

Christ in 1 Samuel

TRANSCRIPT (AUTO-GENERATED)

In 1901, six self-governing British colonies, New South Wales, Tasmania, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia, united under a single constitution.

With the ascent of Queen Victoria, they declared themselves the Commonwealth of Australia. That, in short, is the origin story of our country and our political system. It's the origin story of the federal government.

And of course, every state, every country, every political system has an origin story. For the Americans, it's the Declaration of Independence and their founding fathers. For China, it's Mao and the Communist Revolution and the Chinese Civil War.

I bring this up because today we are looking at the origin story of ancient Israel's political system. The beginning of the Israelite monarchy, which ruled over the kingdoms of Israel and Judah for a few hundred years in the early Iron Age.

We are, of course, in our Christ in Scripture series, where we're going through every book of the Bible and looking how it points to Jesus. And today we are in 1 Samuel. Now, 1 Samuel has many stories that you will be familiar with.

I think we're all familiar with David and Goliath. Many of you will be familiar with some of the other characters. Saul, the first king, Jonathan, his son and David's best friend, David, of course, as well.

Samuel, the prophet, and his mother, Hannah. And of course, Yahweh himself, the Hebrew god, is a character in his own right in this story.

But all of these stories and characters all relate back to the idea of kingship and what Israel's kingship should look like and who is the rightful king.

So today we're going to look at what 1 Samuel has to say specifically through the lens of kingship.

And if we do it right, hopefully it will set us up well for when we look at the rest of the Bible, because basically in Old Testaments, from here on out, it's kings as far as the eye can see. But let me pray and then we'll get into it.

Oh, Heavenly Father, we thank you for the opportunities gathered together today to unpack your word.

I just pray that your Holy Spirit would be moving in us now, that you would speak through this ancient text, that you would speak through me and over me, and that our hearts would be ready to receive what you have to say. In Jesus' name, Amen.

So let's jump into 1 Samuel, and 1 Samuel really starts with the question of, where does true power reside? And that's where we're going to start. The beginning is a good place to start.

So we see this first in Hannah's prayer, in 1 Samuel chapter 2. I'm just going to read a little bit of it now, from 2 verse 6. Yahweh brings death and makes alive.

He brings down to the grave and raises up. Yahweh sends poverty and wealth. He humbles and exalts.

He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap. He seats them with the princes and has them inherit a throne of honor. For the foundations of the earth are Yahweh's.

On them he has set the world. He will guard the feet of his faithful servants, but the wicked will be silenced in the place of darkness. It is not by strength that one prevails.

Those who oppose Yahweh will be broken. The most high will thunder from heaven. Yahweh will judge the ends of the earth.

He will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed. So here at the start of 1 Samuel, we have this prayer, this song, this piece of poetry by a woman named Hannah. Now, you can go read Hannah's story in 1 Samuel 1.

I'm just going to focus on what she says here. And what Hannah declares is that true power resides with Yahweh. She declares that it is Yahweh who brings both life and death.

It is Yahweh who brings wealth and poverty. In other words, all human fortunes are entirely in his hands. And those fortunes are not static.

Hannah emphasizes Yahweh's ability to lift the humble up, to sit with the princes, and likewise to break those princes if they oppose him. The very foundations of the earth, says Hannah, are Yahweh's.

In fact, the king himself gets his strength from Yahweh. It says Yahweh lifts his horn, horn being sort of a symbol of honour in the ancient world. So who's really in charge?

Who is really sovereign? Who's really king here? These are the themes that play out across the rest of 1 Samuel.

When we look at Yahweh's kingship and his guidance of human fortunes, these are the things our author wants us to take note of. That in the midst of the coming war and intrigue, amidst pride and human pretensions, true power resides in Yahweh.

This is the great comfort of our faith, isn't it? That when we look and we see chaos and reckless power in the world, we can take comfort in knowing that there is a God in heaven who's working it all for his purposes.

There is a reason the psalmist so often describe Yahweh as a rock. Because amidst the swirling seas and the unknowns of life on earth, we can find certainty in his rule and his reign. Because to him belong the very foundations of the earth.

And our fortunes and our lives are in his hands. Because true power resides in Yahweh. And that's our starting point for 1 Samuel.

But if we read on, we get to the crux of 1 Samuel in Chapter 8. And the crux is that Israel isn't content to trust this all-powerful God. They want a system.

Let me revisit the passage that Trotty read for us in 1 Samuel 8, starting from verse 4. So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Rama. They said to him, You are old and your sons do not follow your ways.

Now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have. But they said, but when they said, give us a king to lead us, this displeased Samuel.

He prayed to Yahweh and Yahweh told him, listen to all the people are saying, it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king, as they have done from the day I brought them out of Egypt, until this day forsaking me for other

gods, so they are doing to you. Now listen to them, but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will claim as his rights and Samuel says what the rights are, conscription, taxation.

We jump down to verse 19, but the people refused to listen to Samuel. No, they said, we want a king over us. Then we will be like the other nations with a king to lead us and go out before us and fight our battles.

When Samuel heard all the people said, he repeated it before Yahweh, Yahweh answered, listen to them and give them a king. So the people come to Samuel, who's an old judge, the leader of Israel, they demand a king for him.

Samuel brings this to Yahweh. Yahweh says, okay, this is ultimately a rejection of me and my kingship, but nevertheless, he grants the people what they want.

And so what we have here is a transition point between the era of the judges and the era of kings. Now, quick refresher on judges.

If you think back to Ben's sermon two weeks ago on the Book of Judges, judges were ad hoc, usually localized leaders, raised up by God to defend Israel as needed. But of course, the only reason Israel needed defending is because they kept rebelling.

And when they rebelled, God allowed other nations to attack them. And inevitably, they would repent. And then God would raise up a judge to fight for them.

You may remember Ben's slide about the cycle of judges from a few weeks ago. And what we can notice here is that the whole system of judges is bound up in the people's relationship to God.

Judges as leaders are the products of this cycle of obedience, rebellion, repentance that marks God's rule over his people. But by asking for a king, what Israel is trying to do is take Yahweh out of the equation.

They want a permanent central authority to lead them at all times, but you don't have to wait for Yahweh to raise up a deliverer. Instead of trusting Yahweh, they're putting their trust in a system, in an institution.

They want to be like the nations around them. So, let's have a look at what being like the other nations is like. What does being an ancient king entail?

Well, unlike modern politicians, they're not concerned with interest rates and climate policy. Ancient kings are concerned with three things. Justice, war, religion.

Everyone repeat. Justice, war, religion. Great.

We're going to go through them quickly. So, number one, justice. 1 Samuel 8 verse 5.

Now appoint a king to lead us such as all the other nations have. Now, the word for lead here, I don't know why NIV has done it as lead, but it's shafat. It really means to judge.

So, this has to do with the king's role in upholding the law, passing judgment and resolving disputes. Justice. Think like a judge in a courtroom.

Upholding the law, passing judgment, resolving disputes. And it's also got the general vibe of good governance. That's justice.

Number two, war. What is it good for? Kings.

1 Samuel 8, verse 20. Then we will be like all the other nations with a king to lead us and go out before us and fight our battles. Pretty simple.

Ancient kings are warriors. They are war leaders. It's an integral part of their role.

To lead the army, defend the people, attack their enemies and win. That's war. Number three, religion.

Now, Israel doesn't actually mention this in their request, and that's kind of telling in and of itself, but we know it is very important later in the story and in the surrounding cultures of Israel. The basics of this is keep the gods happy.

Whatever gods are in Israel's case, God you worship, show them respect, perform the correct rituals and sacrifices in the correct way and respect the priests. Easy. That's religion.

So that's our three-step criteria for being an ancient king. This is the system that Israel wants to rely on. Now, let's just pause here for a second.

This is the system they're putting their faith in, and we're going to see how it plays out in a second. But let's just reflect on an irony here. Read your Old Testament up to this point.

God already fulfills each of these roles for Israel. You want justice, go to Deuteronomy. You want war, go to Joshua.

You want religion, you better go to Leviticus. Yahweh is already the perfect king, but Israel are not perfect subjects. It is their rebellion that has brought us here.

They are trying to substitute a perfect God for, spoilers, an imperfect system. And surely, we are tempted to do the same sometimes, right? I mean, we love to talk about the system, don't we?

Economic systems or political systems or organizations or technological systems or just systems of life. When we encounter hardship, we sometimes think that it must be the system that is broken.

If we can just fix it or get a new system, everything will be good. And look, sometimes that is the case. But how often are we deluding ourselves, searching human institutions instead of the perfect God who surpasses them all?

Only God can see the human heart. Only God can redeem his creation. So are you substituting a system for God?

Where are you placing your hope in routines and technical knowledge and the right kind of leaders? Are you allowing yourself to be blinded to your true king? Speaking of kings, let's return to 1 Samuel.

So quick reminder, justice, war, religion, the three aspects of ancient kingship. Now that we have this criteria, we can use it to evaluate Israel's kings. And in 1 Samuel, there's one main king, and that's Saul.

Now, Saul, he's described as a bit of a shy man from the tribe of Benjamin, but he's also described as very tall and a strappingly handsome young lad. Reminds me of Ben. But he seems quite promising, doesn't he?

Let's see how he goes in our three categories, shall we? Number one, justice. Now, justice doesn't feature a whole lot in Saul's reign, and where it does feature, it's not great.

Two stories illustrate this. 1 Samuel chapter 14, Saul makes an oath on behalf of his whole army. They're facing off against the Philistines, and the oath is, no one's allowed to eat until we beat the enemy.

And his son, Jonathan, doesn't hear about this little oath, this little decree. And so in the middle of battle, he eats a little bit of honey, a little energy boost. And that leads to this scene in 1 Samuel 14 verse 43.

And Saul said to Jonathan, tell me what you have done. And Jonathan said, so I tasted a little bit of honey with the end of my staff, and now I must die. And Saul said, may God deal with me, be it ever so severely if you do not die, Jonathan.

So trying to execute someone for eating some honey. I think we can agree that that's not justice. That is a bad decree and a bad judgment.

And more than a bad judge, Saul's a hypocrite. We're told that one of his laws is to ban mediums, you know, people who talk to spirits. And that's a good law.

It's in line with God's teachings in Deuteronomy and Leviticus. But in 1 Samuel 28, Saul himself goes and visits a medium. He's violating his own laws and his own rules.

So in summary, justice in Saul's reign, not looking too good. Number two, war. Now, Saul's pretty good at war, actually.

The beginning of his reign in 1 Samuel 11, he rallies the Israelites to defend off an Ammonite invasion. He fairly successfully fights the Philistines through most of his reign, and he ends up dying in battle.

So I guess he's no coward, and I guess we've got to give him good marks for the war category. But it's category number three, religion, where Saul really falls apart. It's his greatest failure is this blasé attitude he has towards God.

And there are a couple of incidents that show this. I've just picked out two. Firstly is 1 Samuel 13, verse 7 to 10.

Saul remained at Gilgal, and all the troops with him were quaking with fear. He waited seven days, the time set by Samuel, but Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and Saul's men began to scatter.

So he said, bring me the burnt offering and the fellowship offerings. And Saul offered up the burnt offering. Now that's a big no-no.

If you remember back to Leviticus, there are very strict regulations as to who can offer sacrifices, i.e. only priests, and Saul is no priest. He has not taken these sacrifices with the seriousness that God has instructed.

And this incident actually dooms his dynasty. As a result of this, the Lord says, your house will not be established over Israel. The second incident is a little darker.

One of his priests, Ahimelech, kind of unintentionally helps David, who Saul has come to hate now. Saul hears about this, turns to his guard and says, turn and kill the priests of Yahweh because they too have sided with David.

Then they knew he was fleeing, yet they did not, tell me. Killing priests. I mean, he actually ends up killing 85 priests.

So in the category of religion, hard fail for Saul. So where does this leave us? We're one king into the new system, and the only thing he's good at is war.

Saul does not live up to his promise. And so Israel has gained all the downsides of a monarchy, you know, conscription, taxation, all that stuff, and like one of the upsides. And to be honest, the second king, David, he's only a little bit better.

Like Saul, he's a legendary warrior. And unlike Saul, he's fully committed to honouring God and respecting the priests and the sacrifices. But if you look at justice in David's reign, it's one travesty after another.

Go read the second half of 2 Samuel. And the thing is, David's probably the best they ever got. A 2 out of 3.

And it's downhill from there. So surprise, surprise, the human system has failed yet again. But remember our first point, back to Hannah's prayer.

While Saul and the system of kings seems to be futile, remember who's really in charge. Because God can redeem even this fallen institution. Because it is with the titles of Israel's monarchy that God chooses to describe his son.

In 1 Samuel, the ritual for choosing a new king is to anoint them with oil. That is why the Israelite king historically is often called the anointed one. The anointed one in Hebrew is Mashiach or in Greek, Christos, Christ.

And in Jesus, we find the ultimate fulfillment of the Israelite kingship. Through his human bloodline, he is acclaimed to the throne, right? He is a descendant of David, but he's also God incarnate.

So that in Jesus, the king of Israel and Yahweh are the same person once again. He undoes the separation of God and king that occurs back in 1 Samuel 8. And at the deepest level, he fulfills each of the three criteria we've talked about.

Let's go through it. Justice, as judge, Jesus's decrees are firm, but he is merciful in judgment. For example, he decrees in Matthew 5, 28 that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery in their heart.

That's a pretty firm decree. It's pretty harsh even. And yet this is the same man who when he meets a woman caught in adultery, he doesn't execute her on the spot.

He says, neither do I condemn you. Go and leave your life of sin. Firm in his decrees, merciful in his judgment.

Unlike Saul, he lived a blameless life, in complete harmony with his decrees and with the law.

And we have confidence knowing that he will come again to judge the living and the dead, and his judgment will be perfect because he knows every human heart. This is our king and his perfect justice. Second category, war.

Now, Christ did not lead a human army to conquer the Romans or any other human enemy. But our true enemies aren't human, are they?

Ephesians 6-12 says, For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Satan is trembling in his boots because he knows that the king is coming. And not just Satan, not just the demons and the dark powers that have manipulated humanity from time immemorial. Death itself retreats before Christ.

1 Samuel 15-25, for he must reign until he has put all, sorry, 1 Corinthians, for he must reign until he puts all his enemies under his feet. And the last enemy to be destroyed is death. This is our king who wages war against death itself.

Third category, religion. Do I even need to say anything here? Who else is our true sacrifice?

Who else lived a blameless life? Who else is our true high priest that can empathize with our weakness and cleanse us with his blood? Who else sits at the right hand of the father interceding for us?

Who else can reconcile God and humanity? Only Jesus. This is our king who pleases God in everything that he does.

And so we see that where the first king of Israel failed, the last king of Israel triumphed. This is our king and a crucified king at that. I ask you, what could possibly take his place?

Who could possibly have a greater claim to our allegiance than Jesus? Yet some of us try to substitute him, don't we? For many of us, the alternative candidate is me, ourselves.

We try to live by our own justice, our own decrees, our own desires. No one can tell me what to do.

We wage war against the people we dislike, often in comment sections through insults and tearing up opponents down because they're wrong or they have wronged me. Or perhaps we try to please God by ourselves.

If I just live a good enough life, He'll be fine. But let's learn from the example of 1 Samuel. Only one human is good enough to be king, and it's not me, it's not you, it's Jesus.

So let me call you once again to bend the knee to our true king, who rules with perfect justice, who wages war against death itself, and who pleases God in all that he does.

In 1 Samuel, Israel attempted to divorce God and the kingship, but in Jesus, God and the king are one once again. And this shows that Hannah's words were true even across centuries. That true power still resides in Yahweh.

And despite our best efforts, no system can take his place, and no human can equal him. He reigns now, he reigns forever.

Let me finish with a passage from the very end of our Bibles, where we have a vision of the risen Lord Jesus in all his glory, from Revelation 19.

I saw heaven standing open, and there before me was a white horse whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice, he judges and wages war.

His eyes are blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns, and he has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God.

The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron scepter.

He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of the God Almighty. On his robe and on his thighs, he has this name written, King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Let me close in prayer.

Father, we know that you are Lord, that true power resides in you. We thank you that you have liberated us from the enemy, that you are our true and perfect King, that you reign over us with justice.

We pray that you would continue to protect us and lead us as we go out into our weeks. I pray this in the name of Jesus, Amen.