

SAUL: THE FIRST KING

Week 13: United Kingdom: Saul—The People’s Choice (1 Samuel 1-31)

In his farewell address to his people, Moses prophesied: “*When you come into the land which the Lord your God is giving you, you will say, ‘Let us appoint over me a king like all the nation around me, then you will appoint over yourself a king whom the Lord your God shall choose’*” (Deut. 17:14-15). The time had now come! The people demanded a king!

After two to four hundred years of only marginal success in occupying the land given to them by the Lord, the Israelite tribes united to form a single nation under a single king. Since entering the Promised Land under Joshua’s leadership the land was ruled loosely by non-centralized judges, who had limited amounts of judicial and military control over the other Israelite tribes. At times, various deliverers would lead some or all of the tribes against aggressors, and then fade again into history. But the loose tribal confederacy was starting to seem inadequate when compared to the neighboring nations around them who had kings, and militaries, and inventions arising from the dawn of the Iron Age. It was a time in Israel’s history where there was a constant threat of invasion and oppression.

As a result, the Israelites began to desire a more unifying solution to their national troubles (8). Looking to the Egyptian and Mesopotamian models of monarchy the Israelite tribes began agitating Samuel for a king. Samuel is not happy about this request but God tells him to go ahead. Still it is clear that God is not happy with it either: “*Listen to the voice of the people according to all that they say to you for they have not rejected you but they have rejected Me from reigning over them*” (8:7).

Why are Samuel and God displeased, especially since Moses had predicted this turn of events? The answer is in how the people asked for a king: *And the people said to Samuel “...Now set up for us a king to judge us like all the nations”* (8:6). An Israelite king was not supposed to be a king “like all the nations.” Rather, he was supposed to be a model of all that God had commanded Moses in the Covenant at Sinai (Ex. 20). He was supposed to be an example for his people and a testimony to the nations of the Lord and His ways.

But in the year 1051_{BCE} Saul was anointed as the first king of Israel by the prophet Samuel in accordance with the wishes of the people, chosen by popular acclaim as he was tall and good looking! Just how Saul was notified of his new position is an odd story. He goes to the greatest prophet alive and asks, “Where are my donkeys?” The prophet answers, “Don’t worry, your donkeys have been found. Oh, and by the way, you will be the first king of Israel” (9). Then Samuel anoints Saul king. However, Saul does not tell his family about this encounter. But when Samuel gathers the nation to announce that Saul has been chosen as king, Saul hides. When a few people mock Saul as unsuitable to be king he remains silent (10). Are these actions signifying his humility and modesty, or are they rather evidence of a weakness in his character?

Saul finally arose to the occasion and leads the nation into victory after the Ammonites invade (11). He went on to lead the Jewish people in a series of victories and establishes his authority as king. However, over 40 years Saul proved to be an ineffectual leader as he repeatedly failed to carry out God’s instructions (chs. 13-15). But when Saul made the critical mistake of keeping back some of the spoils of victory against God’s directive, the course of Israel’s history changed: *And Samuel turned to go and Saul seized the hem of his robe and it tore. And Samuel said to him, “The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it your fellow who is better than you”* (15:17-28).

Saul doesn’t get another chance. God didn’t mess around when it came to the leader of Israel. Although Saul is finished, it didn’t mean he was deposed on the spot, but it meant that his line would not carry on the monarchy. Indeed, following this declaration to Saul, Samuel goes looking for another king to anoint and he finds him in the most unlikely place (16)!

Week Thirteen Reading Plan

1:1-2:11	Hannah’s Request to God
3:1-4:1	The Lord Calls Samuel
8:1-22	Israel Demands a King
9:1-27	Saul Chosen to be King
10:1-27	Samuel Anoints Saul
12:1-13:15	Saul’s Coronation & Sin
15:1-23; 31:1-13	Saul Rejected as King

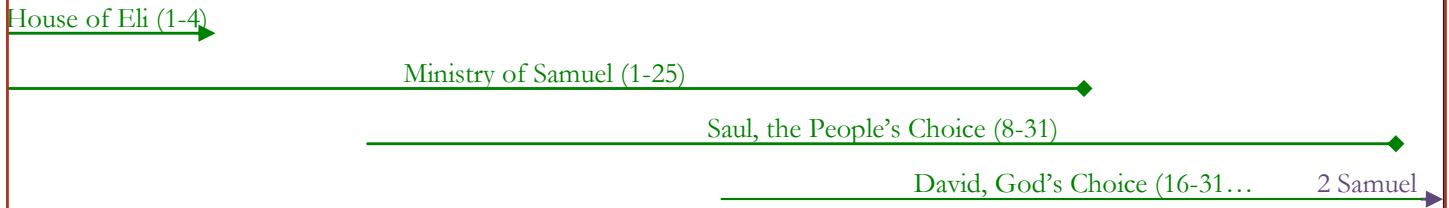
THE BOOKS ABOUT THE MONARCHY

1st & 2nd Samuel

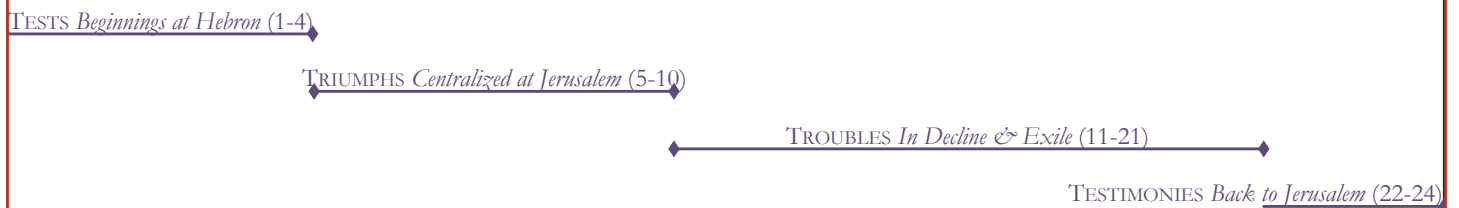
1st & 2nd Kings

1st & 2nd Chronicles

4 Key Characters of 1 Samuel

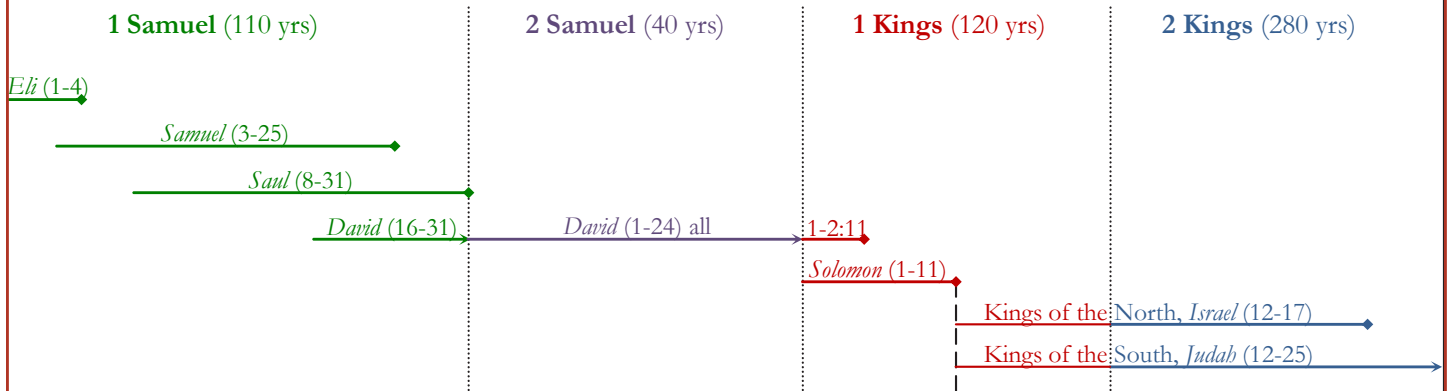


4 Phases in David's Life in 2 Samuel



1 & 2 Chronicles: a Retelling of 1 & 2 Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings

POLITICAL & ROYAL



SACRED & ECCLESIASTICAL

