

Quest for a King

Craig Tucker tackles the daunting task of preaching through 1 Samuel



Background and Purpose

1 Samuel

The Old Testament books of 1 and 2 Samuel are best understood together. The story moves from Israel worshipping God in a tent at Shiloh, to the temple promised and all but built; from Israel virtually a vassal of the Philistines and under threat from other nations, to the stability of the Davidic Empire; and from the unstable rule of the Judges,

to the monarchy and the promise of an everlasting house. In short, the two books taken together move from apostasy,

to the golden era of the Old Testament.

Most probably written during the Exile, 1 and 2 Samuel ask the question: "what went wrong?" There are seemingly both favourable and unfavourable reflections on kingship intertwined (e.g. 1 Samuel 8 anti-monarchy, 1 Samuel 9 pro-monarchy). However, the institution of Israel's monarchy is not judged as either good or bad. The real issue is Yahweh's kingship. 1 & 2 Samuel are book-ended by Hannah's song (1 Sam 2) and David's song (2 Sam 22), and the theme of both is Yahweh's kingship. Monarchy is OK, provided the monarch understands that Yahweh is the real king. This is the obvious lesson in both Saul's failure and David's rise. The exilic writer is pointing out that what has gone wrong is that Israel has always been a nation that has refused to submit to Yahweh's kingship. The big application for us today is the importance of obedience.

1 Samuel

The key character of the book is not Saul or even the favourably presented David, but Samuel. Samuel's function is to highlight the central theme of Yahweh's kingship. As Yahweh's representative, he is the king maker and the king breaker. As prophet, his word is the king's word - to disobey Samuel is to refuse Yahweh's rule.

The structure highlights Samuel's central role. The book begins with Samuel's birth, and even though he dies half way through the book, Samuel still gets the last word, making a dramatic curtain call just before the end (Chap 29). The book closes with the fulfilment of his prophecy - Saul's death in chapter 31.

A Potted Analysis of 1 Samuel

1 Samuel 1-3

Hannah's song introduces 1 Samuel (as David's lament for Saul begins 2 Samuel). The theme of her song is that behind the rise and fall of history (and kings) is God's sovereign hand. God is king. Samuel is the answer both to Hannah's tears, and to Israel's need. He is the central figure of the narrative.

1 Samuel 4-8

The ark narrative shows that Israel do not need any king except Yahweh. He (his ark) can single-handedly keep them safe from the Philistines. This highlights the foolishness of their request for a (human) king to lead them into battle. Yahweh's anger is not with the request for a (human) king. It's the type of king that's the problem. They want a human king to take Yahweh's place, whereas the only acceptable king is one who acknowledges Yahweh's sovereignty.

1 Samuel 9-15

The Rise and Fall of King Saul. Saul has everything going for him as king, and is presented favourably by the narrator. (He is not doomed from the start). This emphasises that his rejection is due solely to disobedience.

1 Samuel 16-31

This section contrasts the rise of David against the decline of Saul, for the most part in alternating scenes. David's rise parallel Saul's in many respects (both unassuming handsome young boys, both clearly chosen by God, both win big battles) emphasising that the distinctive ingredient is obedience.

The prolonged agony between Saul's rejection and his death (15 chapters) serves to parade before the reader in great detail the desperate tragedy of Saul's demise, culminating in the witch of Endor scene (1 Sam 29), and his death scene which closes the book. Perhaps from the perspective of the exile, the demise and extinction of "the Lord's anointed one" would be especially poignant.

As far as David is concerned, the commentaries point out that this section is an "apologetic" for David's rise to power. There is also some dramatic tension: Will David fail too? (Sometimes he looks quite wobbly!) The other interesting thing is the writer's interest in describing how various people respond to David (Jonathan, Saul, Nabal, Abigail, etc.).

They either acknowledge his God-ordained kingship and bow the knee, or they reject him (not unlike the Gospels' presentation of Jesus.)

There is also a certain now-and-not-yet tension in this section: David's kingship is not yet consummated, and yet his kingdom's rule is already breaking in. He has already begun to do the things a king would do: he defeats Israel's enemies, dispenses justice, and people already acknowledge his kingship.

Preaching on 1 Samuel

My break-up for preaching through 1 Samuel was as follows:

1. *A Saviour is Born (1-3)*
2. *God is King, whether you like it or not (4-6)*
3. *A King Like the Nations (7-8)*
4. *Saul: A Case Study in Failure (9-15)*
5. *The King who Saved his People (17)*
6. *The King is Dead - Long Live the King! (18-31)*

This series was preached from November to December 1990, to the Marayong morning congregation. Quite a few had no OT background at all. Those who did gave me the impression they had only seen the OT used as a resource for doing character studies.

The major aim of the series was to use 1 Samuel as a guide for reading the OT, with an emphasis on seeing how the OT points to Jesus. Each week the sermon was structured around the same three questions which were shamelessly adapted from Bryson Smith's talks on Judges at KYLC:

1. **What is this passage about?**
2. **What does it show us about the way God does things?**
3. **What does it show us about the way God does things through Jesus?**

After a couple of weeks, I started asking who could remember the three questions. Minties were a good reinforcement. I found the three question framework a bit restrictive, but the repetition was probably worth it. A couple of the Home Groups have since studied other OT books using these three questions as the framework for each study.

As you might expect from a book with God's kingship as its major theme, the big application is the importance of obedience. I wanted people to see that God wasn't just a nice cuddly friend, but someone who commands repentance and obedience in our lives. We must submit to his rule, not just when it suits us.

Commentaries/Articles

R P Gordon's 1 & 2 Samuel commentary (Paternoster) is a good verse by verse commentary in the style of the Tyndale commentaries. Gordon has an excellent treatment of the structure of 1 & 2 Samuel and its relationship with the New Testament (David and Christ, Davidic covenant).

"Covenants Made, Covenants Broken". While the commentary is excellent, the author's name is not very memorable. More a "reader" than a verse by verse commentary, it deals with large chunks at a time (a chapter or two), and is good on the structure and flow. The book brings out some interesting links to the NT (e.g. the boy Samuel in 1 Sam 1- 3, and the boy Jesus in Luke 2). Currently out of print.

Other commentaries were not very helpful, Bruegeman in "Interpretation" series and Kilen in "Word" series were especially disappointing. I didn't look at Hertzberg in the Anchor Bible series, but I've heard that it could be helpful.

SERMON OUTLINES

Sermon 1 A Saviour is Born 1 Samuel 1-3

Key:

Our God is a saving God. Even though people reject him, he sends saviours to bring them back.

Introduction

One-way street illustration - if you're reading the Old Testament and it's not leading you towards Jesus, you're heading the wrong way in a one way street.

1. What is this passage about?

The book opens to the sound of a woman's tears - Hannah is barren. The period of the Judges has concluded, Israel is also in great need: as a nation they've turned their back on God; Israel's worship is corrupt and leadership pitiful - Israel is at an all time low...But the birth of Samuel is God's answer to both Hannah's tears and Israel's need.

2. What does it show us about the way God does things?

God saves his people by sending saviours. God is the great reverser of circumstances. (Hannah's song is an intro to the book. The theme of Hannah's song: "The Lord lifts up, and the Lord casts down" - that God turns the table when you least expect it - is the theme of the whole book).

3. What does it show us about the way God does things through Jesus?

The Great Rescuer: Luke 2: Luke dresses Mary up to look like Hannah, and Jesus up to look like little Samuel. She sings a song just like Hannah's of the God who lifts up and casts down. Luke is pointing out that the rescuer has arrived - not just to save Israel, but to rescue a whole world that has turned its back on God.

The Great Reversal: God Through Jesus is the great reverser. The gospel is the greatest reversal of all. We who were lost and dead, are now found and alive. If Hannah thought she had something to sing about, because God had reversed her situation, how much more do we?

Sermon 2 **God is King, whether you like it or not** **1 Samuel 4-6**

Key:

You can't use God. God demands our obedience - not the other way round. You can't demand that God does what you want.

Introduction

Raiders of the Lost Ark ... the real story of how the ark was lost...

1. What is this passage about?

God on a leash: (1 Sam 4). Rather than repent and ask for God's help against the Philistines, Israel start giving God orders. They wheel the ark out onto the battle field like a Rotweiler on a leash, that will attack on their command.... But the result is disastrous: their leaders killed, the army massacred and the ark (the sign of God's kingship) is captured.

Things that go bump in the night: (1 Sam 5:1-5). The Philistines have made the same mistake as Israel. They think that because they have the ark, they have Israel's God on a leash. But God quickly shows he's more powerful than Dagon.

Rats and Lumps: (1 Sam 5:6-12).

The Philistines pass the ark like it's a hot potato, and in doing so they infect every Philistine city. It's a ridiculous picture of the ark riding home victorious, having KO'd Dagon and humiliated the Philistines, with a wagon full of gold.

When God comes to visit: (1 Sam 6:19-21).

The Israelites too are brought to their knees by God. They must learn that God won't be insulted by anyone.

2. What does it show us about the way God does things?

God is powerful. Single-handedly, God through the ark brought the Philistines to their knees. The reason Israel was defeated, was not because God is weak - he defeats his enemies with laughable ease.

3. What does it show us about the way God does things through Jesus?

The ark was a model, pointing forward to the day when God himself would stand among his people in person. Jesus is powerful. If you thought the ark was scary...

Jesus doesn't take orders, he gives them "Come follow me ..."

Sermon 3 **A King Like the Nations** **1 Samuel 8**

Key:

Sin is when we are so deceived that we pass up the good that God wants to give us, to take hold of something we foolishly think will be better.

Introduction

My experience as a young Christian was that it was great to have Jesus as my Saviour, but having him as my Lord was a bitter pill I had to swallow as part of the deal.

1. What is this passage about?

A reflection of God: they want a king to take God's place

A reflection of their role as God's special people.

A foolish option: The Israelites think they'll be better off, but this type of king will in fact be a tyrant who will bring them nothing but misery.

2. What does it show us about the way God does things?

It shows us how stupid it is to put something or someone else in God's place. That's the way sin always works - we think that there's something better than what God intended for us.

3. What does it show us about the way God does things through Jesus?

Two rulers: Sin and Jesus. One is a tyrant who will only bring us misery, one is a loving king who brings us freedom. Despite what the world tells us, disobeying God brings misery, obeying God brings freedom.

Street directory illustration: What about our attitude to God's word. When I get lost and my street directory tells me I'm wrong, I don't feel inhibited or restricted by its instructions because they are leading me where I want to go. (The other interesting point in this passage that came up in question time was: "God sometimes allows us to take wrong options, and experience the consequences")

Sermon 4
Saul: A Case Study in Failure
1 Samuel 9-15

Key:

Saul is a case study in failure: When the pressure is on, he chooses to disobey God. God doesn't call us to just obey him when it's convenient, or the going is easy - the test of our discipleship is whether we obey when the going gets tough.

1. What is this passage about?

There is an ambiguity about Saul through these chapters. He seems to have everything going for him, and yet little negatives keep popping up.

The man who went looking for donkeys and found a kingdom: (1 Sam 9). Saul doesn't appear to be the type of king Samuel predicted. This isn't a sordid lunge for power by a ruthless and cruel dictator - Saul is handsome, unassuming, humble, concerned about his father rather than grasping for kingship. And he is God's clear choice!

Eyeballs Saved: (1 Sam 11) Saul does everything you would expect a godly king to do.

Samuel's Warning: (1 Sam 12) Amidst all the euphoria of Saul's victory, Samuel stands up with a grim warning: kingship depends upon the king obeying God.

Saul takes matters into his own hands: (1 Sam 13-15) Saul trusts his own judgement rather than God's instructions. Saul fears his circumstances more than he fears God's word. He disobeys Samuel. Samuel's response: Saul has rejected God, and God has rejected Saul!

2. What does it show us about the way God does things?

God is so powerful he can even work through wrong choices. (He uses Saul to achieve his purposes: both to protect Israel and to ultimately teach obedience. God doesn't call us to just obey him when it's convenient or the going is easy - the mettle of our discipleship is whether we obey when the going gets tough.

3. What does it show us about the way God does things through Jesus?

How different is our king, from Saul. The king who didn't cave in under pressure, but said "not my will, but your will be done" and went to the cross for our sins.

Sermon 5 The King who Saved his People 1 Samuel 17

Key:

God raises up his saviour to rescue his people. The pattern we see in David is a shadow of the reality we see in Jesus.

1. What is this passage about?

De Ja Vu: Once again, Israel are in trouble with the Philistines. Once again, if they will only turn back to God, he will save them. But once again, they don't. And their precious king is no help.

A giant problem: The irony is that Israel wanted a king who would lead them into battle, but Saul is too frightened to meet Goliath.

Two kings, two attitudes: There's a big contrast between Saul and David. One trusts in armour, the other trusts in God. David is concerned with God's honour. When the going gets tough, David is obedient.

2. What does it show us about the way God does things?

Again, God saves by raising up a saviour: God is so good at this saving stuff, that he can even save his people through a country bumpkin kid with a handful of rocks. God saves, even though the people don't deserve it: The repetition highlights God's continuous mercy and patience.

3. What does it show us about the way God does things through Jesus?

An unlikely saviour: A country kid shepherd boy with a rock - a nobody from Nazareth
A seemingly invincible enemy: Goliath - Sin ..certain judgement...nothing we can do about it.

A surprising weapon: a cross.

Just as David would have looked hopeless and pathetic as Goliath approached - as he is being painfully executed as a criminal, ridiculed and pathetic, Jesus is actually winning the victory that will rescue God's people.

We should identify ourselves not so much with David (the man of faith), but with the army of Israel who stands by and watches the victory won on their behalf. We could do nothing to defeat our enemy, sin, but our king won the victory for us

B52 Bomber Illustration: I had a B52 model as a kid. But the day I saw the real thing at an air-show, my tiny model never looked the same again. My model taught me to identify the real B52 when I saw it, but my tiny model also made the grandeur and hugeness of the real thing stand out even more.

That's how the OT works with Jesus, David is an airfix model of Jesus. Understanding David's victory over Goliath prepares us to meet Jesus. But it also emphasises the awesomeness of the victory that Jesus has won for us.

Sermon 6
The King is Dead ... Long Live the King
1 Samuel 18-31

Key:

This passage shows Saul's downward spiral into disobedience, fear and desperation - the snowballing effect of wilful sin. This time the contrast is between Saul and Jonathan: Saul refuses to bow the knee to God's chosen king. He will resist God's will because he wants to be king himself. However, Jonathan perceives that David is God's chosen king and bows the knee. NB. This talk was way too long - maybe it needs to be cut in half.

Introduction

War in Kuwait: Fighting on even though defeat was inevitable.

1. What is this passage about?

Scene 1: (1 Sam 18) Holding on to Power:

Jonathan recognises David as God's chosen one. He must choose between family and following the King! He (symbolically) hands over the robe of the heir apparent to David. Saul recognises that David is God's chosen replacement, yet he will resist God's will to the bitter end.

Scene 2: (1 Sam 24) A Great Relief:

Lots of potential for toilet humour here.

Scene 3: (1 Sam 28) Bad News at Endor:

This scene sums up Saul's life. When he's in trouble he turns not to God, but away from God into disobedience. Saul's last scene before his death shows him being nurtured and cared for by a servant of Satan.

1 Samuel ends with the fulfilment of Samuel's posthumous prophecy of Saul's death. (Even though Samuel is dead, he still has the last word.) Resist as he might, Saul has always been under God's prophet (i.e. under God's word), even to the bitter end.

2. What does it show us about the way God does things?

The passage shows how to respond to God's word.

Saul and God's King:

Is there an area of your life where you are deliberately resisting God's will? Saul's downward slide should be a great warning to each of one us to take our own discipleship very seriously.

3. What does it show us about the way God does things through Jesus?

In these chapters, everyone must make a decision about David. They either recognise that he is God's chosen king, or they reject him. Jonathan is the classic example - he puts his own security and claim to kingship on the line. He must even choose between commitment to his family and commitment to God's chosen king.

How will you respond to God's king Jesus - like Saul, or like Jonathan?

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