israel from the tabernacle in Shiloh
 - And yet it would be hard to find men more corrupt
 - These men eventually met their fate, and the people likewise
 - Then we see the rise of Samuel as the man of God, a prophet seeking to serve God, and directing the people back to following God
 - Last week Samuel convinced the people to put aside their idols and follow God with their whole heart
 - This time when they faced their enemy, they took the path of faith and found the victory
 - And then Samuel began to judge Israel for 40 years
 - So we naturally assume that Samuel's rise to judge was the happy ending to our story of judges
- Not so fast...Chapter 8 opens with a shocking result to remind us of how evil the time of judges truly was

1Sam. 8:1 And it came about when Samuel was old that he appointed his sons judges over Israel.

1Sam. 8:2 Now the name of his firstborn was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judging in Beersheba.

1Sam. 8:3 His sons, however, did not walk in his ways, but turned aside after dishonest gain and took bribes and perverted justice.

- Near the end of Samuel's life, his grown sons are ready to assume responsibility, and Samuel appoints them as judges
 - His sons were Joel and Abijah, and these men judged in Beersheba in southern Judah
 - Now if anyone should be able to raise godly sons, we would expect it would be Samuel
 - But in v.2 we learn that these sons were no better than Eli's own corrupt sons
 - Presumably, they started out right, otherwise we wouldn't expect Samuel to

entrust a judgeship to them

- But in v.2 we're told they turned aside
 - They came into power and saw an opportunity to benefit themselves
 - They pursued dishonest gain like bribes, extortion and the like
 - They perverted justice, giving favorable judgement to those who made a payment over those who deserved justice
- How did Samuel's sons come to such a surprising end? Do we blame Samuel as we did Eli?
 - In this case, the scriptures offer no critique of Samuel
 - There is no indication that Samuel deserves blame
 - Instead, the text is clear that they were already grown and working in their positions before they elected to turn aside
 - They were grown men making their own choices
 - So if Eli's sons can be an example of bad parenting, then Samuel's sons are a reminder that good parents don't guarantee perfect children
- So where do we go to explain such a dramatic turn? The answer is central to these Chapters in 1 Samuel
 - This period of Jewish history is so double-minded and without godly direction that not even a judge's own sons will persist in doing God's will
 - When Samuel was writing the book of Judges and penned that book's well-known phrase, was he thinking of his sons?
 - His sons did what was right in their own eyes, not according to his father's eyes
 - That's the situation that brings us to the this point in 1 Samuel
 - The people are beyond reach by a judge
 - And now that even their judges are without integrity, the people themselves recognize there is no hope for men to follow God
 - So they demand a king

1Sam. 8:4 Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah;

1Sam. 8:5 and they said to him, "Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations."

1Sam. 8:6 But the thing was displeasing in the sight of Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." And Samuel prayed to the LORD.

1Sam. 8:7 The LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them.

1Sam. 8:8 "Like all the deeds which they have done since the day that I brought them up from Egypt even to this day — in that they have forsaken Me and served other gods — so they are doing to you also.

1Sam. 8:9 “Now then, listen to their voice; however, you shall solemnly warn them and tell them of the procedure of the king who will reign over them.”

- The elders of the people see the evil in Samuel’s sons and realize that this corruption can’t continue
 - Their concern over these sons is not unreasonable and their protests are not the problem
 - They say, you have grown old Samuel
 - They mean, you won’t rule us forever, and God-forbid your sons are left in authority over us
 - Therefore, we need a solution
 - Everything up to this point is fine, but it’s the solution they propose that’s the problem
 - The elders ask Samuel to appoint a king over Israel to rule the people
 - Here they begin to go wrong
 - They ask for a change of authority from God ruling the people to a human king ruling
 - Moreover, they offer the wrong reason for their recommended solution
 - They want a king so they can be like every other nation
 - Forgetting that God intended Israel to be a nation distinct and separate from other nations
 - So they point to Samuel’s sons as the problem, but they use it as an excuse to ask for what they have long wanted
 - The people tried to install a king twice before, once under Gideon
 - And again under Abimelech, the corrupt judge who followed Gideon
- Samuel knew the people were making a rash choice, and he worries for what the Lord will say in response
 - In v.6 it says the thing was displeasing to Samuel
 - The word in Hebrew for displeasing is *raa*, which is the Hebrew word for wicked and evil
 - The request is evil, for it amounts to a rejection of the Lord’s ruling over the people through judges
 - The people could have solved this problem without rejecting the Lord
 - Rather than ask for a king, the people could have simply asked that the Lord send them a new judge who wasn’t corrupt
 - Instead, they reject the Lord’s way of ruling over His people
- But if truth be told, the people have been rejecting the Lord’s authority for some time
 - They have rebelled against every judge who has ruled over them
 - They do what is right in their eyes, not God’s sight
 - So this is just the final straw of rebellion that has marked the entire time in the

- land since Joshua
 - Such is the wickedness of man's heart
 - Nothing can tame the sin of men, not the Law, not judges, and not even kings as the people will soon discover
 - Meanwhile, the Lord answers Samuel's concerns with mercy and pity for the people
 - Samuel's worry at this point is that he might be assigned some blame for this predicament, much the way Eli bore the blame for Israel
 - He wondered if the people's rebellion would be traced to him since his sons, like Eli's, were the cause for the trouble
 - But the Lord reassures Samuel that he's not in trouble with the Lord
 - He says, go ahead and do as the people demand
 - Because they are rejecting me, not you
 - In other words, Samuel couldn't have stopped this rebellion no matter what he did as judge
 - The people's hearts strayed from God continually
- In v.8, the Lord gives a brief synopsis of the history of Israel since they entered under Joshua
 - They have never been a people to obey and respect the word of God, at least not for long
 - They forsake the Lord continually and chase after other gods
 - And so Samuel is experiencing this same rejection as well
 - Notice the Lord doesn't say that Samuel's sons are the problem or that Samuel shares some blame
 - At this point the sons are just a distraction from the real problem, which is the peoples' hearts
 - They aren't interested in obedience
 - So that even if Samuel's sons had been perfect judges, the people would have still wanted a king eventually
 - And we know that because their real motivation was to be like other nations
 - When God's people make our goal aligning with the world over following the Lord, we forsake Him and reject His authority
 - We may not realize that's what we're doing
 - But these two pursuits are literally opposites
 - Which is why the Lord equates seeking a king like the other nations, with rejecting Him
- But the people don't realize how their sinful hearts will always lead them wrong
 - When sin is conceived it seems like the perfect plan, because our flesh responds in eager anticipation
 - But our flesh lies, and it's only after sin gives birth to action that we come to understand the consequences

- And so in mercy, the Lord offers the people a chance to understand the consequences in advance
 - So the Lord tells Samuel to explain to the people all the things that will happen when one man has enough authority to do whatever he pleases
- For such is monarchy
 - A king has no equal in the land
 - And if the Lord anoints a king, then the Lord will ensure that his power is unchallenged until such time the Lord decides
 - And while power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely
 - And a king is absolute power personified
- So Samuel explains the consequences of what's coming with a monarchy

1Sam. 8:10 So Samuel spoke all the words of the LORD to the people who had asked of him a king.

1Sam. 8:11 He said, "This will be the procedure of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and place them for himself in his chariots and among his horsemen and they will run before his chariots.

1Sam. 8:12 "He will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and of fifties, and some to do his plowing and to reap his harvest and to make his weapons of war and equipment for his chariots.

1Sam. 8:13 "He will also take your daughters for perfumers and cooks and bakers.

1Sam. 8:14 "He will take the best of your fields and your vineyards and your olive groves and give them to his servants.

1Sam. 8:15 "He will take a tenth of your seed and of your vineyards and give to his officers and to his servants.

1Sam. 8:16 "He will also take your male servants and your female servants and your best young men and your donkeys and use them for his work.

1Sam. 8:17 "He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his servants.

1Sam. 8:18 "Then you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the LORD will not answer you in that day."

- The Lord speaks through Samuel with a stern warning
 - First, a king will need an army to protect his reign
 - And the warriors will come from among the people he rules over
 - Mothers and fathers will give up sons in great number to the army
 - And there will be placed in harm's way on the whim of the king
 - Secondly, the king will need servants and workers to sustain the lifestyle of an all-powerful monarch
 - Teams of men will be ordered to plow and harvest fields for the king
 - And others will be workers to make equipment for the sovereign

- And daughters will go to work in the kitchens and palaces
 - And where will these fields come from for all this material and farming?
 - From the people of course
 - The king must tax the people and appropriate their land
 - And take servants and animals
 - And when you can't pay the taxes, you yourselves will become indentured servants
 - In summary, sinful, human royalty acts like a parasite
 - They take the best from the people
 - Because kings are never satisfied with less than the best
 - And the people live to serve the king, not the other way around
- The Lord warned them in advance of this burden, but the people won't listen
 - They assume that a king will be good news for them
 - And because they rejected the Lord, they will know all these things
 - When the weight of this expense and deprivation becomes a reality, the people will cry out to God for relief but find none
 - How predictable...they ask for the wrong thing for the wrong reasons, and the Lord tells them in advance what to expect
 - Still they persist and eventually will know all the Lord promises
 - But then they will cry out to Him as if they are the victims
 - If they are the victims, they are victims of their own disobedience

1Sam. 8:19 Nevertheless, the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel, and they said, "No, but there shall be a king over us,

1Sam. 8:20 that we also may be like all the nations, that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles."

1Sam. 8:21 Now after Samuel had heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the LORD'S hearing.

1Sam. 8:22 The LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to their voice and appoint them a king." So Samuel said to the men of Israel, "Go every man to his city."

- If it wasn't clear enough already, the people repeat their explanation that they want to be like other nations
 - They want a king to judge them and go out before them, that is to lead them and to fight their battles
 - Each of these roles was to be fulfilled by the Lord Himself
 - As He's demonstrated, He is more than capable of doing so
 - The Lord has judged Israel through the Law and gone out before Israel in their wanderings and fought Israel's enemies under Joshua
- Ultimately, the Lord will fulfill these roles in the Person of Christ in the Kingdom

Mic. 4:1 And it will come about in the last days
 That the mountain of the house of the LORD
 Will be established as the chief of the mountains.
 It will be raised above the hills,
 And the peoples will stream to it.

Mic. 4:2 Many nations will come and say,
 “Come and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD
 And to the house of the God of Jacob,
 That He may teach us about His ways
 And that we may walk in His paths.”
 For from Zion will go forth the law,
 Even the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

Mic. 4:3 And He will judge between many peoples
 And render decisions for mighty, distant nations.
 Then they will hammer their swords into plowshares
 And their spears into pruning hooks;
 Nation will not lift up sword against nation,
 And never again will they train for war.

Mic. 4:4 Each of them will sit under his vine
 And under his fig tree,
 With no one to make them afraid,
 For the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken.

Mic. 4:5 Though all the peoples walk
 Each in the name of his god,
 As for us, we will walk
 In the name of the LORD our God forever and ever.

- Until then, kings are incapable of administering righteousness or bringing peace
- So Samuel passes word to the Lord, Who says then go appoint a king for the people
 - Specifically, the Lord tells Samuel to “listen to their voice”
 - In other words, not only is Samuel going to follow their request in granting them a king
 - But he is also to follow their desires in who he appoints
- The Lord is going to bring Samuel a man who fits the people’s expectations to a “t”
 - The Lord knows the hearts of the people
 - So the candidate will be a perfect match
 - But of course this will be to the people’s own undoing
 - And so that in the result, the Lord can teach a lesson
- So Samuel tells them to go back to their cities to await his decision

1Sam. 9:1 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.

1Sam. 9:2 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.

- Chapter 9 is the selection of that king, a Benjamite named Saul
 - And right from the start, we learn that Saul comes straight from central casting
 - He is exactly the guy you want to play the part of king, at least as far as external appearances
 - He comes from excellent Benjamite stock, the descendent of a might man of valor
 - Saul's name means "asked for of God" and he is a hunk
 - He is literally, according to scripture, the most handsome man in Israel
 - I find it interesting that the word of God can make such a judgment
 - We tend to think that attractiveness is largely subjective
 - But the word of God says that Saul was #1 among all Israel in this category
 - And he stood a full head taller than anyone else in Israel
 - Later, we learn he's in his late 20s, which is perfectly suited to the people's desires
- Saul is literally a perfect example of what men expect when they imagine a king
 - They want someone who looks the part
 - Because men judge with the flesh according to our own desires
 - But God's ways are not man's ways
 - That's why the Lord chose to bring Christ into the world in such a humble and lowly way
 - Nothing about Jesus' earthly appearance would attract the flesh

Is. 53:1 Who has believed our message?

And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

Is. 53:2 For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot,

And like a root out of parched ground;

He has no stately form or majesty

That we should look upon Him,

Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.

Is. 53:3 He was despised and forsaken of men,

A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;

And like one from whom men hide their face

He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

- God's choice to endow Christ with a humble appearance was intended to mock man's foolishness to judge by looks
- And the story of Saul is a classic account of just such a folly

- So now we watch as the Lord directs Saul to Samuel's attention so that the people will receive just what they wanted

1Sam. 9:3 Now the donkeys of Kish, Saul's father, were lost. So Kish said to his son Saul, "Take now with you one of the servants, and arise, go search for the donkeys."

1Sam. 9:4 He passed through the hill country of Ephraim and passed through the land of Shalishah, but they did not find them. Then they passed through the land of Shaalim, but they were not there. Then he passed through the land of the Benjamites, but they did not find them.

1Sam. 9:5 When they came to the land of Zuph, Saul said to his servant who was with him, "Come, and let us return, or else my father will cease to be concerned about the donkeys and will become anxious for us."

1Sam. 9:6 He said to him, "Behold now, there is a man of God in this city, and the man is held in honor; all that he says surely comes true. Now let us go there, perhaps he can tell us about our journey on which we have set out."

1Sam. 9:7 Then Saul said to his servant, "But behold, if we go, what shall we bring the man? For the bread is gone from our sack and there is no present to bring to the man of God. What do we have?"

1Sam. 9:8 The servant answered Saul again and said, "Behold, I have in my hand a fourth of a shekel of silver; I will give it to the man of God and he will tell us our way."

1Sam. 9:9 (Formerly in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, he used to say, "Come, and let us go to the seer"; for he who is called a prophet now was formerly called a seer.)

1Sam. 9:10 Then Saul said to his servant, "Well said; come, let us go." So they went to the city where the man of God was.

1Sam. 9:11 As they went up the slope to the city, they found young women going out to draw water and said to them, "Is the seer here?"

1Sam. 9:12 They answered them and said, "He is; see, he is ahead of you. Hurry now, for he has come into the city today, for the people have a sacrifice on the high place today.

1Sam. 9:13 "As soon as you enter the city you will find him before he goes up to the high place to eat, for the people will not eat until he comes, because he must bless the sacrifice; afterward those who are invited will eat. Now therefore, go up for you will find him at once."

1Sam. 9:14 So they went up to the city. As they came into the city, behold, Samuel was coming out toward them to go up to the high place.

- In a twist of irony, the Lord directs Saul to Samuel through a search of his own...for a donkey
 - Saul's search reveals a number of things about his character at this early point in his life
 - First, he's willing to serve his father in a devoted and sacrificial way
 - Searching for lost donkeys is one thing, but the distance Saul travels is

remarkable

- It's about 35 miles total
 - Secondly, he's aware of the societal customs of not coming to a man of God empty-handed
 - Notice Samuel makes clear that Saul and the servant perceive Samuel to be merely a seer
 - A seer was a diviner, and not necessary a godly one
 - And to receive the help of a seer required a payment, because they earned their living this way, like a fortune teller
 - Of course, Samuel isn't a seer, as he clarifies, since he's a true prophet of God
 - Nonetheless, the point is that Saul shows some courtesy and respect for custom and respect to the position
 - That's another plus for Saul
 - Thirdly, Saul has the humility to stop and ask a woman for directions
 - This is hard enough for any man
 - But in this culture, it was particularly difficult for a man to seek assistance from a strange woman
- Overall, we are introduced to Saul as a man with great potential and seemingly a good heart as well
 - Here's the danger of judging with our eyes rather than on relying on the Lord's counsel
 - Even when we are seeing the best in a person, we can't know the inner workings of their heart
 - More importantly, we can't know the future
 - We don't know how they will respond to stress, temptation, success, failure
 - But God knows these things, so if we trust in His counsel we will never be wrong
 - As we said, the people aren't interested in God's counsel
 - So they will naturally love this guy
 - And he has potential, at least in the sense that he starts well
 - Finally, it's interesting that this man has never heard of Samuel and knows nothing of his role as prophet of Israel
 - Either Saul has been so isolated and kept so busy with his father's affairs that he hasn't kept up with current affairs
 - Or he is remarkably naïve
 - Either way, it would seem to disqualify this man from public service
 - One commentator observed that Saul went hunting for donkeys and found a kingdom
 - While a prophet went hunting for a king and found a young man ignorant of political affairs
- On this day, the Lord ensured that Saul and Samuel would find one another, as

Samuel was preparing to officiate at a high place altar

1Sam. 9:15 Now a day before Saul's coming, the LORD had revealed this to Samuel saying,

1Sam. 9:16 "About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin, and you shall anoint him to be prince over My people Israel; and he will deliver My people from the hand of the Philistines. For I have regarded My people, because their cry has come to Me."

1Sam. 9:17 When Samuel saw Saul, the LORD said to him, "Behold, the man of whom I spoke to you! This one shall rule over My people."

1Sam. 9:18 Then Saul approached Samuel in the gate and said, "Please tell me where the seer's house is."

1Sam. 9:19 Samuel answered Saul and said, "I am the seer. Go up before me to the high place, for you shall eat with me today; and in the morning I will let you go, and will tell you all that is on your mind."

1Sam. 9:20 "As for your donkeys which were lost three days ago, do not set your mind on them, for they have been found. And for whom is all that is desirable in Israel? Is it not for you and for all your father's household?"

1Sam. 9:21 Saul replied, "Am I not a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel, and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? Why then do you speak to me in this way?"

- Scenes like this are so interesting to me because they just scream to us about the Lord's sovereignty
- Every step Saul and Samuel took they took of their own accord, or so they supposed
 - Saul walked 35 miles looking for wayward donkeys
 - Samuel was on his regular circuit performing sacrificial services for the people
 - Yet the Lord was carefully moving them so that on this day they would meet
 - As Proverbs says

Prov. 16:9 The mind of man plans his way,
But the LORD directs his steps.

- The day before Saul even arrived, the Lord tells Samuel what's coming
 - He will encounter a man that he will anoint as king
 - Samuel knows this is about to happen
 - He doesn't know who or how but he's ready
- And Saul knows even less
 - In fact, the Lord's telling Samuel to expect the visit even before Saul has determined to enter the city
 - And yet he does enter

- Which means every detail of Saul's day was under God's control
- This is not unique to Saul and Samuel...this is how God is operating every day in every life
- There is no such thing as coincidence in God's Creation
- God's instructions to Samuel carry an interesting element of mercy
 - The Lord says that this king he anoints will be used by God to free Israel from the Philistines who have returned to molesting the people
 - Even though they reject the Lord, He remains faithful
 - And though they will regret having a king, the Lord will continue to lead Israel through this man
 - This pattern of hearing the people cry and freeing them from their enemies is the pattern of Judges
 - So in this sense, we see the final cycle of judges playing out in Samuel's day with the rise of the monarchy
 - Then Samuel sees Saul and the Lord says, this is the guy
 - Saul asks Samuel if he knows where the seer is, reminding us that Saul doesn't know Samuel
 - Samuel tells Saul he will spend some time with him
 - And to convince Saul that Samuel can help him, Samuel tells Saul exactly what he was seeking – which is a sure proof of Samuel's prophetic ability
- But then Samuel drops a bombshell on Saul
 - He says, isn't everything desirable in Israel appointed for you and your household?
 - This language doesn't specifically say, you will be the greatest in the land – but it implies as much
 - We can see that Samuel's words aren't lost on Saul, since he responds incredulously
 - He says, I'm in the least tribe of Israel – which was true
 - So in terms of human standards and priorities, how can he expect to ever be in a position to receive such honor in Israel?
 - And by human standards, he was correct
 - But of course, he didn't know what God was prepared to do

1Sam. 9:22 Then Samuel took Saul and his servant and brought them into the hall and gave them a place at the head of those who were invited, who were about thirty men.

1Sam. 9:23 Samuel said to the cook, "Bring the portion that I gave you, concerning which I said to you, 'Set it aside.'"

1Sam. 9:24 Then the cook took up the leg with what was on it and set it before Saul. And Samuel said, "Here is what has been reserved! Set it before you and eat, because it has been kept for you until the appointed time, since I said I have invited the people." So Saul ate with Samuel that day.

1Sam. 9:25 When they came down from the high place into the city, Samuel spoke with Saul on the roof.

1Sam. 9:26 And they arose early; and at daybreak Samuel called to Saul on the roof, saying, "Get up, that I may send you away." So Saul arose, and both he and Samuel went out into the street.

1Sam. 9:27 As they were going down to the edge of the city, Samuel said to Saul, "Say to the servant that he might go ahead of us and pass on, but you remain standing now, that I may proclaim the word of God to you."

- Apparently, Samuel had planned ahead after hearing the Lord pronounce that today would be the day he found the king
 - Samuel told the leaders of the city to assemble in a hall near the high place
 - In this hall, he had a lavish feast planned with a cook assigned to prepare the lamb to Samuel's instructions
 - No one knew why they were assembled or who the guest of honor would be
 - Samuel was so confident in the Lord's word, he could make such an effort without fear of being disappointed
 - So as Saul greets Samuel, he is immediately invited to eat with everyone
 - And more than that, Samuel puts Saul at the head of the table where a king would be seated
 - And then Samuel calls for the cook to bring out the best portion of the animal for Saul to eat
 - Saul must have been thinking he was dreaming the whole time, or else he was suspicious this was a grand practical joke
- Then they return to the city and have a private evening discussion on the roof, which was a common meeting place in the cool night air
 - The setting was both more comfortable and private
 - Wouldn't you love to have heard that conversation?
 - Samuel explaining that the Lord had selected Saul to be a king, Israel's first monarch
 - And Saul asking questions trying to understand how all this is happening to him
 - Like someone winning a lottery he didn't even play
 - As the chapter ends, we see Samuel preparing to anoint Saul as the king
 - Next time we meet we'll pick up here