



## **UNIT 6 - LESSON 1**

### **FROM THEOCRACY TO KINGDOM**

From Israel's beginnings as a nation at the time of the Exodus until the election of Saul as king, the form of government was theocratic, i.e. the rule of God. Yahweh was not only their God; He was also the nation's ruler, and chose his servants such as Moses, Joshua and the Judges, to carry out this rule. These rulers had a charismatic endowment of the Spirit of Yahweh as a sign that they were appointed as God's leaders. Leadership was not hereditary, and attempts to bring in hereditary leadership had failed before the election of Saul.

#### **THE MOVEMENT TOWARDS KINGSHIP**

When Israel had settled in the promised Land, demands were heard that the nation should become a kingdom on the pattern of surrounding kingdoms. It is apparent that there was tension between pro- (for) and anti- (against) monarchical parties for many years. Four incidents indicate the development towards kingship.

1. The men of Israel asked Gideon to rule over them and found a dynasty which would continue to rule after his death. Gideon rejected this request outright, because he saw Yahweh as the only rightful ruler of Israel (Judges 8:22-23).
2. Gideon's son Abimelech persuaded the people of Shechem to make him their king (Judges 9). Abimelech killed his brothers to save disputes over his election, but Jotham escaped. However, Abimelech was faced with rebellions, and eventually was killed in the fighting. His death was seen as the judgment of God upon him on account of his evil deeds (Judges 9:22-25; 9:55-57).
3. The book of Samuel introduced a situation where Israel was worshipping in a sanctuary at Shiloh, with Eli as high priest. He also functioned as a "judge", giving leadership to Israel as God's representative (1 Sam. 4:18). Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were also priests at Shiloh (1 Sam. 1:3), and one of them might have been expected to succeed his father as high priest and judge. However, they were "worthless men" who had no regard for the high office they held (1 Sam 2:22-25), and God decreed that the judgement of death would come upon them, thus ending Eli's line (1 Sam. 2:27-36). In place of these unworthy priests, a faithful priest would be appointed.
4. Samuel faced a similar experience when he appointed his sons as judges. They were not like their righteous father, so the elders of Israel asked Samuel to appoint a king for the nation (1 Sam. 8:1-5). This led to Saul's election as king.

Within Israel there was dissatisfaction with the anarchy which had characterised the period of the Judges (Judges 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25).

**UNIT 6 – LESSON 1 (cont'd)****SAMUEL – PROPHET, PRIEST, JUDGE**

Samuel is the dominating figure in 1 Samuel. Read the book through and see how, even during Saul's reign, the influence of Samuel remains. The story of his birth and divine vocation marks him as one who is in the line of the judges – leaders raised up by God to rule Israel (1 Sam. 1-3). Samuel is in fact the last of the great line of judges. Samuel served as a priest under Eli and continued to engage in the work of sacrifice, though this was not his primary function. Samuel was also recognised as a prophet of Yahweh (1 Sam. 3:19-21) and he is one of the earliest of that class which was to become so important in Israel's subsequent history.

Samuel led Israel at a time of national crisis. Israel's enemies the Philistines had defeated them and taken the Ark of the Covenant (1 Sam. 4 and 5). Eventually the Ark was returned because the Philistines found it was bringing them trouble (1 Sam.6). As he moved around Israel supervising sacrifices on the altars at Mizpah, Gilgal, Bethel and Ramah Samuel gave the kind of leadership which Israel needed, pointing the people to God. His annual circuit also involved him in judging the people. Under Samuel Israel defeated the Philistines (1 Sam.7).

**THE CHOICE OF A KING**

When, in spite of Samuel's protests, (1 Sam.8) Israel demanded a king the prophet chose an obscure man named Saul for this office. As a prophet Samuel had special insight into God's purpose and he was thus able to discern God's choice of a king (1 Sam. 9:15-17). Saul was anointed by Samuel and also received the charismatic gift of prophecy, a link with the judges (1 Sam.10:6-7, 10-13).

At Mizpah Saul was formally presented to Israel and elected as King (1 Sam. 10:17-27).

**THE REIGN OF SAUL**

The remainder of 1 Samuel covers the period of Saul's reign, C.1020 – C.1000 B.C. It was a reign begun with promise. He was of impressive stature (1 Sam.10:23) and was received enthusiastically by Israel after Samuel's introduction of him as the one chosen by Yahweh (1 Sam. 10:24). His early victory over Jabesh-Gilead was an opportunity to show himself as a military leader and was followed by victories over the Philistines (1 Sam. 14) and the Amalekites (1 Sam.15). However, Saul did not fulfil his early promise and was a failure as king. His main problems were:

**UNIT 6 – LESSON 1 (cont'd)****SAMUEL – PROPHET, PRIEST, JUDGE**

1. **His conflict with Samuel** - At Gilgal, Saul performed sacred rites himself instead of waiting for Samuel. After his victory over the Amalekites he failed to destroy all that he had been commanded to. Samuel announced that his disobedience had brought about Yahweh's rejection of him and a more worthy king would reign in his place. (1 Sam. 13,15).
2. **His jealousy of David** - David rose to prominence in Saul's court after his defeat of Goliath (1 Sam.17-18). He seems to have had earlier contact with the court as a musician (1 Sam.16:14-23), but there is difficulty in understanding Saul's apparent ignorance of David's identity after his defeat of Goliath (1 Sam.17:55-58). Consult commentaries for various explanations. The difficulty does not exist in the Greek version of the Old Testament for it does not contain 1 Sam. 17:55-58. David received Saul's daughter Michal in marriage, but found himself the subject of Saul's jealousy, culminating in attempts to murder him (1 Sam.19). David was forced to live as a refugee, pursued by Saul. At the same time a discontented element within Israel joined David (1 Sam.22:1-2). Twice David could have killed Saul (1 Sam. 24 and 26) but he would not kill Yahweh's anointed one. David eventually took refuge with the Philistines (1 Sam.27).
3. **His religious decline** - We have already noticed Saul's failures (1 Sam.13,15). His act in slaying the priests of Nob for their assistance to David marked further decline (1 Sam.22). Late in his reign he was guilty of necromancy (1 Sam.28) despite the law forbidding it (Deut.18:9-14). The presence of names compounded with "Baal" in Saul's family (1 Chron. 8:33,34) has led to the conjecture that he may have turned to Baal worship.

**SAUL'S END**

Saul and three sons, including Jonathan, died in battle against the Philistines (1 Sam. 31). David was living in Philistine territory but did not participate in the battle as some of the Philistines doubted his loyalty to them. This saved David the embarrassment of fighting against his countrymen in a war which led to his enthronement.

Saul's life and death are a tragedy, for they show a man of great potential in the service of God and man, but one who turned from good to follow his own ways. Saul's early promise of greatness was never realised, and it was left to David to show how great the kingdom could be if the king was one who walked in the ways of Yahweh.

**QUESTION 1:**

Why do you think Samuel was specially raised up by God?

**QUESTION 2:**

What 3 roles did Samuel have? Explain them.

**QUESTION 3:**

How and why was Saul chosen as king?



**QUESTION 4:**

How did Saul fail as a monarch?

**QUESTION 5:**

Study Samuel's speech in 1 Sam.12. What does it teach about:

- (a) The stewardship of God's servants'?
- (b) Obedience and disobedience

**SUGGESTED FURTHER QUESTIONS FOR GROUP STUDY**

Read 1 Samuel 3, the familiar story of the Lord's appearance to the boy Samuel.

How did Samuel learn it was God calling him?

How did Samuel respond in verse 10?

Why was Samuel afraid in verse 15?

What do we learn of Samuel and Eli in verse 18?

Is there any part of this chapter that particularly challenges or encourages you?