



PROPHETS AND KINGS IN ISRAEL:
ISRAEL STRUGGLES TO MAINTAIN ITS
CULTURAL SEPARATENESS
INTO THE WORD
LESSON 19

- WHAT YOU WILL LEARN IN THIS LESSON:
 - Israel forgets the great works of God.
 - Israel is given over to pagan nations and idolatry.
 - God's training and purpose in the midst of their disobedience.
 - The stories of Deborah, Samson, and Gideon.
- BIBLICAL THEMES:
 - Humanity's constant battle with the spirit of the World.
- SCRIPTURAL REFERENCES:
 - Judges 2:1-4; 10-11
 - Judges 17:6
- FOR FURTHER STUDY:
 - Read through the book of Judges
 - The Practice of the presence of God - Lawrence

INTO THE WORD

LESSON 19

PROPHETS AND KINGS IN ISRAEL: ISRAEL STRUGGLES TO MAINTAIN ITS CULTURAL SEPARATENESS

Introduction:

It is significant that the final verse of the Judges reads as follows:

- Judges 21:25
In those days there was no king in Israel, every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

Despite the short periods of obedience demonstrated through the lives of the Judges, the Book of Judges records the political and social chaos that ensued when the tribes of Israel were not bound together through their devotion and obedience to the Lord.

Israel continued to covet what they understood to be the more advanced and urbanized culture of the pagan nations that surrounded them (the Philistines on the western coast and the Canaanites--related to the Amorites--of the Jordan valley). Perhaps the people of Israel thought that modeling their governmental structures on their neighboring cultures would ameliorate what they perceived as their vulnerable and inferior status. The first step, they thought, was to appoint a king.



Introductory Discussion Questions:

- Which repeating pattern do you see regarding the Israelites and their relationship to pagan nations?
- What results follow when Israel pursues the ways of these nations rather than the ways of God?
- Why do you think that Israel struggles to maintain their cultural separateness; what were the things of the world that they found so compelling?
- In which ways do you find yourself like the nation of Israel?

Pause for Thought:

Life in the twenty-first century in North America can be very busy for many people. There are many things that compete for our attention, passion and commitment on a daily basis. Many of these things are good things: family commitments, work related commitments and social activities and relationships. In our Christian walk it is important that we do not allow these good things to crowd out our personal relationship with and devotion to God. Scripture says, "Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need." (Matthew 6:33, NLT). God requires that we earnestly seek Him first ("...for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him." Hebrews 11:6). Similarly we place things that are clearly not good in front of our devotion to and relationship with God: substance abuse, wrong relationships, pride, love of money for example.

If we align our our lives with the word of God, we will correctly order our lives and our relationship to the things and commitments in our lives. When we have a wrong relationship to the things and commitments in our lives, good or bad, we are not obeying the word of the Lord. In time, chaos of one kind or another, will ensue.



Reflective Questions:

- Is there anything in your life currently that you feel is out of alignment with God's or is there anything that you feel you place before your relationship with God?

Before a King is appointed to Israel, the prophet and judge Samuel leads the nation. As Samuel grows old, the elders of Israel request that Samuel set up a king to judge Israel, "like all the other nations" (1 Sam 8:5). Displeased with their request, Samuel goes to the Lord for guidance. The Lord instructs Samuel to comply with their request, stating that it is the Lord God Himself they are rejecting as King, not Samuel's leadership. Clearly an earthly king was not God's perfect will for Israel. The Lord tells Samuel to warn the people regarding the way an earthly king will rule over them. These scriptures imply that such positions of power may prove too much for man.

It is this structure of government that the nation of Israel continues to follow in the ensuing centuries: king and prophet, under God. There will be many instances in the future of Israel when the kings of Israel turn away from the law and ordinances of God, and false prophets emerge, culminating in devastation for the nation. Once again it is the commitment and dedication to God of those in leadership that determine the success or otherwise of the nation of Israel.

Into the Word:

Part 1: Hannah

The story and life of Samuel provides us with a great example of dedication and consecration to the kingdom of God. 1 Samuel 1 narrates the early portion of Samuel's life. The story begins with his mother, Hannah.

- Hannah was married to a devout man, Elkanah. She was one of his two wives. His other wife was called Peninnah. Hannah was unable to have children, but Peninnah had both sons and daughters.
- Each year the family would travel to Shiloh to worship and offer sacrifice to the Lord of hosts. Elkanah gave Peninnah and her children portions to offer, but to Hannah he gave a "worthy portion" (1 Samuel 5). Elkanah loved Hannah (am I not better tho thee than 10 sons" (1 Samuel 8), but Peninnah would constantly mock Hannah about her lack of children.
- Hannah was deeply sad ("bitterness of soul") that she determined to fast and cry out to the Lord in the temple at Shiloh. Hannah placed her trust completely in God as she earnestly prayed this prayer:
 - 1 Samuel 1:11-18
¹¹ And she made this vow: "O LORD of Heaven's Armies, if you will look upon my sorrow and answer my prayer and give me a son, then I will give him back to you. He will be yours for his entire lifetime, and as a sign that he has been dedicated to the LORD, his hair will never be cut." ¹² As she was praying to the LORD, Eli watched her. ¹³ Seeing her lips moving but hearing no sound, he thought she had been drinking. ¹⁴ "Must you come here drunk?" he demanded. "Throw away your wine!" ¹⁵ "Oh no, sir!" she replied. "I haven't been drinking wine or anything stronger. But I am very discouraged, and I was pouring out my heart to the LORD. ¹⁶ Don't think I am a wicked woman! For I have been praying out of great anguish and sorrow." ¹⁷ "In that case," Eli said, "go in peace! May the God of Israel grant the request you have asked of him." ¹⁸ "Oh, thank you, sir!" she exclaimed. Then she went back and began to eat again, and she was no longer sad.



Scripture Response and Analysis:

- Why do you think that Eli, the priest and judge of Israel at the time, considers that Hannah is drunk?
- What is his response when he realizes that she is, in fact, sober?
- What is significant about Hannah's actions when she has finished her petition and submitted herself to the will of God?

Hannah prayed with such sincerity and desperation; yet she also prayed in complete faith. She demonstrated her faith by returning to her food and refusing to remain sad after leaving the temple. She had placed her situation into the hands of the Lord, and she was content to leave it there. Hannah's earnest and heartfelt prayers for a son might serve as a model for our prayers of petition and intercession. The key elements for prayers of petition and intercession as modeled by Hannah are: faith in the power of the Lord God, demonstrated by our relationship with and knowledge of Him, and committing those prayers to the will of the Lord.

In time God did indeed answer her prayer and she gave birth to a son, naming him Samuel, meaning, "Because I have asked him of the Lord" (1 Sam 20). Hannah kept her promise to the Lord, and when her child was weaned, she returned to Shiloh with Samuel and offered her child to the Lord as she had committed to do. 1 Samuel 2:1-10 records Hannah's beautiful song of praise as she placed her son into the service of the Lord and the priest, Eli, at the temple in Shiloh. Her song demonstrates the strength of her faith in the delivering and mighty power of the Lord. Each year she would return to the temple with her husband to offer their sacrifices and worship, and visit their son. Hannah and Elkanah went on to have many children together: And the Lord visited Hannah, so that she conceived, and bare three sons and two daughters. (1 Sam 2: 21)

Part 2: Samuel is chosen as prophet and judge of Israel

From a very young age, Samuel ministered in the temple at Shiloh. Although he was not in the lineage of the priesthood, Samuel was God's choice for the office of prophet and priest. Clearly, Eli had not done well in training his sons in the laws of God and in living righteous lives. His two sons, Hopni and Phinehas had committed perverse sexual acts "at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation" (1 Sam 2: 22). They had desecrated the holy temple of God and had established an evil reputation for themselves.

On the other hand, Samuel "grew on, and was in favor both with the Lord, and also with men" (1 Sam 2: 26). God spoke to his chosen prophet Samuel even as a child. 1 Samuel: 3 outlines the story of the first few times God spoke directly to Samuel. Scripture records that "in those days messages from the Lord were very rare and visions were quite uncommon" (1 Sam 3:1) demonstrating that Samuel was indeed an exceptional young man. God revealed to Samuel what would take place in the family of Eli. Although Samuel was fearful to relay the word of the Lord to Eli the priest, but Eli pressed him to do so.

God judged Eli and his family and removed his descendants from His holy office, confirming his decision with the following prophetic words:

○ 1 Samuel 2:34-35

And to prove that what I have said will come true, I will cause your two sons, Hophni and Phineas, to die on the same day! Then I will raise up a faithful priest who will serve me and do what I desire. I will establish his family and they will be priests to my anointed kings forever.

1 Samuel 4 tells the story of the defeat of the armies of Israel and the capture of the Ark of the Covenant by the Philistines. It is in this battle that the sons of Eli, Hophni and Phineas lose their lives. On hearing about the death of his sons and the capture of the Ark of the Covenant, Eli falls from his seat beside the gate, breaks his neck and dies. The prophetic word of the Lord had come to pass. Eli's daughter-in-law also died after giving birth to a son, who she named Ichabod, meaning "Where is the glory?" after learning that the Ark had been captured and her husband and father in law were dead.



Scripture Response and Analysis:

- Why do you think that God deals so harshly with Eli's family?
- Why is it important that the things God calls holy, we also call holy and treat accordingly?
- What do you think is the significance of the Philistine capture of the Ark of the Covenant during the priesthood of Eli?

The Ark of the Covenant did not remain in Philistine. God's wrath and judgment rested on the land of Philistine while the Ark was in their possession. Eventually they returned the Ark across the border to Israel with guilt offerings realizing that they had offended the mighty God of Israel. The Ark was eventually brought to Kiriath-jearim under the charge of Eleazar, son of Abinadab, after many Israelites had lost their lives for their unlawful treatment of the Ark. The Ark remained there for 20 years, and the people of Israel mourned as it seemed that the Lord had abandoned them.

Part 3: Victory over the Philistines

Samuel lead the nation of Israel in their repentance, commanding them to rid themselves of their foreign gods and idols and to determine to obey only the Lord. Only then, Samuel promised, would the Lord deliver them for the Philistines. He lead them in communal confession and sacrifice at Mizpah. The Philistine's mobilized their armies when they heard of Israel's gathering at Mizpah. Fearful at the sight of the approaching Philistines the Israelites pleaded with Samuel to intercede for them. Samuel took a young lamb and offered it to the Lord as a whole burnt offering and pleaded with the Lord to help Israel As Samuel offered the lamb, the armies of Philistine approached the Israelite camp

to attack Israel. However, the Lord spoke with a mighty voice of thunder from heaven and the Philistines were thrown into confusion. The Israelites defeated the army of Philistine. (1 Sam 7:9-11).

Reminiscent of the actions of Joshua when he built an altar at the river Jordan, Samuel took a large stone and placed it between the towns of Mizpah and Jeshanah. He named it "Ebenezer," meaning "the stone of help," for he said that, "Up to this point, the Lord has helped us!" (1 Sam 7:12). Throughout Samuel's lifetime the Lord's powerful hand was raised against the Philistines, and the Israelite villages near Ekron and Gath that the Philistines had captured were returned to Israel. There was also peace between the Israelites and the Canaanites (Amorites) during Samuel's leadership. Samuel continued to judge Israel for the rest of his lifetime, traveling around and hearing cases. His home was at Ramah, where he built an altar to the Lord.



Scripture Response and Analysis:

- How would you describe the character of Samuel?
- What brought about peace during the leadership of Samuel?
- According to the story of Samuel, which key elements do you see as necessary for the peace and prosperity of Israel?

Part 4: Israel asks for a King

As Samuel grew old, he appointed his eldest sons as judges over Israel. However, they were unlike their father and were greedy for money. The Elders of Israel asked Samuel to appoint a King (like the other nations) over Israel. Clearly this was not the perfect will of God, yet God gave them their request. In obedience to the Lord, Samuel warned Israel about having a king reign over them:

- 1 Samuel 8:10-21
 - ¹⁰ So Samuel passed on the LORD's warning to the people who were asking him for a king. ¹¹ "This is how a king will reign over you," Samuel said. "The king will draft your sons and assign them to his chariots and his charioteers, making them run before his chariots. ¹² Some will be generals and captains in his army, some will be forced to plow in his fields and harvest his crops, and some will make his weapons and chariot equipment. ¹³ The king will take your daughters from you and force them to cook and bake and make perfumes for him. ¹⁴ He will take away the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his own officials. ¹⁵ He will take a tenth of your grain and your grape harvest and distribute it among his officers and attendants. ¹⁶ He will take your male and female slaves and demand the finest of your cattle and donkeys for his

own use. ¹⁷ He will demand a tenth of your flocks, and you will be his slaves. ¹⁸ When that day comes, you will beg for relief from this king you are demanding, but then the LORD will not help you." ¹⁹ But the people refused to listen to Samuel's warning. "Even so, we still want a king," they said. ²⁰ "We want to be like the nations around us. Our king will judge us and lead us into battle." ²¹ So Samuel repeated to the LORD what the people had said,



Scripture Response and Analysis:

- What were the warnings Samuel gave regarding a King in Israel?
- Why did the people still want a King?

Conclusion:

The nation of Israel desired to be like the surrounding nations, rather than remain culturally separate and consecrated to God. Yet, God was merciful to Israel, granting them peace and prosperity when their kings followed his ordinances. However, in the warnings He gave them through Samuel regarding the failings of human kingship, a foreboding note was sounded.