

## SESSION TWO

# THE END OF THE THEOCRACY

## *1 Samuel 1:1–7:17*

### I. INTRODUCTION

The books of First and Second Samuel originally formed one long book in the Hebrew text. With the LXX translation, the book was divided into two as remains true today in our English versions. Taken together, the books of Samuel extend all the way from the period of the Judges when Eli was priest through the reign of King David. The books bear the name Samuel, although he is only the chief character of the opening chapters, not necessarily the author of the entire corpus. [He may have been a contributing author to the work; cf. 1 Chr 29:29]. In any case, he was the last of the judges, a priest, one of the greatest prophets, the founder of the schools of the prophets, and the one who anointed both Saul and David.<sup>1</sup> He is the one through whom YHWH reveals His will during this transition period.

#### A. The Time Setting

The chronology for this period can be established with the death of Solomon in 931/30 BC. Since Solomon reigned 40 years (1 Kings 11:42), the beginning of his reign would be 971/70 BC. David also reigned for 40 years (2 Samuel 5:4), and this would place his coronation at 1011/10 BC. However, David reigned 7 years at Hebron and 33 at Jerusalem. Saul's reign was also a period of 40 years<sup>2</sup> (Acts 13:21), which would give us a date of approximately 1051 BC for the inauguration of his reign.<sup>3</sup>

#### B. Relation to the Book of Judges

The period of the judges continues right on into the book of 1 Samuel, for it is not until 1 Sam 8 that the people begin to ask for a king. The book of Judges closed with the thought:

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<sup>1</sup> According to 1 Sam 1:1, Samuel's father was an Ephraimite. This may only indicate, however, that he lived within the tribal territory of Ephraim. 1 Chr 6:31-38 indicates that Elkanah was technically a Levite. Thus, Samuel was qualified to perform priestly duties.

<sup>2</sup>The notice in 1 Sam 13:1 about Saul's length of reign involves a complex textual problem (see the LXX), and the MT is obviously corrupt at this point. The *NASB* translation specifies that Saul reigned 32 years, while the *NIV* has 42 years. Merrill defends the idea that Saul reigned 40 years (see *Kingdom of Priests*, 193).

<sup>3</sup>There could be some confusion as to whether or not the 40-year reign of Saul included the seven years his son Ish-bosheth reigned while David was at Hebron. If this were the case, then Saul's reign would have commenced about 1044 BC. However, the mention in 2 Sam 2:10 that Ish-bosheth reigned two years seems to imply that the 40 years of Saul do not include the years that Ish-bosheth reigned after him.

*"In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Jud 21:25).*

This same spirit of apostasy still prevailed when Samuel came on the scene, and this seems to be confirmed by the reference in 1 Sam 3:1:

*"And word from the LORD was rare in those days, visions were infrequent."*

The latter reference is more a commentary on the priesthood. The apostasy not only embraced the nation, but was coupled with a corrupted priesthood as well. Eli would have lived through a number of the judges, certainly Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon.

### C. The Chronological Framework of the Philistine Domination

During these opening chapters of 1 Samuel, the nation was under Philistine domination, which continued all the way to the battle of Mizpah (1 Sam 7) when Israel subdued the Philistines under Samuel's leadership.<sup>4</sup> Since these events in 1 Samuel occurred during the period of the judges, they are undoubtedly connected with the 40-year oppression of the Philistines mentioned in Judges 13:1. Thus, the Samson narrative (Jud 13–16) probably took place during Samuel's judgeship, sometime before Saul's reign. Samson also was a judge (although not a prophet like Samuel), and he is said to have judged Israel for twenty years. This would be twenty years of the 40-year Philistine oppression.

Apparently, the defeat of Israel at Aphek took place twenty years before the battle of Mizpah (see 1 Sam 7:2), or about half-way through the period of Philistine oppression. It is possible that Samson's judgeship occupied the 20 years between Aphek and Mizpah (cf. Jud 13:1-15 where Samson is born after the 40-year oppression had started). We cannot be too sure how much of a time gap there was between the battle of Mizpah (1 Sam 7) and the demand of the Israelites for a king, i.e., Saul (1 Sam 8). 1 Samuel 8:1-2 records that Samuel's two sons did serve as judges prior to the coronation of Saul:

*"And it came about when Samuel was old that he appointed his sons judges over Israel . . . they were judging in Beersheba."*

There could have been a time gap of as much as 33 years between the Battle of Mizpah and the anointing of Saul as king, as Eugene Merrill has argued.<sup>5</sup>

Dr. Merrill dates the Philistine oppression from 1124 to 1084 (cf. Jud 13:1).<sup>6</sup> This would give a date for Aphek at 1104 and for Mizpah at 1084 BC.

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<sup>4</sup>The Philistine problem still persisted after Mizpah (we note, for instance, that Saul is slain by the Philistines). But the specific forty-year oppression probably concluded at Mizpah.

<sup>5</sup>Eugene Merrill, "Paul's Use of 'About 450 years' in Acts 13:20", *Bib Sac* 138:551 (1981).

<sup>6</sup>Cf. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 146ff. Merrill's conclusion rests on the following presuppositions: (1) the Philistine problem in Jud 10:7 is the same as in 13:1; (2) the 40 year Philistine oppression of Jud 13:1 includes the Philistine problem of 1 Sam 1–7 (but there were Philistine problems after this); (3) the mention of 300 years in Jud 11:26 was meant to be exactly 300 from the conquest of 1406 BC until the moment Jephthah spoke with the king of Ammon; and (4) the Philistine problem began at exactly the same time as the Ammonite problem (Jud 10:7). Hence:

Thus the battle of Mizpah, at which the Philistines were subdued and which ended the 40 years of oppression, probably occurred about 1084 BC. At any rate, there is a high likelihood that Samson and Samuel were contemporaries, and that both judged during the final 20 years of the Philistine oppression, between the battles of Aphek and Mizpah.

Since Eli died at the time of the battle of Aphek (1 Sam 4), his death must be dated about 1104 BC. Thus Samuel's judgeship could have begun as early as 1104 but not later than 1084 BC. Samuel and his two sons judged Israel for at least 33 years before Saul's coronation (possibly as much as 53 years).

#### D. The Operation of the Cultus in Israel

The cultus, i.e., the ceremonial and sacrificial aspects of Israel's life, was centered at Shiloh. This is where the ark of the covenant and the Shekinah glory would have primarily dwelt during the long period of the judges. Jerusalem would not become the religious center until the time of David. Apparently, Shiloh was the religious center from the time of the conquest under Joshua:

*"Then the whole congregation of the sons of Israel assembled themselves at Shiloh, and set up the tent of meeting there . . ." (Jos 18:1).*

Shiloh probably remained the religious center, and in the last chapter of Judges, we read: "Behold, there is a feast of the LORD from year to year in Shiloh" (Jud 21:19).<sup>7</sup> As the book of Samuel opens, Shiloh is the place of sacrifice and the residence of the priesthood (1 Sam 1:3). The Ark remained at Shiloh all the way up to the battle of Aphek in approximately 1104 BC (1 Sam 4:3). The Ark was captured at this battle by the Philistines and further evidence seems to suggest that Shiloh was levelled soon after this battle (cf. Jer. 7:12, 14; 26:6,9). When the Philistines returned the Ark, it was placed at Kiriath-jearim, and remained there until the reign of David when he had it brought to Jerusalem. Thereafter, Jerusalem remained the center of the cultus, as well as the political center.

#### E. The Theme of 1 Samuel

This historical background is essential for understanding the purpose of 1 Samuel. As mentioned previously, the great turning point in the nation's life was the battle of Aphek (1 Sam 4). This battle was more than a decisive defeat of Israel by the Philistines, for the Ark was captured and the Shekinah glory of Israel departed from the midst of the nation. This marked the termination of the nation as a theocracy, as far as God was concerned. Thereafter, the nation would be under the rule of a king rather than the direct rule of God Himself. Their demand for a king in 1 Sam 8 was a

1406 - Date of the Conquest

-300 - Judges 11:26

1106 - Jephthah's conversation with the king of Ammon

+18 - Time of the combined Ammonite/Philistine oppression (Jud 10:8)

1124 - Start of the Philistine oppression

- 40 - Length of the Philistine oppression

1084 - End of the Philistine oppression (Battle of Mizpah)

<sup>7</sup>Note, however, Judges 20:26-28 indicates that the Ark was at one time at Bethel.

rejection of YHWH as their king (1 Sam 8:7). The LORD had anticipated that they would be ruled by a king (Deut 17:14-20; 28:36), yet it was not the prerogative of the people to choose for themselves a king. The remainder of 1 Samuel (8–31) is an evaluation of Israel's choice of Saul as king, showing the nation that this was an unwise decision. In grace, YHWH raises up a king who will be after His own heart, namely David. The book of 2 Samuel (in continuation) reflects the life of the nation under the reign of David. Despite the inferior arrangement of the monarchy, God in His grace could still bless the nation if they were obedient to Him and allowed Him to establish the king of His choice. Thus, 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel form a transition from theocracy to monarchy. Heater points out two significant theological underpinnings that accompany this shift to a monarchy:

There are two forces continually at work in Israel. The centrifugal force was a tendency to fragment into the individual tribal organizations . . . . The centripetal force, drawing together people who were disparate culturally and geographically, was the centering of worship on the dwelling place of Yahweh: the Tabernacle and later the Temple.<sup>8</sup>

Yet the movement of these books does more than explain the development of the monarchy. The texts direct us to David, for it will be through him that God's program is advanced by way of the Davidic Covenant. This will introduce us to God's kingdom plan through the "Greater David" whereby the Abrahamic promises of blessing will ultimately be realized. Understanding the divine author's intention for the Davidic Covenant will help us realize why 1 Samuel is ushering in David.

The primary theological theme of 1 Samuel is this:

*to reveal the political and spiritual consequences in Israel's folly of rejecting the theocracy in favor of a monarchy.*

## II. 1 SAMUEL 1–7

### A. Introduction

These first few chapters of the book reflect the ministry of Samuel as prophet-judge before the coronation of Saul as king. However, a great deal of this section (chap 4–6) is not about Samuel at all, but rather the events dealing with the ark. Thus, chapters 1–7 are the crucial chapters involving the termination of the theocracy from God's perspective.

### B. Samuel Established as Prophet (1–3)

These first three chapters reflect the way God sovereignly worked to raise Samuel up and confirm him as a prophet of the LORD. The LORD worked in the heart of Samuel's mother so that Samuel could be raised in the house of Eli the priest. The life of Eli is displayed to reflect the condition of the tabernacle and to show a need for change. With Eli and his two sons over-seeing the tabernacle at Shiloh, what hope was there for the nation (2:17, 22; 3:13)? The nation had already been under Philistine oppression for twenty years. If the priesthood was this corrupt as well, could there be any hope for change? Yes, there could be. God was at work already in the family of Elkanah. God

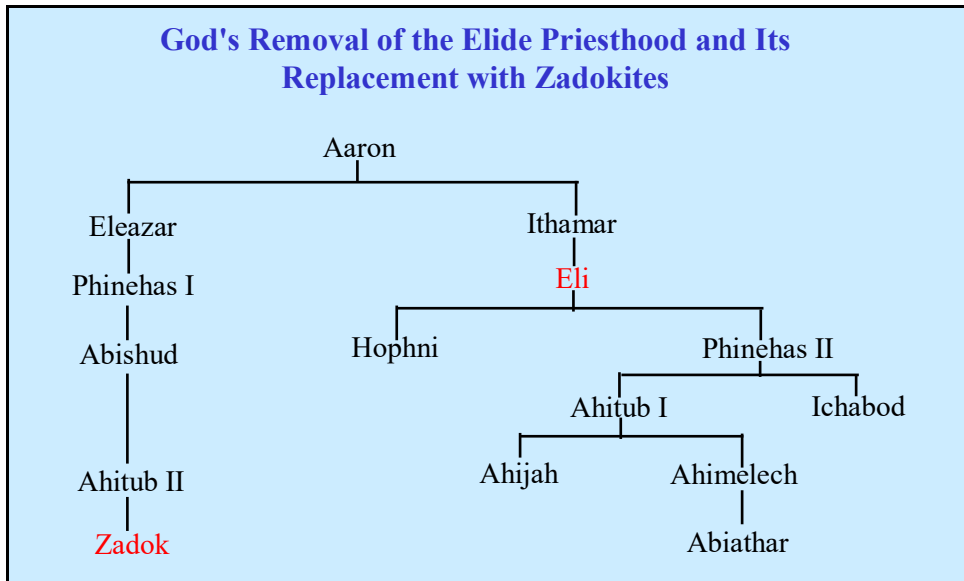
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<sup>8</sup>Homer Heater, Jr., "A Theology of Samuel and Kings" in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, ed. Roy B. Zuck (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 117.

was preparing Samuel as His instrument for the anticipated moment when the LORD would bring forth judgment upon the priesthood and terminate the theocracy.

Chap. 2:27-36 reveals the judgment to come on the priesthood. God's promise was to maintain the priesthood through Aaron. Eli presumes upon this, but God had a way of fulfilling His promise through Zadok (who was of the Aaronic line but not that of Ithamar and Eli). The change came about in this way:

- 1 Sam 4 - Eli and his two sons died
- 1 Sam 22:18-21 - Ahimelech and his sons were slaughtered
- 1 Kgs 2:26-27 - Abiathar was dismissed by Solomon leaving Zadok as priest



**Note:** Zadok and Abiathar served jointly under David, but after David's death Abiathar was dismissed and Zadok served alone.

**C. Samuel Revives the Nation (4-7)**

This section focuses on the ark. It begins with one of the bleakest moments in Israel's history and ends with a very joyful occasion. These four chapters cover the last twenty years of the 40-year Philistine oppression. The events revolve around two major battles: the battle of Aphek in which Israel was soundly defeated by the Philistines and the battle of Mizpah in which Israel conquered the Philistines. Apparently, these battles were separated by twenty years, with the battle of Aphek coming at the mid-point of the Philistine oppression.

The apostasy that was so typical of the period of the judges would not go unchecked. Judgment was long overdue. The corruption of the priesthood as reflected in the case of Eli and his two sons was the final straw that brought on God's stern judgment. The Philistines engaged Israel at the battle of Aphek and not only soundly defeated the covenant nation but killed Eli's sons as well. Eli himself died upon hearing the bad news, and worst of all the ark was taken. The son that was born

to Phinehas's wife was named Ichabod, i.e., "no glory," for now the Shekinah glory of God had departed from Israel. Samuel, as prophet, was raised up to mediate between God and the nation, once the ark (the throne of God's presence with the nation) was removed. Although there would be no atoning sacrifice for the nation (Yom Kippur) with the ark removed, at least one man could be a channel for hearing God's voice.

The Philistines took the ark (ch 5-6) but did not retain it for long. At first, the possession of the ark was a glorious feat for them, because the capture of the most sacred object of the enemy was a sign of supremacy. God quickly showed the Philistines that their victory over Israel was not due to their superior strength or the superiority of their gods. The significance of chapter five in which the statue of Dagon falls on the floor before the ark is a polemic against the gods and pagan worship of the Philistines. Clearly, YHWH was supreme, and He would make sure the Philistines honored Him as well.

The only reason the Philistines had defeated Israel was because YHWH was using the Philistines to discipline His people and show their utter failure under the theocracy.

In chapter seven, the LORD used Samuel to bring relief to the nation and terminate the long oppression of the Philistines. In 7:3-17, Samuel functioned as prophet, priest and judge of Israel.

1. The prophetic preaching of Samuel (7:3-4)
  - a. The scope — *"Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel"*
  - b. The nature — a call to repentance  
*"Return to the LORD with all your heart"*
  - c. The conditions:
    - remove the foreign gods and Ashtaroth
    - direct your hearts to the LORD
    - serve Him alone
  - d. Promise — *"He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines"*
2. The Intercession of Samuel (7:5) - *"I will pray to the Lord for you"*
3. Priestly ministry of Samuel (7:6a, 8-11)
  - a. Priestly lineage: from tribe of Levi (1 Chron 6:16,28) and had ministered to the LORD with linen ephod (1 Sam 2:18)
  - b. Presents offerings (7:6a, 7-11)
4. The judge ministry of Samuel (7:6b)  
*"And Samuel judged the sons of Israel at Mizpah"*

Twenty years had elapsed (1 Sam 7:2) since God removed the ark from Shiloh. Now, the nation was ready to listen and repent once again (7:4). God honored their humility before Him by giving them a

decisive victory over the Philistines. Although the Philistines would still trouble the nation even through the time of David, the Philistines grip had been broken for now, and the 40-year oppression ended.

The victory at Mizpah did not restore the nation to her former role as a theocracy, however. That privileged opportunity was no longer available to them. Nevertheless, the people could still experience YHWH's blessing, since the Abrahamic covenant was in force. Things would be different, and the nation would have to make the most of it with her judges. But this was an unstable situation: the prospect of a new generation of judges was bleak, for even Samuel's sons were corrupt (8:3). The nation was in a difficult position, and the idea of human kingship was beginning to look attractive.

### **A LESSON FOR OUR LIFE**

1 Samuel 2:30 gives us an important principle: "those who honor Me, I will honor." Eli was disciplined by the Lord for unfaithful service. Samuel was an example of a man in ministry whom God honored (even though he was not perfect – 8:13).