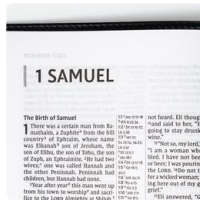


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1 Samuel 5 - 8



1 Samuel - Steve Gregg

In 1 Samuel chapters 5-8, the Israelites engage in battle against the Philistines and the Ark of the Covenant is captured. God subjects the Philistines to plagues and misfortune until they return the Ark to Israel. The people of Israel, however, prove themselves to be unfaithful and the leadership of Samuel's sons is corrupted by bribery and injustice. As a result, the people demand a king to lead them, even though this is seen as a rejection of God's leadership. God warns them of the heavy taxes and demands that will come with having a king, but the people persist and Saul is eventually chosen to be their first king.

Transcript

We'll resume the story. It's 1 Samuel 5. The Ark has been captured in a battle that the Israelites ill-advisedly initiated against the Philistines. We don't know why they did so at this time.

The Philistines have been around for a long time. They actually oppressed Israel for 40 years. To our knowledge, prior to this, there wasn't any time that the nation of Israel mobilized against them and sought to drive them out.

This is pretty close to the end of that 40 years, actually. It's unexplainable, unless it is because they saw that the Lord had returned to Shiloh. This was seen by the fact that God was speaking now through a young prophet, Samuel, as he had never done in recent times.

Probably not since the time of Moses or Joshua had there been a resident prophet in Israel that people knew was an established prophet. That's what it actually says in chapter 3, verse 20. All Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel had been established as a prophet of Yahweh.

That he was confirmed in that role. They'd never had anyone in that position, maybe since Deborah. Deborah had been a prophetess, or at least she prophesied.

This prophet was attached to Shiloh, to the tabernacle. People were beginning to feel like God had returned after a long absence. That may be why they felt the gumption to rise

up and try to drive out the Philistines after so long a time of oppression.

But they miscalculated. They misread God. God was not ready to deliver them yet, because they were not ready to be right with God in all the ways that he was expecting them to be.

So they were jumping the gun, and when God didn't give them victory, they put their faith in something else than God, namely the Ark of the Covenant. They thought it would save them, and it did not. It was captured.

The priests were killed. The Ark was captured. There was a great slaughter of 30,000 Israelites on the field.

Eli, hearing about the death of his two sons, himself fell over backward and died. He broke his neck. One of the two priests who were killed on the battlefield, Phinehas, had a wife who was pregnant at that time.

The news of her husband's death so shocked her and grieved her that she went into what seems to have been a premature labor. Apparently not so premature as to be dangerous to the child, but it basically precipitated the labor. She had the child and died in childbirth, but not before she had named him Ichabod to commemorate the tragedy of that day.

As she said, the glory had departed. That's what Ichabod means, no glory. Then the Philistines took the Ark of God and brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod.

Ashdod was one of the five Philistine cities on the coastal plain of the Mediterranean in the land of Palestine. When the Philistines took the Ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon and set it by Dagon. Commentaries have always said that Dagon was a fish god.

A lot of authorities say that the Dagon statue was in the shape of a fish, except that it had a bearded head of a man and human hands. I'm not sure how those were constructed. I'm not sure how they know this.

Apparently, I would think they could only say such specific things if they found statues, you know, archaeologically. But I'm not sure they have, because modern scholars sometimes question whether the word Dagon was of a fish god or of a fertility god. It was thought in older times that the word Dagon was based on the Hebrew word dag, which means fish.

Of course, the Philistines were mariners. They were people of the sea. That's how they'd gotten to Palestine.

From Asia Minor, they'd travel by sea to Crete, and then from Crete to various points in

the southern, southwestern, excuse me, southeastern Mediterranean coast. Many of them had settled in Israel. Now, whether it was a fish god or not, I don't know.

But that modern scholars would question it makes me wonder whether they have found any such statues. It seems like if they had found statues, they could quickly affirm or disconfirm whether it was a fish shape or not. I really don't know the nature of the archaeological discoveries about Dagon.

But the traditional account from the older commentators is that it was a fish-shaped statue with human hands and human head. And so, they brought the Ark into the Temple of Dagon, obviously as a trophy. It was their belief that the Ark was the very presence of Yahweh and that the statue of Dagon was the very presence of their god.

And their god had given them victory over the people of Yahweh. So, that's how war was interpreted in those days. Every nation had their own god and whichever nation won, it proved that their god was stronger than the god of the other nation.

And so, God actually subjected himself temporarily here to being misunderstood and even giving the Philistines the impression that their god was greater than he was. And so, they bring the Ark as a trophy of Dagon's triumph into the Temple and present it before Dagon. However, if God did allow them to think briefly that their god was stronger than he, he didn't allow them to continue in that delusion for very long.

Because it says, and when the people of Ashdod rose early in the morning, there was Dagon fallen on its face to the earth before the Ark of Yahweh. Now, in other words, the statue was fallen down like prostrate, like a worshipper would. Someone subject to a king would lay prostrate before him seeking mercy or simply showing reverence to him as a king.

It would be common that the people that were courtiers of a king would lay prostrate on their face. And even sometimes people who prayed to God would lay prostrate on their faces. And that's the position that Dagon's statue had fallen to before the Ark of God.

So, what did they do? They took Dagon and set him up in his place again. It's like they didn't get it. They thought, oh well, must have been an earthquake.

Then they arose early the next morning. There was Dagon fallen on his face to the ground before the Ark of the Lord. This time, however, the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were broken off and sitting on the threshold of the temple of Dagon.

Only the torso of Dagon was left of it. So the human parts, if the traditional view is correct, that it had a human head and hands, the human parts were removed from the fish part. And they were set on the threshold.

Why? I don't know. I'm not sure what the symbolism is. Except that it seems to be

represented as something in the story that it was an act of God.

Obviously, it could have been interpreted as the act of vandals. But it would be very coincidental that vandals would come and do that on the particular night that the Ark was there. I mean, the Hebrews would be the only ones who would have a motive for doing such a thing.

And they didn't have access here. They had run away from the Philistines and were not doing vandalism in the temple of Dagon. So this is supernatural that God vindicated himself in the temple of Dagon.

So, therefore, neither the priests of Dagon nor any who come into Dagon's house tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day. Apparently, at the time this was written, the temple of Dagon was still used by the Philistines in Ashdod or Ashkelon. Ashdod.

Yeah, Ashkelon was also a city, but this is Ashdod. And that the writer says that they have a custom these days of making sure they don't step on the threshold of the doorway. Why? Because their God's head and hands were once there and it's been made sacred so they won't step on it.

But the writer says, have you ever noticed how the Philistines don't step on that? You ever wonder why that is? It's because the head and hands of Dagon were there once when the Ark of the Covenant was in captivity there. So, there's a sense in which the truthfulness of this story is continually confirmed by the ongoing practice of the Philistines. That's what the author is saying.

But the hand of the Lord was heavy on the people of Ashdod and he ravaged them and struck them with tumors, both Ashdod and its territory. And when the men of Ashdod saw how it was, they said, the Ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us for his hand is harsh toward us and Dagon our God. God's being mean to our God and to us.

Therefore, they sent and gathered to themselves all the lords of the Philistines and said, what shall we do with the Ark of the God of Israel? And they answered, let the Ark of God of Israel be carried away to Gath, another of the Philistine cities. So, they carried the Ark of God of Israel away. So, it was after they had carried it away that the hand of Yahweh was against the city with a very great destruction.

And he struck the men of the city, both small and great, and tumors broke out on them. That would be in Gath also apparently. And then it says, therefore they sent the Ark of God to Ekron.

So, it was as the Ark of God came to Ekron that the Ekronites cried out saying, they have brought the Ark of God of Israel to kill us and our people. Apparently, its reputation preceded it to Ekron that everywhere it went, it brought deadly plagues on the people. And they sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines and said, send away

the Ark of the God of Israel and let it go back to its own place so that it does not kill us and our people.

For there was a deadly destruction throughout all the city and the hand of God was very heavy there. And the men who did not die were stricken with the tumors and the cry of the city went up to heaven. Now, as it turns out, this may have been the bubonic plague that God brought upon them.

Because although we haven't been told yet, it becomes clear in chapter 6 that there were rats or mice associated with their plagues. Apparently, wherever the Ark went, these mice became numerous and the plague broke out. And of course, the bubonic plague is carried by fleas and on things like mice or squirrels or rats or something like that.

So, the tumors, it was a deadly plague, but they had these tumors, I think in the King James it refers to them as hemorrhoids. But they may not have been only in one location on the body, they may have been all over the body and it was a horrible way to die. And it happened wherever the Ark went.

Now it says, the Ark of the Lord, chapter 6, was in the country of the Philistines seven months. Well, they put up with it a long time. Under those conditions, I don't think I'd let it be that long.

But apparently, it would be in Ashdod for a while before the plague was spread and before they associated in their minds with the presence of the Ark. And likewise, when it went to the other cities, when it went to Gath or Ekron, it took a while for the plague to spread out. So, it was a total of seven months in the land of the Philistines.

And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners saying, what shall we do with the Ark of Yahweh? Tell us how we should send it to its place. Now, the priests and the diviners would be, of course, magicians and occultists. But many times God would use the pagan occultists or something to speak the truth.

I mean, it doesn't mean that divining and the occult are good or okay. But if God wanted to get the truth out and people were consulting those sources, he could get the truth. Like when Saul consulted a witch at Endor and wanted to conjure up Samuel.

Apparently, Samuel really came because God had something he wanted to say through Samuel to Saul. And so here, these diviners gave a word that turns out to be correct. So, they said, if you send away the Ark of the God of Israel, do not send it empty.

But, by all means, return it to him with a trespass offering. Then you will be healed and it will be known to you why his hand is not removed from you. Then they said, what is the trespass offering which we shall return to him? They answered, five golden tumors and five golden rats, according to the number of the lords of the Philistines.

That doesn't sound very flattering to the lords of the Philistines. Send five golden rats, according to the five lords of the Philistines. It almost sounds like the rats represent the lords.

But that's not so. I believe it's because there was infestation of rats that they did that. For the same plague was on all of you and on all your lords.

Therefore, you shall make images of your tumors and images of your rats that ravage the land. And you shall give glory to the God of Israel. Perhaps he will lighten his hand from you, from your gods and from your land.

So, if you placate Israel's God, maybe he'll stop punishing your God and your land. You know, it often was the case that the pagans recognized the superiority of Yahweh to their own gods. But the pity never seemed to drop in their heads.

You know, maybe we should serve Yahweh instead of our God, since he's a better God, he's stronger. But it's because of nationalism. It's because they had a national God.

It's like you don't turn against your own country, you don't turn against your own national God either. You might find that your country is weaker than another country, but you still are loyal to your country. And so also, if their God is weaker than Yahweh, well, they acknowledged it.

But they still remained worshippers of Dagon, who is obviously inferior. It says, verse 6, Why then do you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts, when he did mighty things among them? Did they not let the people go, that they might depart? Now therefore make a new cart, take two milk cows, which have never been yoked, and hitch the cows to the cart, and take their calves home away from them. Then take the ark of the Lord, and set it on the cart, and put the articles of gold that you are returning to him in it, as a trespass offering, in a chest by its side, and then send it away, and let it go.

And watch, if it goes up the road to its own territory, to Beth Shemesh, then he has done us this great evil. But if not, then we shall know that it is not his hand that struck us, it was by chance that it happened to us. Now, they weren't 100% sure this was Yahweh's doing, but it was the best theory.

But they thought, well, maybe it could be chance, and we'll find out, easy enough. We'll put the ark on a cart, we'll make a new cart, so we'll honor it by not giving it an early model, we'll give it a new shiny model right out of the showroom, and we'll hitch it to two cows that have never been under the yoke. That is, they don't know how to pull a cart, they've never been trained to pull anything.

These are cows, they're milk cows, they've never pulled anything, they've never been used that way, we'll put them under a yoke, see if they know what to do. Also, make it

harder for them, take their calves away from them and put them in the barn. Well, the cows naturally are going to want to go to where their calves are, they're going to hear their calves crying and want to go to them.

But it says, if they don't go to their calves, if they pull the cart, something they've never been taught to, if they go to Beth Shemesh, where the Israelites are, then it'll be obvious, it's a sign to us that this was God's doing. If they do what cows would normally be expected to do, and they get all confused under the yoke and try to get back to their calves, then we'll know that God's not been a part of this, it was just by chance. Now, obviously the idea that it was by chance doesn't seem very reasonable, but people who are holding out some last vestige of hope that God isn't real, often will attribute to chance very divine powers, including the creation of life from nothing, the evolution of humanity from lower beings.

What's the likelihood of that? Not very great, but we've got to go with it, otherwise we have to acknowledge Yahweh. If we're not going to acknowledge God, we've got to give chance the credit for things. And they're leaving that out, they were leaving themselves out that way.

However, if it was Yahweh, they didn't want to be in any more trouble with him than they already were, so they wanted to get the ark out of their land. It wasn't really something that would benefit them to keep, except as a status symbol of having conquered Yahweh, and it's very clear that they had not conquered him, he had conquered them. And the Israelites had seen the ark as sort of an object of power instead of Yahweh, and it did not show itself powerful to them, it did not deliver them from the Philistines.

But once it was taken captive, God, because he was associated with the ark, that is, it was the symbol of his presence, and therefore his reputation was on the line, he did act through the ark to obviously humiliate Dagon and his worshippers, and to bring painful plagues on the people. So the ark of God, which seemed not to do any good for the Israelites, probably had ceased to intimidate the Philistines. When the Philistines first saw that the Israelites had brought the ark into the camp, they were terrified and said, oh, this has never happened to us, we're in trouble now, fight hard.

But they found it reasonably easy to capture the ark, and it made God seem pretty weak after all, but I think they found the ark to be a little too hot to handle, so they had to try to get rid of it, and so they put it on a cart. Now, carrying the ark on a cart is not the right way to do things. The ark, it was commanded in Scripture, should be carried on the shoulders of priests through poles that were put through rings on its side, and four priests were supposed to carry the ark on their shoulders.

But the Philistines were not, of course, apprised of the law. They carried things like most people did in carts, and so they put it on a cart, and God allowed it. God accommodated them.

This was going to be a sign to them that this was really Him, because the cart thing was going to work, and it was going to take the ark home. However, at a later date, when David wanted to move the ark to Jerusalem, he put it on a cart, and that proved to be a disaster, because he didn't do what God said about transferring the ark, and a man died in that event. And later, when David successfully brought the ark, it was carried on the priest's shoulder.

But it seems like the mistake David made the first time is following the Philistines' lead by putting the ark on a cart. That worked well for the Philistines. Maybe we should do it that way.

Well, God accommodated the Philistines to get the ark out of Philistia and into the hands of the Israelites again, but He didn't allow His people to do that, because they had the word of the Lord. They should know better. Now, verse 10, Then the men did so.

They took two milk cows, and hitched them to the cart, and shut up their calves at home. And they set the ark of the Lord on the cart, and the chest with the gold rats, and images of their tumors. I wonder if the goldsmiths who made those had ever had an assignment like that.

We'd like five tumors, please. Gold images of tumors. Wouldn't that just be like a lump of gold? Someone thought tumors, does it have distinctive characteristics? Rats! Now, that would take an artisan more, but I could probably make an image of a tumor out of clay or something like that easy enough.

Tumors are not very detailed pieces of models for the sculptor to copy. But they took these gold rats and gold images of the tumors. Then the cows headed straight for the road to Beth Shemesh, and went along the highway lowing as they went.

That is, they were moaning probably for their babies, but not going to them. God was dragging them the right direction, and they were missing their babies. And they did not turn aside to the right or the left, and the lords of the Philistines went after them to the border of Beth Shemesh.

They actually followed them to see them as far as they could to see if they were going where they thought they were. Now the people of Beth Shemesh were reaping in the wheat harvest in the valley, and they lifted their eyes and saw the ark and rejoiced to see it. Then the ark came to the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh, and stood there.

A large stone was there, so they split the wood cart and offered the cows as a burnt offering to the Lord. The Levites took down the ark of the Lord and the chest that was on it, or with it, in which were the articles of gold, and put them on the large stone. Then the men of Beth Shemesh offered burnt offerings and made sacrifices the same day to Yahweh.

So when the five lords of the Philistines had seen it, they returned to Ekron that same day. Now these are the gold tumors which the Philistines returned as a trespass offering to the Lord, one for Ashdod, one for Gaza, one for Ashkelon, one for Gath, one for Ekron. And the gold wraps, according to the number of the cities of the Philistines belonging to the five lords, both fortified cities and country villages, even as far as the large stone of Abel on which they set the ark of the Lord.

Which stone remains to this day in the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh? Then he, God, apparently struck the men of Beth Shemesh because they had looked into the ark of the Lord. He struck 50,070 men of the people that lamented because the Lord had struck the people with a great slaughter. This number seems excessive.

In fact, it almost seems rather cruel and unusual for God even to kill people for looking in the ark. But just because God brings the ark back doesn't mean that they can ignore his instructions. No common person was supposed to ever touch the ark.

To look in the ark, presumably they had to remove the mercy seat, which was the lid of it, and look inside of it. That was something that was a no-no. They just did it out of morbid curiosity.

They weren't allowed to touch it, but they did anyway. Remember, Uzzah had touched the ark on one occasion, stabilized it, and he was struck dead. And so, just because God had favored the ark by bringing it back to the land doesn't mean people could just be careless about it.

And so, looking in brought judgment on them. Now, as far as the number 50,070 men, there have been suggestions by commentators that the number here is somehow mistaken, that the Hebrew has been misread. A lot of times, in the historical books especially, the text has been, as they say, corrupted.

What it means is that there are parts of the text that are hard to read, or where different manuscripts read differently from each other, and there's evidence that someone in copying the original has made some kind of mistake or another in making the copy. This is true with a number of smaller details in the story. And one of the places that they say is the easiest place to make such mistakes in copying is with certain numbers, because in the Hebrew text, numbers and letters are used interchangeably.

That is, when you want to give a numeric figure, you have to use characters of the alphabet for that. The same is true in Latin, as we know, when we see Roman numerals. Roman numerals are what? They're letters of the alphabet.

L, X, V, C. But they also serve as numbers. So, the Latins did the same thing as the Hebrews, and they used letters of their alphabet for numbers. Now, the problem is that in many cases, certain numbers or certain letters of the Hebrew alphabet are very

similar to each other.

They look similar to each other, like our capital Q and capital O look very similar to each other. Or a capital C and a capital G might easily be written in such a way that they look very similar. And sometimes the letters of the alphabet are misread by a copyist, and they'll write down the wrong one.

And then his copy becomes the standard from which other copies are made, and it perpetuates the mistake. Now, this doesn't happen anywhere near as much as some people think it does when they speculate about how much the text of the Bible has been corrupted through making copy after copy after copy. But it has happened some.

I mean, it's demonstrable. You can see passages where it clearly has been done. Or two parallel passages read something different from each other, but similar enough that you can see where the mistake was made.

And so, some scholars think that maybe this was misread. Maybe it wasn't 50,000. Maybe the number was somewhat different.

Some people might think it was 50 liters or 50 clans or something like that rather than 50,000. The word thousand sometimes has been mistaken and interpreted, read differently. So, I don't know if it was 50,000 and 70 men or if some of the commentators are correct that this could be textual corruption and the number would be a smaller number than that.

Though, it's not impossible that with the ark in their town that everyone in town, possibly 50,000 people or more, would have gotten in line to file by and look inside of it just out of curiosity. I mean, it'd be an item of interest like the circus coming to town. Everyone who's doing their agrarian life is pretty dull.

Not much happens out of the ordinary. And here's the ark of the covenant. It shows up in their town supernaturally from the captivity of the Philistines.

Everyone might want to see it. So, they might literally have taken the lid off and had everybody file by and look at it who wanted to see it. And it could have been 50,000 or more.

So, if so, that would probably have seriously affected the population of the town. Verse 20, And the men of Beth Shemesh said, Who is able to stand before this holy Yahweh God? And to whom shall it go up from us? So they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kirjath-Jerim, saying, The Philistines have brought back the ark of the Lord. Come down and take it up with you.

So, no doubt, priests came. And it says, The men of Kirjath-Jerim came and took the ark of the Lord and brought it into the house of Abinadab on the hill and consecrated Eliezer

his son to keep the ark of the Lord. Now, the ark of the Lord stayed there for 20 years.

And it wasn't until David's time that it was moved. It might have been moved during Saul's time, but it wasn't moved to Jerusalem until David's time. So it was that the ark remained in Kirjath-Jerim a long time.

It was there 20 years. And all the house of Israel lamented after Yahweh. That is, they seemed to finally repent.

God had already begun to speak through a prophet, but that had not yet resulted in national repentance. And that was why they did not do well in battle against the Philistines. They obviously were not turning to the Lord.

They were turning to religious relics to trust in, to give them power. When God failed, and instead of repenting, but now they were repenting. Now they were mourning and lamenting after the Lord.

And Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying, If you return to Yahweh with all your hearts, then put away the foreign gods and the Asherites from among you, and prepare your hearts for the Lord, and serve Him only, and He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines. So you see, they had other gods among them too. The ark was treated almost like another god, Yahweh.

He was associated with the ark in their minds. And they had idols of other gods too. Yahweh was their god of choice on this particular occasion.

And that is why they failed. Now this claim that people needed to put away the gods that were among them is found many times. Joshua said the same thing to the people of Israel.

Jacob even said it to his household. When he was going to Bethel to offer to the Lord, he told his household to put away the foreign gods among them. It seemed like foreign gods kept creeping into Israel's religious life like cockroaches into the kitchen.

They just seemed to always have these foreign gods encroaching. And from time to time they had to put them away again. Clean house again.

Get the exterminator. And so, if you serve Yahweh only, then He will deliver you from the Philistines. Apparently the 40 years of oppression from the Philistines had been 40 years of religious compromise on their part.

And they had not served Yahweh only during that time. So the children of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtoreths and served Yahweh only. And Samuel said, Gather all Israel to Mizpah and I will pray to Yahweh for you.

So they gathered together at Mizpah, drew water and poured it out before Yahweh. And

they fasted that day and said there, We have sinned against Yahweh. And Samuel judged the children of Israel at Mizpah.

Now, when the Philistines heard that the children of Israel had gathered together at Mizpah, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the children of Israel heard of it, they were afraid of the Philistines. So the children of Israel said to Samuel, Do not cease to cry out to the Lord, our God, for us, that He may save us from the hand of the Philistines.

So they had re-consecrated themselves to the Lord there at Mizpah. And apparently a huge assembly. And the Philistines, who were technically their overlords, didn't like the looks of such a huge assembly.

It probably looked like a military mobilization to them. Hard to say what the Philistines thought of it, but they just didn't like the idea of the Israelites coming together in such large numbers. That's the kind of thing that could lead to a revolt.

And so the Philistines in this time made the attack. And so the people decided to trust in Yahweh this time, instead of the ark. And Samuel took a suckling lamb and offered it as a whole burnt offering to the Lord.

Then Samuel cried out to Yahweh for Israel, and Yahweh answered him. Now as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel. But Yahweh thundered with a loud thunder upon the Philistines that day, and so confused them that they were overcome before Israel.

And the men of Israel went out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines and drove them back as far as below Beth-char. Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shem, and called its name Ebenezer, saying, Thus far Yahweh has helped us. Ebenezer means the stone of help in Hebrew.

So the word help is the key word here. Now when it says the Lord thundered upon the Philistines and confused them, and they ran away, it might make them sound a little wimpy to us. I mean, what's an army running away from a thunderstorm for? There might have been lightning bolts too.

Thunder usually follows lightning. And so it may be that God is actually striking Philistines with lightning in an electrical storm. And, you know, the lightning killing members of their army, as well as the continual thunderings, they may have just seen it as a portent that God was against them.

After all, they had lately seen what happened to them when the ark was in their captivity. And the Philistines obviously knew that Yahweh was superior to their God, and so when they see a sign like this of a storm coming against them and probably striking down some of them, maybe a lot of them, they just fled, and the Israelites pursued them

and finished it up. So that God did deliver Israel for the first time from the Philistines through Samuel's leadership.

And he set up a stone, not as a memorial to himself, but as a memorial to God who had helped them. And so the Philistines were subdued, and they did not come anymore into the territory of Israel. And the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines in all the days of Samuel.

Now when it says they didn't come anymore into the territory of Israel, well, they did kind of. I mean, there was David and Goliath, that was a Philistine thing. Saul fought against the Philistines and was killed by them in the land of Israel.

So what we have to understand, we see this kind of phrase in the Bible a number of times. Not anymore. It doesn't mean never, ever.

It means not anymore for our time period that's under consideration, here it says in the days of Samuel. But even so, there were wars. There was a period of time that the Philistines didn't come anymore.

But they came later on. Remember back when in the book of Judges the people called out to God, and they said, I'm not going to deliver you anymore. But then he changed his mind because he felt sorry for them.

So a lot of times the Bible uses the term not anymore. But it's not really absolute and universal and eternal. It's just speaking of not anymore for the time being is really what it means.

And that's important because there are times in the prophets that God is saying he won't do something anymore. And people sometimes take it wrongly that this is like a permanent eternal decree. And it's not any more than this is.

It's just a manner of speaking. Okay, verse 14. Then the cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron to Gath.

And Israel recovered its territory from the hands of the Philistines. Also there was peace between Israel and the Amorites. So they didn't have wars going on in that direction.

So Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. He went from year to year on a circuit to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah and judged Israel in all those places. But he always returned to Ramon, for his home was there.

There he judged Israel, and there he built an altar to the Lord. As I said in our introduction that these towns that he made his circuit to, Bethel, Gilgal, Mizpah, and Ramon, three of those four we later find there are communities of prophets there that Samuel is overseeing. Apparently he planted in each of these locations a permanent

spiritual group.

He couldn't be there all the time. He had to make the itinerary and judge in those places. But these prophets were local there.

Now we don't read of such a group in Mizpah. That's the only place of these four that it doesn't mention. But we do know that there were groups of prophets in other places besides this too because we read in 2 Kings of such a group in Jericho, which isn't mentioned here.

And so there were these companies of prophets, these communities of prophets who were gathering for fellowship. It's probable that these are the people that we'd consider to be the true remnant of Israel who were filled with the Spirit of God or at least in touch with the Spirit of God. They may not have been filled with the Spirit as we speak of it in New Testament times, but they would receive gifting from the Holy Spirit.

And they gathered together for apparently mutual ministry and encouragement. We don't know exactly what they did day by day as a group of prophets, but they provided some kind of ministry, no doubt. And Samuel built an altar to the Lord in Ramah.

Now why not Shiloh? It seems clear that now Shiloh was a thing of the past. The priesthood in Shiloh was dead and the ark had been taken for a while. It was back now, but it wasn't taken to Shiloh.

Why not? It had been taken out of Shiloh before the battle. Why didn't they just take it back to Shiloh? Why didn't they put it in this guy's house? Obviously Shiloh wasn't there anymore. And therefore at the same time that that war occurred, it is generally believed that Shiloh was burned down and destroyed.

That being so, though Samuel had been raised in Shiloh at the tabernacle, he wasn't living there now. He could live where he wished and he went back to his parents' town. And he built an altar there, which apparently was okay.

I mean, when there's no tabernacle, apparently God allows for innovation. God allows his prophet to do so and probably revealed to Samuel that that would be okay as an alternative. So that's what Samuel did.

He had a home base, but he traveled a lot. And that might account for what we read about in the beginning of chapter 8. It came to pass when Samuel was old that he made his sons judges over Israel. The name of his firstborn was Joel, the name of his second Abijah, and they were judges in Beersheba.

But his sons did not walk in his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain, took bribes and perverted justice. Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah and said to him, Look, you're old and your sons do not walk in your

ways.

Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations. Now Samuel appointed his sons to be judges. This does not appear to have been led by the Lord.

So prophets aren't always getting all their decisions from God. I mean, God speaks to them when he has something to say. The rest of the time they have to act like anybody else, follow the law and act according to their best judgment.

When God reveals something to them, it's always true and reliable, but he's not revealing things to them every day necessarily. And he had to make many decisions, including family decisions apparently, without prophetic insight. Certainly the appointment of his sons as judges couldn't have been God's guidance.

They were corrupt. And yet, so were Eli's sons. But Eli and his house were punished because of the corruption of his sons.

Samuel was not punished for the corruption of his sons. That is, God didn't bring any judgment on Samuel as he did upon Eli and his house. Why? They both had corrupt sons.

There might be a couple of reasons, and I don't know that either of these are them, but I've given it a lot of thought over the years. One is that, of course, Eli's sons were profaning the sanctuary. They were profaning the worship of God.

Samuel's sons were doing something very bad. They were corrupting the government. They were not serving as priests but as judges, and they were taking bribes and doing the things that corrupt governments do.

They were corrupt government officials, where Eli's sons were corrupt priests. And judgment must begin at the house of God. God is more jealous over the worship of himself than he is over the fortunes of a particular political system, though he is certainly against all corruption in government or anywhere else.

Certainly, corruption of the tabernacle, corruption of the religious system, of the worship of God, is more heinous, more a sacrilege, than mere corruption in other areas more, we might say, more secular. And therefore, the judgment on Eli may have been more severe because of that, because it was actually the worship of God that was profaned by his sons. Another thing may also be that Samuel, because of his ministry and traveling as much as he did, wasn't home all the time, raising his sons.

Eli was settled, raised his sons there at Shiloh. They were raised right under his eye, under his nose. He apparently had been a negligent father, despite the fact of having the opportunity to be otherwise.

And therefore, there is more responsibility. His sons became vile and he didn't restrain

them. Samuel's sons may have become vile.

Samuel may not have been able to restrain them because he was over in Mizpah or Bethel half the time. His home was in Ramah, but he made an itinerary. And therefore, it's unlikely that his sons traveled with him when they were little.

Probably not. So, as a man who was forced by his ministry to be away from home a certain percentage of the time, he had less, I would say, probably, ability to oversee all the stages of his children's growth and less consistently to discipline and train them, perhaps through circumstances beyond his own control, and God didn't hold it against him. I don't know if either of those things are the answer, but it is notable that the book of Samuel mentions both Eli's sons and Samuel's sons as not being as good and honest as their fathers are.

And yet, one is judged severely and the other does not seem to suffer any judgment for it. So, his sons took bribes and perverted justice. Of course, what that means is that if people came with a complaint to the court and they were the judges on the bench, that they could rule in favor of whoever bribed them and that's what happened.

Unfortunately, they were not honest men. So, the elders of Israel are unhappy about this. Now, I don't understand why Samuel appointed his sons to be judges.

It's clear that Samuel was a judge because it says so in the three verses at the end of chapter 7. He judged Israel. Eli was a judge too. So, we have to say that Eli and Samuel were the last two legitimate judges.

His sons were appointed as judges, but they didn't continue in office very long. It was an appointment Samuel made, but it's the only known case of any of the judges appointing his sons to be judges. It's something that Gideon would not do because he believed that was too much looking like a hereditary dynasty and Israel was not supposed to have that.

And so, Samuel, though a great man like Moses, could make some mistakes. And I think it was probably a mistake of his to put his sons in to judge Israel. But it's probably because he was traveling as much as he was, and there was a large load that he probably deputized them to judge under his authority.

But apparently he didn't watch them closely enough. And the people who were actually being judged by his sons were more aware of their corruption probably than he was. And so, they came to him and informed him about it.

And they said, look, you're old, your sons do not walk in your ways. The idea is you're old, you'll probably die before very long, and then we'll be stuck with your sons who are lousy leaders. Better to have no one there than them, but we actually have a better idea.

Why don't you just make us a king to judge us like all the nations? If we're already going the way of hereditary leadership, and your sons are in the position to succeed you when you die, why not just go all the way and make it a king? That's what the other nations have. And apparently they felt a little embarrassed to be without a king. I mean, they had a king.

Israel had a king. God. God was their king.

They were the kingdom of God. That was what was understood up until this time. But you can't see God.

And in these ancient societies, you know, there's a lot of national pride put in the royal family and the palace and the pomp and the ceremony. I mean, look at England today. What does the royal family contribute? Well, someone told me the other day, well, they do some charities and things like that.

Well, any rich person could do that. What do they do as royalty? What do they do for the nation as royalty? They're national symbols. That's what they are.

They're national symbols. They're celebrities. And England seems to be proud of them.

From time to time, there's discussion in Great Britain about the possibility of just discontinuing the whole thing with the royal family. I mean, they suck an awful lot of money out of the economy and they don't really do anything except encourage national pride. Now, we don't understand that because we were raised and born in a country that doesn't have kings.

Never had a king in this country. Ever. There's never been a king on this continent that we know of.

At least this part of the continent we live on, North America, in the United States. So we don't relate to that. But apparently, in a land of kingdoms, people put a lot of pride in their royal family.

And, you know, the way the palace is, the way that the king is dressed and he parades himself and so forth, just gives people a sense of pride in their country. Israel didn't have that. They didn't even have the tabernacle to be the palace of their god at this time.

The tabernacle didn't exist. The Ark was in the private home. There was an altar set up in Ramah.

But there really wasn't any of the pomp and the ceremony that goes along with royalty. And they kind of thought, you know, why can't we be like the other nations and have all that? All that to make us feel important and feel proud of our country. Well, obviously people wouldn't talk that way if they really appreciated God.

I mean, I myself would much rather have God as my king than some visible monarch. But that's because, I guess, because God is important to me. Because I know God.

But when people don't know God, having this invisible being out there that you claim is your king, but no one around can see and your enemies, your surrounding nations don't know he's there. Or they may, but they can't see him. They just want some kind of visible symbol of authority like everyone else had.

And what really could be wrong with that? It's a modest proposal, is it not? You know, let's just be like everybody else. Is that asking so much? Well, it is entirely wrongheaded, because God never intended for Israel to be like everybody else. That's the point.

That's the very point of their existence. That they would be a peculiar people, a special nation, separated from all the peoples unto God, having him as their king as no other nation had the privilege of doing. They were basically casting off that privilege and renouncing God as their king.

And that's exactly what God said they were doing when he spoke to Samuel about it. Now, Samuel, he knew this was not the right way to go. And it says, The thing displeased Samuel when they said, Give us a king to judge us.

So Samuel prayed to Yahweh, and Yahweh said to Samuel, Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them. Now, God is reasonably calm about all this. He's not lashing out, he's not sending lightning bolts, but he does say, they've rejected me.

That's what it is. In choosing a king, they have rejected God. Now, in the book of Judges we read repeatedly, there was no king in Israel in those days, meaning no earthly king.

Of course there was God. Or maybe it's even suggesting God wasn't even their king in their thinking. They were not thinking of having a king.

They did what was right in their own eyes. They weren't thinking of God or anyone else as a king. They just did their own things.

But they did have a king. And that was God. And they had a lawgiver, and they had obligation to their king.

But they didn't want any of that anymore. And God saw that that was a rejection of Him. Not of Samuel.

He said, Samuel, don't take it personally. It's not you. It's me.

God said, according to all the works which they have done since the day I brought them up out of Egypt, even to this day, with which they have forsaken me and served other gods, so they are doing to you also. Now, therefore, heed their voice. However, you shall

solemnly forewarn them and show them all the behavior of the king who will reign over them.

So, if they insist on giving a king, give them what they want. But let them know what it's going to be like. It's not going to be an improvement in their lives.

So Samuel told all the words of the Lord to the people who asked for a king. And he said, this will be the behavior of the king who will reign over you. He will take your sons and appoint them for his own chariots and to be his horsemen.

And some will run before his chariots. This is probably just the kind of stuff the people were hoping for. Oh, good.

We're going to have these royal parades and everything. Our sons dressed up in fancy uniforms running before the chariots. He will appoint captains over his thousands and captains over his fifties.

See, there was no standing army in Israel during the time of the judges. There were just ad hoc mobilizations of whoever would respond to the trumpet blast. But he's going to set up a standing army.

There's going to be a military. Your sons are going to be drafted. And he'll set some to plow his ground and reap his harvest and some to make his weapons of war and equipment for his chariots.

He will take your daughters to be perfumers, cooks, and bakers. He will take the best of your fields, your vineyards, and your olive groves and give them to his servants. That's sort of like what the government does.

They take the wage earners' money and gives it to the state workers and government officials, the servants of the king. And this was something that was considered to be undesirable. We take it for granted that that happens.

And it says he will take a tenth of your grain and your vintage, that is your grapes, and give it to his officers and servants. And he will take your men's servants and your maids' servants and your finest young men and your donkeys and put them to work, to his work. He will take a tenth of your sheep and you will be his servants.

And you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves. And Yahweh will not hear you in that day. So he says, man, he's going to tax you heavily, 10%.

God says if that doesn't put him off, nothing will. 10% taxation. Well, that is really obviously very little taxation compared to what we have become accustomed to because our kings take a much larger percent to give to their servants.

And they add more servants all the time, more government agencies, more federal employees, and they just have to soak it out of the public. And we, like Israel, they didn't mind the abuse, just give us a king. Apparently, we don't mind it either.

And we have become accustomed to far worse than that which God was describing to them as something that should be considered intolerable. I mean, they were already giving 10% to God, at least required to, in the tithe. But now the king is going to take a tithe also for himself, 20%, 10% for government work.

Now, it's interesting that it would be considered that government work should cost 10% of the gross national product. You know, maintaining the armies, maintaining the capital, the government services, should take 10%, is what is suggested here. So, any government that can't operate on 10% of the national product is somehow wasting and providing more than the government is supposed to provide, apparently.

Verse 19, though they heard it, they didn't listen. Nevertheless, the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel. And they said, No, but we will have a king over us.

And we will also be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles. And Samuel heard all the words of the people, and he repeated them in the hearing of the Lord. Like he reported back to God, and here's what they said.

So the Lord said to Samuel, Heed their voice, make them a king. And Samuel said to the men of Israel, Every man go to his city. So, they were going to leave it in Samuel's hands to find and establish a king among them.

And he says, You just go on home, and I'll take care of this. And so, in the following chapters, we find how he finds the first king and puts him in office. In the book of Hosea, chapter 13, Hosea 13, 9-11.

God says, O Israel, you are destroyed, but your help is from me. I will be your king. Where is any other that he may save you in all your cities? And your judges, of whom you said, Give me a king and princes.

I gave you a king in my anger, and I took him away in my wrath. Now, this is apparently a reference to Saul. God gave them Saul, according to their request, but he did so angrily.

God is not showing a lot of anger in his communication with Samuel. He's not losing his temper, but he later says, I gave you the king you wanted, but I was angry about it. This is not something that pleased me.

And I took him away in my wrath, a reference to Saul's death. I gave you a king, I was angry about it, and I was still angry when I took him away. But, there would be another king that God would give them, who would be a man after his own heart.

And he would give them not out of wrath. In other words, God would adjust to the new situation. Which is interesting, because God is not the one who has to adjust to us.

We're supposed to adjust to him. But, they wanted a king, and so he could work with that. He was offended, because it was a rejection of him.

But, he could still be their king, even through this rebellious change, by giving them a king who would follow him. And that's what he would eventually do. But, first he gave them a king to punish them.

And that was Saul. And he didn't turn out to be a good one, as we shall see. And he becomes prominent, starting in the next chapter.