

SESSION THREE

THE START OF THE MONARCHY

1 Samuel 8:1–12:25

I. INTRODUCTION

With the loss of the ark, the formal functioning of the theocracy was interrupted. The capture of the ark was allowed by God as a judgment on the theocracy (not that the theocracy failed, but that the people failed in their responsibilities to the theocracy).

In 1 Sam 8, the covenant nation enters a new national relationship to YHWH. They would now be constituted as a monarchy with a human king ruling over them. This change involves some very interesting questions concerning God's will. In demanding a king, the nation was rejecting YHWH as their king (1 Sam 8:7). This was a wicked act to desire a king (1 Sam 12:17), and yet the LORD was willing to let them have a king (8:22).

We should take into account that YHWH foresaw the day when the nation would have a king—in fact He even intended for them to have a king (Gen 49:18; Num 24:17; Deut 17:14-19; 18:17-20), yet the nation was not told how or when. From a human standpoint, we can understand their rationale for wanting a king: (1) Samuel was old and his sons were corrupt; and (2) the nation faced external dangers, including the Arameans to the north and the Ammonites to the east. Hence, they wanted a king who could lead them against their enemies. Nevertheless, this was a wrong choice: (1) their motive was wrong, for it involved a rejection of YHWH as their king (i.e., they had an anti-theocratic spirit); (2) this was premature—they did not wait for God's leading in this and to see His choice of a king; and (3) this was done with an attitude of conformity to the world—*"such as all the other nations have."* Thus they were guilty for this decision. On the other hand, God's actions were righteous, and He would use the new order of kingship to accomplish His purposes.

II. THE STRUCTURE

Rejection of Yahweh as King and Demand for a Human king Ch 8	God Reveals To Samuel That Saul Is To Be King Ch 9	Saul Confirmed As King to the Nation Ch 10	Saul's Victory Unites the Nation Under His Kingship Ch 11	Samuel's Charge to the Nation to Serve and Obey the LORD Ch 12
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III. THE MESSAGE

These chapters reflect that YHWH was going to permit the people to have a king, even though this was a wicked sinful deed on their part. The people were warned about the consequences of having a king (8:10-18), and thus they were held accountable for their decision.

In the story, God selects the man who is to be the king, and He does so quite fairly. He chooses the finest candidate in the land. Humanly, Saul was a perfect choice: good looks, great stature (9:2), etc. He was a good leader (ch 11), and God even changed His heart and gifted him with the Spirit. From the human vantage point, there would be no excuse in the selection of Saul. When Saul would eventually fail, the people would learn that the solution to their problems was not in having a king . . . their real need was for an obedient heart! Furthermore, they would recognize that this king—a fine a man as he was—did not meet God's standards. There was a need for a man after God's own heart. Saul is thus the divinely chosen background for the emergence of David, who is, in turn, a foretaste of the Lord Jesus.

Through all of this, God's basic plan for the nation has not changed. We must not lose sight of the Abrahamic covenant! Israel was to mediate God's blessing to the world and be a nation set apart unto YHWH. Even though the tactics were changing, His relationship to them as reflected in the Abrahamic covenant had not changed:

"For the LORD will not abandon His people on account of His great name, because the LORD has been pleased to make you a people for Himself" (1 Sam 12:22).

The nation is still under the Abrahamic covenant and still responsible to YHWH. Faith and obedience are still essential. God will permit the new order which involves a king, but obedience will still be required to experience blessing. This is confirmed in Samuel's charge to the nation after their acceptance of Saul:

"If you will fear the LORD and serve Him, and listen to His voice and not rebel against the command of the LORD, then both you and also the king who reigns over you will follow the LORD your God" (1 Sam 12:14).

So, blessing is still available to the nation, if they will obey and serve YHWH. But if they disobey, they will experience the curses that had been outlined in Deut 28–29. Samuel goes on to also make this clear:

"And if you will not listen to the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the command of the LORD, then the hand of the LORD will be against you, as it was against your fathers" (1 Sam 12:15).

With this in mind, the message of these chapters boils down to this:

Despite the sinful act of demanding a king and rejecting YHWH as king, the covenant nation can have a king, but they will still be responsible to the covenant demands!

IV. THEOLOGICAL STUDY OF GOD'S WILL

The matter of God's will in regard to the nation's demand for a king involves some careful study.¹ If God did not want them to have a king, why was this allowed to happen? Did God's will change?

A. The Nature of God's Will

Probing a study of the will of God invokes a sense of awe concerning the very deep personality of God Himself. Simply put, God wills, and this He does apart from the controlling influence of any other creature. As far as the matter of self-determination goes with God, we can recognize two very fundamental distinctions of His will: His decretive and His preceptive will. According to Berkhof,

The former is that will of God by which He purposes or decrees whatever shall come to pass, whether He wills to accomplish it effectively (causatively), or to permit it to occur through the unrestrained agency of His rational creatures. The latter is the rule of life which God has laid down for His moral creatures, indicating the duties which He enjoins upon them. The former is always accomplished, while the latter is often disobeyed.²

Though these may appear to be distinct, they are yet fundamentally one in God.

The basic aspect of God's will is that God cannot will anything that is contrary to His nature, to His wisdom or love, to His righteousness or holiness. Thus, if we recognize that God's decretive will also includes the sinful deeds of man, we must be careful to conceive this in such a way that God does not become the author of sin. This would lead us to a view of God's will with respect to sin as His will to permit sin and not His will to effectuate it. In this sense, we may speak of God's permissive will. The will of God to permit sin need not imply that He takes delight or pleasure in sin.

B. God's Preceptive Will in the Days of Samuel

God's preceptive will in the days of Samuel was for His people to live under a theocracy with YHWH as king. God gave the Law to His nation in which He made no provision for rule by earthly king (although he did recognize the eventuality of one). Instead, He instituted the priesthood in which the High Priest was the representative of the nation before God. In addition to priests, God also raised up judges and prophets who would transmit His messages and will to the people. The high priest wore the breastplate of judgment on the front of the ephod; the breastplate was so made as to form a pouch and in it were placed the Urim and Thummim. These were used for discovering God's will. Thus, there was no need for a human king. That the preceptive will of God excluded a human king is seen in God's response to the people's request in 1 Sam 8:7, ". . . they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them."

C. Change in God's Will

God's will is seen to change in regard to the rule of His people. In 1 Sam 8:22, God said to Samuel, "Listen to their voice, and appoint them a king." Here we see that God's permissive will allows the people to have a king. His plan will not be thwarted by the interruption of His preceptive will. God

¹Cf. J. Barton Payne, "Saul and the Changing Will of God," *BibSac* 129 (1972):321-25.

²Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 77.

knew that the people would eventually return to agreement with Him that a king is not best; rather, direct rule by God was best for them. Nevertheless, God used this to accomplish His purpose . . . the preparation of a kingdom for His Son.

D. The Question of Guilt Involved

To understand the guilt involved in the change, it would help us to understand the motivation for the change. In 1 Sam 8:19, the people declare, "No, but there shall be a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles." The people's motives were wrong, for they did not need to be like the other nations in this regard. The guilt cannot lie with God, for God had Samuel warn the people of the hazards of having a king (1 Sam 8:9-18). There would be the need to support a standing army in service to the king, the need to maintain the service of the palace, the need for taxation, and the use of one's servants and animals for public service. These things would be burdensome to the people.

Still, the people insisted, and so God permitted them their desire. In doing so, God is shown to be clear of guilt, for He even attempts to have the best man possible to become king so that the nation will see her folly. The point in this is that God does not try to make the kingly reign fail; to the contrary He gives it the best opportunity to succeed. Saul was chosen by God; Saul was a choice and a handsome man (1 Sam 9:2). Saul's heart was changed, and God was with him (1 Sam 10:7-9). Furthermore, he did possess the skills necessary to be an effective leader (ch 11).

God's permissive will was clear of guilt and even allowed for the outworking of His reign and purposes as we see in 1 Sam 12:14: "If you will fear the Lord and serve Him, and listen to His voice and not rebel against the command of the Lord, then both you and also the king who reigns over you will follow the Lord your God." Hence, there was no "forcing action" by God for the nation to turn away from the Lord. We cannot say that God caused the rule-by-king to fail. Rather, the guilt lies with the people as Samuel reveals: "I will call to the Lord, that He may send thunder and rain. Then you will know and see that your wickedness is great which you have done in the sight of the Lord by asking for yourselves a king" (1 Sam 12:17).

E. God's Will Utilized Evil

God's will utilized evil in His decree by allowing the choice of the people to come about and so prove to them a lesson when their choice failed. God did not allow the evil to come about so that the people would turn away from YHWH. As Samuel says, "Do not fear. You have committed all this evil, yet do not turn aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart" (1 Samuel 12:20). Through these events, the nation will learn an important lesson about rebelling against God's rule. Furthermore, God will use this evil to accomplish two other things: (1) Saul will deliver the people from the hand of the Philistines—as well as punish the Amalekites (1 Sam 9:16); and (2) God will prepare the people for having the righteous king, Jesus, who will establish God's kingdom.

A LESSON FOR OUR LIFE

Look carefully at 1 Samuel 8:3: "His sons, however, did not walk in his ways, but turned aside after dishonest gain and took bribes and perverted justice." The ministry can sometimes provide opportunity to profit illicitly, but God does not honor this (and it does not escape God's notice). Honesty . . . pure

honesty . . . is a character trait that God is looking for in the lives of those of us who serve Him. May the Lord forbid that we would ever stoop to sinning in this way. To misappropriate funds that are intended for our Lord's ministry is a perversion of the stewardship He has entrusted to us. We are not in our Lord's service for the money, and therefore seeking dishonest gain should have no place in our lives.