

Day 83 Judges 17 and 18

Micah and the Levite

This terrible story from the book of Judges lets us see how degraded the worship of the Lord became in Israel in the time of the *Right-wisdoms*. Idolatry, individualism, violence, theft, all rear their ugly heads.

The key statement, which becomes a refrain for the rest of the book, comes in 17.6

In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.

The slide into anarchy and disorder do not make pleasant reading, but continue the story of God's people.

17.1ff The chapter starts with a confession. An Ephraimite named Micah confesses to his mother that he took about 13 kilos of silver which were hers, and which she thought had been stolen by someone else.

The woman seems to overlook his theft, and explains, quite nonchalantly, that she had plans to make a silver idol dedicated to the Lord with some of it ! This betrays the level of theological backwardness Israel had slidden into over this time.

17.4 So the idol is made, and placed in an idol-shrine in Micah's house. He makes an ephod (a priest's breastplate) for divination, presumably, and makes one of his sons the shrine's priest.

17.7 But along comes a Levite, from Bethlehem in Judah. It seems he has no duties, indicating that the service of the Lord has been neglected. Micah takes the opportunity to have a pucker priest ministering in his new temple, and so he hires him, expecting God's blessing, now he is supporting a Levite. It is worth noting, however, that this Levite is not a descendant of Aaron, but of Moses, through his son Gershom.)

18.1ff The chapter opens with the comment again, *Israel had no king*, no focus of government, no order, no rules.

The Danite tribe are now introduced to us as not having found a territory in all this time. Five men, spies of Dan, checking out the lands of Ephraim to see if they could come there, find out about the priest of Micah, and get him to divine whether their expedition will be a success. The Levite does his thing, and tells them yes, it will be.

18.7ff Moving on from Micah's house, they come to Laish in the far north of the land, overlooked by Mount Hermon, on the borders with Lebanon. They find there people living a good life, with no allies to protect them, their nearest neighbours being the Sidonians to the north.

Going back to Zorah and Eshtaol, in their small enclave near Beth Shemesh, where, presumably they have been harried by the neighbouring Philistines, they report on the wide-open nature of the land, and that it is ripe for attack and capture.

18.11ff Six hundred Danites (with families and possessions, see 18.21) then set out to capture Laish, camping en route at Mahaneh Dan (the camp of Dan) and then arriving at the house of Micah in Ephraim.

Here, they steal the silver idols and furnishings, and convince the Levite that he is going to be better off serving a tribe than one man's shrine. He is happy about the deal! So they take their booty and leave.

18.21ff They send their families and possessions ahead of them, to protect them from any rearguard action, which comes in the form of Micah and his neighbours, banded together to pursue the robbing Danites. Micah complains that they have taken all he has, but the Danites just threaten violence and Micah turns back, empty-handed, afraid of the might of Dan compared to his meager troop.

18.27ff The Danites attack Laish, 'a quiet and secure city'. The Laishites are defenceless, and are overcome by the Danites, who rebuild it and settle, renaming it Dan.

18.30,31. This, in a sense, is the point of the whole story, since Dan became a byword in later Israel for rebellion and idolatry. They set up Micah's idols, and install the non-Aaronic priest at the shrine, a dynasty which lasted up to the later fall of Israel.

A last statement is made, that all the time this idolatry is going on, the Tent of God is in Shiloh, where the true priesthood is serving.

Day 84 Judges 19 to 21

Civil War in Israel

The closing chapters of Judges are some of the most distressing in Scripture. In spite of God's raising up deliverers to *right-wise* the wayward people of Israel, and demonstrate His nature as Rescuer and Deliverer, the people sink into deeper and deeper darkness.

The evil which is carried on is reminiscent of the worst excesses of the cities of the plain in Genesis 18 and 19. But the awful fact is that this is going on among the covenanted people of God. Moses' song of unfaithfulness is being played out over this chapter of Israel's story with God, and it is woeful lament.

19.1 Once again, the refrain of the lack of rule and direction in Israel is repeated. Even though God is King, He is being ignored.

וַיְהִי בַיָּמִים הָהֵם, וּמֶלֶךְ אֵין בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל *vayehi bayamim hahem umelekh eyn beYisrael*
And was in days those and king none in Israel

19.2ff A Levite living in a remote part of Ephraim takes a concubine (Heb אִשָּׁה פִּילְגֶשֶׁת *Ishah philegesh*). A concubine was a woman who was recognised as a man's partner, but without written certificate. Some scholars would say that she had no ceremony for marriage, either, but others would say that she had *kiddushin* a blessing of the relationship. Her partner was known as a son-in-law of her father, and there was recognition of such partnerships in Israel, though nothing is said of them in the law. Some concubines lived with their partners, others lived away. However, she was not of the same status as a wife, and her children were secondary in line to the children of a wife.

Here, the concubine is unfaithful to the Levite, sexually, (The Hebrew word is תִּזְנֶה *Tiznah*, meaning she committed fornication or prostitution) and leaves her partner to go back to her father's house, in Bethlehem.

Her partner misses her after four months, and goes south to Bethlehem to ask her to return. Her father is delighted at the reconciliation, and gives days of hospitality to the Levite. After nearly a week, the Levite decides it's time to go home to Ephraim, and refusing more offers of a bed for the night, he and his partner leave.

19.10ff As they travel north from Bethlehem, the night is drawing in, and the Levite's servant suggests they overnight at Jerusalem, which at this point is in the hands of the Jebusites, and is called Jebus. (Heb יְבוּס *Ye-bhus*) The Levite is not happy about staying in a Canaanite city, and wants to make for an Israeli settlement, as they are in the territory of Benjamin's tribal lands, so they go to Gibeah, another five miles north of the Jebusite city. (Today called Tall al Ful, also later called Gabat Saul, because it was the birthplace of King Saul.)

It's sunset when they arrive, and although they wait in the square of the town, no one offers them hospitality, an uncommon event in ancient Israel, where giving hospitality was considered an honour.

19.16ff However, as the evening wears on, an old Ephraimite comes home from work, and is surprised to see travelers sitting uncared for in the square. The old man takes them into his house, and looks after their needs.

19.22ff In a scene reminiscent of the men of Sodom at the house of Lot in Genesis 19, local Benjamite thugs come and pound on the door, demanding the Levite be given over to them to rape. This despicable behaviour is not only evidence of sexual perversion on the part of the Benjamites, but is also designed to inflict maximum humiliation on the abused guest, breaking all moral bounds of the protection of guests in middle Eastern culture.

The old man goes out to them, and appeals to them to leave their wickedness; he then offers them the women who are in the house for their pleasure, since at least that would be to preserve the dignity of the male guest. We cannot surely understand this move in any modern moral terms, but the Ephraimite is trying to mitigate the awful situation he is in through this desperate offer.

19.25ff. The concubine is then sent out to the men, who rape and abuse her all night; at dawn she returns to the house, and collapses at the door. In the morning, her partner finds her dead. He puts her on his donkey and takes his sad journey back home.

The thought of this terrible event is painful in the extreme. How much such human suffering is inflicted on others, male and female alike, through the domination of man's sexual greed and tyranny? How different to the story of Boaz with Ruth, the man who put the woman first, and protected and honoured her.

19.29 In an act of heart-rending appeal, the Levite dismembers the corpse of his concubine into twelve gory parts, and sends them out with a report of what happened in Gibeah to the men of Israel. There is horror and shock across the nation.

20.1ff Israelites from all over the land now come together 'as one man' and gather at Mizpah. (Heb. מִצְפָּה *Mits-pah*, meaning 'Watchtower') The Mizpah in question is most likely to be Mizpah in Benjamin, just a few miles north of Jerusalem, near Gibeah. There, the Levite recounts the terrible events in Gibeah.

20.8ff The unanimous verdict of the men of Israel is that Gibeah has to be punished for what it has allowed to happen. An army is selected by holy lot, presumably with the Urim and Thummim of the Priest. The Benjamites are then told to surrender those responsible for the outrage against the dead woman and her partner. They refuse, not listening to the rest of Israel, and instead muster their troops, twenty-six thousand of them, including seven hundred from Gibeah, to fight the rest of the tribes in civil war. Also, among the Benjamites are seven-hundred left-handed marksmen; the left-handed were seen as particularly favoured (cf. Ehud in Judges 3.)

The other tribes, meanwhile, raise an army of four hundred thousand. They then enquire of the Lord as to which tribe takes the lead. Judah, Benjamin's nearest neighbours, are chosen.

20.19ff The battle is fierce and costly; the Benjamites fight ferociously, and on two occasions they overwhelm the Israelite forces.

20.23 and 26 The terrible ordeal for Israel, fighting with their own brothers, causes their hearts to break. They sit, on two occasions and after heavy losses, weeping at the state of affairs in the nation.

20.29 Finally, Israel surrounds Benjamin in an ambush near Gibeah, drawing them away from their defences. In a finely-balanced battle, eventually the Lord enables Israel to

defeat Benjamin, and twenty-five thousand one hundred Benjamites die, almost the whole male population of the tribe. Also, the city of Gibeah is taken while the Benjamites are outside it fighting, and destroyed. This finally causes the Benjamites to flee into the desert, pursued by Israel, who inflict the terrible losses on them.

20.47ff Just six hundred fugitives from Benjamin escape and hide out for four months in the desert. Meanwhile the Israelites destroy all the Benjamite towns, and their inhabitants and livestock.

21.1ff The terrible consequence of this amputation of almost a whole tribe from the family of Israel weighs heavy on the nation. The rest of Israel has vowed that they will not intermarry with Benjamin, but they now see the bleak future that means for this small tribe.

At Bethel they weep and pray, making offerings to God, and they mourn the loss of Benjamin.

21.5ff In the process of calling Israel together to fight Benjamin, it transpires that dire punishment was vowed to anyone who didn't answer the call to arms. Now, a shocking train of events is planned for Jabesh-Gilead, a town on the east side of the Jordan, in the lands of Manasseh, who failed to respond to the call to war.

First, an army of twelve thousand is sent to the town to kill all males and all females who are not virgins. They then capture four hundred female virgins and bring them to Shiloh, back across the river, the place where God's Tent is pitched.

21.13ff A move is now made to reconcile with the fugitive survivors of Benjamin, and they return to be given the captive virgins of Jabesh-Gilead for their new wives. However, there are only four hundred, compared to the six hundred needed.

21.16ff In a further awful twist, the Israelites work out a plan to override their vow of not allowing another Israelite to marry into the disgraced tribe of Benjamin. They want to find a way of restoring the decimated branch of the nation, so they instruct the Benjamites to kidnap some of the young girls when they are dancing before the Lord in festival at Shiloh! When the fathers and brothers of the girls protest, they will be asked to co-operate to restore Benjamin, and will not be held guilty of breaking a vow, since they didn't give the young women freely.

So this is what happens, and Benjamin starts to rebuild again, while the tribes of Israel stand down and go to their own territories again.

21.25 The book closes with the recurring statement, a summing up of the whole sorry, gut-wrenching period;

בְּיָמִים הָהֵם, אִין מֶלֶךְ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל: אִישׁ הַיָּשָׁר בְּעֵינָיו, יַעֲשֶׂה

BaYamim ha-hem eyn melekh beYisrael

In days those none king in Israel

Ish ha-yashar be-eynav ya'aseh

Each the right in his eyes did

**‘In those days in Israel there was no king,
And each one did his own sweet thing....’**

Day 85 The Move to Monarchy 1 Samuel 1 to 2 (c 1100 BC)

The time of the Judges is coming to an end. The degraded priesthood of Israel is in serious moral trouble. The old high priest Eli has two sons, Phinehas (Heb פִּינְחָס *Pinchas*) and Hophni who are corrupt, and about to get a come-uppance.

The books of Samuel are included in the Hebrew Bible in the section *The Prophets* (Heb נְבִיאִים *Nebhi'im*) and Samuel, although the last of the Judges is also the first of the line of prophets calling Israel to their covenant faithfulness to the Lord.

1 Sam .1ff We are introduced to the parents of Samuel. In a scene with echoes of the story of Jacob and his wives Rachel and Leah, Elkanah's wives Peninah and Hannah are distinguished by their childbearing. Hannah is barren, and on the annual visit of this faithful family to Shiloh, where the Tabernacle of the Lord is based, prays for a child.

1 Sam. 1.4-5 Note that the family sacrifice together at Shiloh, and eat of the meat as part of their worship; sacrifice is a meal with the Lord.

1.9ff Hannah is so desperate for a child that she vows to God that she will surrender any child she has for the service of the Tabernacle, and he will be a Nazirite, like Samson.

Eli sees her praying, and so anguished is she, he thinks she is drunk. After an unfortunate ticking off, Eli is put straight, and he blesses Hannah and her prayer.

1.19ff The Lord answers Hannah's prayer, and Samuel is born. The name Samuel means *Heard by God* (Heb שְׁמוּאֵל *Sh'mu'el*) because he is the child of answered prayer. When he is weaned, the faithful Hannah takes her son and gives him to the service of the Tent of God. It says of Samuel at the end of the chapter that 'he worshipped the

Lord there.’ Like Moses and Joshua before him, Samuel becomes one who is in the presence of God. In fact, he lives there.

2.1ff Hannah raises a beautiful hymn of praise to the Lord for His goodness to her, which has strong resonances of Mary’s *magnificat* – perhaps Mary had this prayer in mind when she responded to God’s grace.

At the end of the song (2.10) she prophetically mentions the king who is to come, and whom Samuel will be instrumental in seeing raised.

2.12ff Phinehas and Hophni are guilty of abuses of the sacrifices. While the meat is being prepared, they come and take it, while the fat is still on it. From the law of Moses, we recall that the fat of an offering belongs to the Lord. (Lev.3.16). Even when the sacrificers ask them to wait, they then threaten to take it by force.

2.18ff Samuel, meanwhile, grows up in the Lord’s presence, visited annually by his family from Ephraim. Hannah is blessed with further children, in a sign of God’s grace upon her.

2.22ff Eli discovers that his sons are also having sex with the women who serve the needs of the worshippers at the entrance to the Tabernacle. He warns that if they do not repent, they will receive judgment.

2.27ff A man of God (Heb אִישׁ-אֱלֹהִים *ish-Elohim*), another name for a prophet comes to Eli and accuses him and his sons of growing fat on what belongs to the Lord. He forecasts Eli’s sorrow and his sons’ death, and their replacement by a faithful priest of God. Then the house of Eli will be in penury.

Day 86 1 Samuel 3 to 7

Samuel’s Prophetic Calling

3.1ff The boy Samuel grows in the service of God with Eli; we are told that prophetic revelation is rare in those times, but God is about to speak to this young man.

Three times, while Samuel is sleeping, he hears a voice calling his name, and three times he goes to Eli, believing it is his call he is hearing. On the third occasion, Eli realises that the boy is receiving a revelation. He tells him to respond to the Lord’s voice by saying ‘Speak. Lord, your servant is listening,’

It is worth noting here that in the original, the word ‘listen’ is present continuous in nature (Heb. שׁוֹמֵעַ *shome’a* , is listening.) This is a posture each believer needs to develop before the Lord, one of an open ear at all times.

- 3.11ff The Lord reveals to Samuel that He is about to carry out the sentence against Eli and his sons, because Eli has not restrained the darkness in his offspring. The effects will be ear-tingling in their execution. Samuel is afraid to tell his great mentor what he has heard, but Eli threatens him with God's retribution, and he tells all. Eli submits to the *mishpat*, the right-wising of God, even in its severity.
- 3.19ff As Samuel grows, his prophetic ministry is constantly substantiated by the Lord, and the Lord now establishes a regular relationship with Samuel. He is acknowledged as a prophet (Heb נָבִיא *Navi*) from Dan, the furthest point north in Israel, to Be'er-Sheba, one of the southernmost cities.

The End of the House of Eli and Capture of the Ark

- 4.1ff The Israelites and Philistines meet in battle at Aphek, towards the western coast, near the Philistine lands of today's Gaza strip, but Israel is defeated.

Israel calls for the ark of the covenant to be brought from Shiloh as a talisman for them going into battle, as if it could save them. Phinehas and Hophni come with the ark to the battlefield. This is such a great encouragement to Israel that they raise a great battle-cry, which terrifies the Philistines, who have heard of the acts of the Lord in Egypt and in the Exodus.

- 4.10ff But the Israelites are defeated, with the loss of thirty thousand men that day. The ark is captured by the Philistines, and the two sons of the High Priest die. When ninety-eight year old and overweight Eli receives the news of the terrible defeat, the death of his sons and in particular the loss of the ark, he collapses in shock, breaks his neck and dies, after forty years of being Israel's *Right-wiser* or *Shophet/Judge*.
- 4.19ff Phinehas' widow is about to give birth when the bad news arrives, and the shock sends her into labour, giving birth to a son. But she is so traumatised, she has no reaction at the birth. In her agony of soul, she names the baby Ichabod (Heb אִיכָבֹוֹד *I-khabhod*, meaning *no-glory*) because of the death of the men of her family, and the capture of the ark. By this, she is not talking about national glory, but the glory, the weight of God's presence which has been removed from them.

The Ark Among the Philistines

- 1 Sam 5.1ff The ark brings nothing but trouble to the Philistines. Their god Dagon, the fish-god, is literally floored before the ark, being found twice face-down, the position of worship before the Lord, the second time his head and hands broken off and left on the doorstep of his temple! Then the people of Ashdod suffer terrible cancerous tumours, or perhaps the boils of bubonic plague, and moving the ark on to Gath and Ekron brings exactly the same outbreak there, leading to the death of many. Thus, they decide to send the ark back again.
- 6.1ff After seven months of the ark in the Philistine cities, they call for advice from their priests, who advise sending back the ark with guilt-offerings, who advise sending five gold tumour shapes, and five gold rats as compensation. It seems that as well as

cancer or plague, rats were also destroying their cities (6.5) Their priests warn them against getting into a battle with the Lord, like Pharaoh did, which just ended up in Pharaoh getting rid of the Israelites. (6.6)

They put the ark on a new cart, as well as a box with the offerings in it, with two newly-calved mother cows pulling it, and let it go. The cows head for Beth-Shemesh, (house of the sun) in Judah, just south-west of Jerusalem. The Philistine rulers follow the cart all the way, to see what will happen.

6.13ff When the ark arrives at Beth-Shemesh, the people are out harvesting, a key time in the year for them. But they stop what they are doing, call the Levites, and get the ark taken off the cart correctly. They then break up the cart, and use it as wood for a sacrifice on which they burn the two cows. They find the offerings (one tumour and rat for each of the five towns of the Gaza plain).

6.19ff However, some of the men of Beth Shemesh take advantage of the ark being in their neighbourhood to take a look inside it. As a result, seventy of them die, at which the people, in great mourning, say ‘Who can survive in the presence of this God?’ and they ask the people of Kiriath-Jearim to take it to their town, which they do, to the house of Abinadab, and set a guard on it, so that the foolishness of Beth-Shemesh does not recur.(7.1)

The whole tenor of this passage reminds us of the awe of the holiness of God. ‘Who can stand in the presence of the Lord, this holy God?’ For us as His people today, the answer is clear- only through the protection and insulation offered to us by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who welcomes us into the Lord’s presence.

7.2ff The ark stays at Kiriath-Jearim for a whole twenty years; the people of Israel yearn for the restoration of the ark to Shiloh, and there is a national awakening. By this time, Samuel is in place to lead and *right-wise*. He calls for wholesale repentance, and for the destruction of the Ba’alim and Ashtorot which have so misled the people. They do this, and gather at Mizpah in Benjamin, the place where Israel last gathered to punish the Benjamites. Now, they worship the Lord.

7.7ff The Philistines hear of Israel’s massing at Mizpah, and they see it as an act of aggression. They mobilise and advance on Israel, who ask Samuel to call on the Lord for them. In the ensuing battle, the Lord sends a terrible thunderstorm, which frightens the daylight out of the Philistines, and they are defeated.

As a result, Samuel sets up a memorial stone, calling it Eben-ezer (Heb אֶבֶן הָעֵזֶר *Evven Ha-Azer*, Stone of the Help) witnessing to the fact that after decades of estrangement from the Lord, they are once again defended by God. The Philistine subjugation of Israel is at an end, with the restoration of towns to Israel captured by them, and there is also peace with the Amorites to the east.

Samuel remains as the *right-wiser* judge all his life, based in Ramah, but travelling around the nation to bring his Godly prophetic wisdom.

Day 87 1 Samuel 8 to 12

The Anointing of a King

Although the story of Israel seems to lurch from one uncertainty to another, the Lord remains unswervingly faithful to them. At this point, the people rise up and demand a king. They see other nations around them with a visible figurehead, often seen as divine or semi-divine. When they compare them to the fickle leadership of the *Right-wisiers*, which has degenerated seriously, they see monarchy as preferable to the corruption of the judges, epitomized in Phinehas and Hophni.

Thus, God will respond to them by giving them a king, although not one of their choosing; a careful process of God's anointing will precede the seemingly democratic choice at Jabesh-Gilead to come. God, not the people is the ruler of this nation.

8.1ff Like Eli, the ageing Samuel has appointed his sons, Joel and Abijah, to the position of *Right-wisiers* for Israel, but they are corrupt like Eli's sons before them. This is the moment when the people come and demand a king, as the other nations have.

8.6ff Samuel is angry, and talks this over with the Lord, but the Lord tells him to listen to the people, because it is the kingship of the Lord they are rejecting. Samuel is tell them what life with a king will be like.

8.10ff. Samuel paints the picture of oppression and taxation, of even the tyranny of a future king, but the people are determined; they want a king. Samuel hears them, and sends everyone back home.

9.1ff We are introduced to Saul, son of Kish. What is most surprising about Saul is that he is of the tribe of Benjamin, and of one of the smallest clans of that tribe. At the end of the book of Judges, we saw Benjamin almost wiped out following their defence of the sinners of Gibeah. God has a way of taking the most despised and insignificant and achieving his purposes through them.

There is quite an surrounding the monarchy of Saul, perhaps coming from the fact that this is 'second-best' for Israel, and although Saul is tall and handsome, he will not last long in favour with the people.

Saul sets out with his servant to look for his father's stray donkeys.

9.6ff. They decide to consult a 'man of God' (Heb. אִישׁ-אֱלֹהִים *Ish-Elohim*) which is one of the terms used for the prophet of God. The other two terms follow here in explanation in quick succession. In Saul's time, the word for God's speaker was *Seer* (Heb. רֹאֵה *ro-eh*, literally, one who sees) but this later became replaced by the word

Prophet (Heb. נָבִיא *navi'*, from a root meaning to bubble up (Easton's Bible Dictionary)) also meaning to 'be the mouth of God.' In this context, the prophet was seen as a particularly ecstatic figure.

Some girls direct them to where a family meat-slaughter/sacrifice is taking place on a hill, and Samuel is officiating there. It is perhaps surprising that at this juncture in Israel's history sacrifice seems to be happening away from the worship centre; however, it may be that the man of God is there as the modern Jewish practice echoes, to ensure that dietary laws are followed, and to join in the ensuing feast.

9.15ff The Lord reveals to Samuel that Saul is His choice for king, and Samuel reveals this to Saul, the one all Israel is waiting for. Saul is taken aback, after all, his tribe is the smallest, after the Gibeah debacle. Saul is invited to eat with the prophet, being given the honour at the feast of chief guest, and given the choicest cut of meat.

10.1ff Sending Saul's servant on ahead next day, Samuel confides in Saul the events which will accompany God's anointing of His new servant, and he anoints Saul with oil as a sign of the approaching encounter with the Spirit of God.

Saul will meet three men on their way to worship at Bethel, and he will be given two loaves by them. (Bread is always a sign of covenant and provision of God). Then, as Saul approaches Gibeah, he will meet a band of ecstatic prophets, with accompanying musical group, and here the Spirit of God will come upon Him and he will join them in ecstatic utterance. This will be His empowering moment, not unlike the judges of the previous dispensation, and is God's moment for Him.

10.9ff Everything happens just as Samuel has foretold. The Spirit of God comes upon Saul in power. (Heb וַתִּצְלַח עָלָיו רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים *Va-titzlach alav ruach Ehohim* – the word *titzlach* here is the feminine singular form of the verb *tzalach* meaning to break out, powerfully encounter.) His friends and attendants are shocked at the sudden ecstatic behaviour and wonder that Saul is behaving like a *navi'*. But Saul tells no one about the promise of Kingship.

10.17ff Saul's election is not a very auspicious occasion. Samuel gathers the Israelites again at Mizpah, and reminds them that, despite the Lord's faithfulness to them and deliverance of them as a nation, they have chosen to reject His rule over them. Then, tribe by tribe, the urim and thummim are used to take lots, and the lot comes down to Saul, son of Kish. However, Saul is hiding in the baggage pile!

We may recognise the seeming unwillingness displayed by many of God's leaders; Moses, Jeremiah, Gideon, and here, Saul, all back off from God's calling. It is of note that the great Scottish reformer, John Knox, on the day of his calling to lead the congregation at St Andrews, ran crying from the building, and had to be brought back in by John Rough and urged to receive his vocation.

Saul is eventually presented, and the people shout, like the nations shout around them for their King *yechi HaMelekh! Let the king live!*

Then a written constitution is presented by Samuel, which contains the regulations for the monarchy; this is sealed before the Lord, as each one returns home.

10.26ff Yet from the word go there is resistance to Saul; some oppose his appointment, and refuse to recognise him.

11.1ff Saul's first opportunity to show his leadership comes when the Ammonites under their king Nachash besiege Jabesh-Gilead, on the east bank of the Jordan. The Israelites negotiate seven days stay of execution, to see if any help will come from the other tribes.

When news of this reaches Saul at Gibeah, his home, he takes a strong lead, with echoes of the sending out of the Levite's concubine's corpse at the end of Judges to call Israel together; the Spirit of the Lord comes upon him, in anger, and he kills and carves up his ploughing oxen and send them out to all the tribes, with a call to come, or end up like the dead meat they are receiving.

There is a great irony in this moment, for it was Jabesh-Gilead's men who refused to come and fight against the Benjamites. (Judges 21.8ff) It is hard to know what might be going on in the mind of Saul at this point. Would Israel come and support him to relieve this formerly renegade city of Manasseh? Was he acting in compassion toward a people who had refused to come out against his own tribe?

Whatever the motives, over three hundred thousand muster together, and Jabesh is delivered from the Ammonites by the massed Israelite forces.

11.12ff There is a moment of possible repeat of history where retribution is urged against those Israelites who have not come out to support Saul, a throwback again to the end of Judges, when the people of Jabesh-Gilead were themselves attacked and destroyed for their non-cooperation with the rest of Israel. But Saul prevents any more inter-tribal blood-letting, and instead Samuel leads them in triumph to Gilgal, where they celebrate Israel's first monarch, with feasting.

Samuel's last speech; The End of the *Right-wiser* Judges

12.1-7 With Saul's coronation, the rule of the *Right-wisers* has come to an end, and Samuel is about to bow out from the scene.(although he remains a powerful prophetic voice in Israel, beginning the tradition of the prophet who becomes God's voice to the monarch.)

However, in his parting address, Samuel defends his record to the people, that although his sons have not followed his ways, he has acted with great integrity, which they all acknowledge and witness.

He then goes on to remind Israel of the real story of their nation, of the story of the God-Rescuer who not only delivered them from Egypt, but also raised up the *Right-wiser* judges, (including one *Bedan* in v.11 who is not recorded elsewhere.) to free them from their enemies. He shows them that by choosing Saul, they are playing fast and loose with

the Lord their true king, but the Lord is working with them, and they will still need to walk before the Lord in holiness as his nation, king or no king.

12.16ff As a demonstration of God's power and displeasure, and as a testimony that their lives are in God's hand, whose the land is, a terrible storm destroys their harvest-ready crops, causing awe to fall on the people, followed by a plea to spare them from death for their action in wanting a king.

12.19-25 Samuel assures them that there is still relationship with the Lord, if they will walk with Him still; after all, they are His people, and Samuel will continue to pray for them.

Here is another occurrence of populist democracy making the wrong choice; however, God does not take His hand off the nation, but promises to walk with them, even in their waywardness.

Day 88 1 Sam 13.1 to 14.45 (and 1 Chron. 9.35-44)

Saul and Jonathan.

1 Sam 13.1, then 1 Chron 14.49-51 This is an introduction to Saul's family, with his sons Jonathan, Ishvi and Malki-Shua and his daughters Merab and Michal, all by his wife Ahinoam. The commander of his army is his cousin, Abner, son of his uncle Ner.

The 1 Chronicles 9 verses give the lineage and descent of Saul. Two names to note are Merib-Ba'al (9v40) Jonathan's son who is also known later as Mephi-bosheth, (2 Sam 9) and Esh-Ba'al (9v39), who later appears after his father's fall as Ish-Bosheth.(2 Sam 2.8). (They are given their Canaanite-style names here.)

Saul's presumption costs him dearly

13.2-15 Saul and Jonathan with three thousand men attack the Philistines at Geba, and provoke them to open war. Saul rouses the rest of Israel to Gilgal, but when they see the might of the Philistine forces, they start to hide and even retreat across the Jordan into the eastern territories.

Samuel has instructed Saul not to do anything until he arrives, and they wait around for a week. Then, Saul is so worried about the situation that he takes presumptuous action and sacrifices burnt offerings to the Lord. As they finish the ceremonies, Samuel arrives, and is told by Saul that he needed to take this unprecedented action to keep his troops together. Samuel now reveals the penalty for Saul's presumption – the throne will be given to another whom the Lord has designated. Saul's days of rule will come to an end with his own life. Samuel then leaves Saul in misery, with just six hundred men still left with him....

13.16-22 The Philistines now launch their attack on the Israelites encampments, against an Israel woefully under-equipped, since the Philistines, in their keeping the Israelites in subjection, had not permitted any blacksmith to forge a sword for Israel. Only agricultural tools were permitted them. However, Jonathan and Saul do have swords.

14.1ff Jonathan decides to carry out his own under-cover expedition, leaving Saul at Gibeah, with the somewhat dubious priest Ahijah, son of Ichabod along with him. Jonathan acts with great daring, and faith in the Lord, saying, (v.6) that the Lord is not prevented from saving them even if they are few in number.

14.14ff In a feat of great daring, Jonathan and his armour-bearer attack a Philistine outpost, and kill twenty men, hewing them down. God then assists by causing a minor earthquake, which sends panic throughout the Philistine forces.(v.15)

From his look-out, Saul sees the Philistines in their confusion. He finds out that Jonathan has left the camp. He calls for the priest Ahijah to bring the ark, but seeing the Philistines already dispersing, he sends it back again, and takes advantage of the moment to wade into the Philistine ranks. This action causes those Israelites who had been so afraid, they had taken sides with the Philistines, to defect back to Israel, and they start to turn on the enemy, who are so confused, they are fighting each other!

Israel is saved, the Lord triumphs for them.

Jonathan's Indiscetion

14.24ff Because of an order that Saul had imposed on his troops to fast, many of the men are hungry and exhausted. As they fight through woods, they see honeycombs around the place, but no one dares help themselves, because of the oath not to eat.

Jonathan, however, has not heard this command, and he takes some honey. He is then told of his father's orders, to which Jonathan responds that his father's oath is causing trouble for the army. He points to how the honey has given him energy to fight; if the other troops had been able to eat, it would not have been such a struggle in the battle.

14.31ff Because of their raging hunger, Israel's troops are even slaughtering animals and eating them raw and bloody, which is anathema to the Jews. Saul calls for a stone to be set up for letting out the blood of the animals, so that they don't sin.

Ahijah then suggests asking the Lord's will on the next day's fight, and whether they should pursue the Philistines. But he gets no word from the Lord. Something is amiss.

14.40-45 Saul realises that there is sin in the camp, which is hindering their progress. He promises death to anyone, including his son Jonathan, if they have broken a vow. The lot of the Lord is taken, and Jonathan is picked out as the sinner; Saul is told of his son's eating of the honey in the woods, and is about to slay him for it, until the men around him point out that it has been Jonathan's faith in action which has given them victory that day. They bind themselves with an oath to protect Jonathan, and Saul backs off from his violent intention.

What emerges from these episodes with Saul is his impatience and lack of dependence on the Lord. His son, Jonathan, demonstrates great courage and faith, while Saul is full of religious action and law-making – the burnt offerings, the oath, the bringing of the ark at the wrong moment. What comes out of this part of the story is the stark truth that although he is a leader and warrior, Saul is not following the Lord's way of doing things. This will be seen even more clearly in the next event recorded in the Scripture.

Day 89 1 Sam.14.46 – 48 & 52, 1 Chron. 5.10 & 18-22, 1 Sam 15

Saul's Folly

14.46 – 48 & 52 Saul is successful enough in his warfare against the peoples around Israel, although the Philistines continue to be a scourge on them all during his lifetime. He makes a point of recruiting the bravest into his army.

1 Chron.5.10, 18-22 During Saul's reign, the Hagarites, an eastern desert nomad people, nominally descended from Hagar, Abraham's concubine, are defeated by the transJordan tribes, the Reubenites, Gadites and Manassites. The glory for this victory is given to the Lord, who responded to prayer during the battle.

1 Sam 15.1-9 Samuel brings a command from the Lord to bring retribution on the Amalekites for their opposition to Israel in their progress from Egypt. They are to be treated as *cherem* (Heb. **כֶּרֶם**), forfeit to the Lord, and all they have is to be totally destroyed. The limited nature of God's judgment towards the peoples of this area is shown in the way in which the Kenites, descendants of Moses' wife and father-in-law are permitted to leave the Amalekite territory, because of their *chesed* (Heb **חֶסֶד**), their keeping of their covenant obligations towards Israel. (v.6).

The Amalekites are then defeated, but instead of treating them as *cherem*, and totally obliterating them, Saul keeps their king, Agag alive, and spares the choicest of the flocks.

1 Sam.15.10-21 The Lord speaks to Samuel of his regret at making Saul king. God says 'I repent' (Heb. **נָחַמְתִּי** *nachamti*) in the sense of regretting and rueing the step taken. Here we see a clear example of God's not having 'blueprinted' every moment of human history. That God should permit things to happen which end for Him in frustration is a sign of the freedom given to man to act according to his own will, even foolishly. As a result, Samuel mourns before the Lord, spending the night in prayer.

Next morning, Samuel goes to Carmel, in the north-west, where Saul has gone to set up a monument in his own honour. Saul claims he has acted in accordance with God's word. But Samuel disabuses him of the assumption that God is pleased with him. Saul says that he has spared the best of the flocks for sacrifice to the Lord, but Samuel interrupts him, and asks why Saul didn't obey the Lord. Saul protests that he did.

1 Sam 15.22,23 Samuel responds with a terrible pronouncement over Saul. Because the Lord values obedience more than sacrifices, and because rebellion and arrogance are a stench to the Lord, as a result of Saul's rejection of the Lord's word, he is now rejected as king.

1 Sam 15.24-35 Saul now tried to undo the damage, blaming the action on the people of whom he was afraid. He begs for forgiveness, but Samuel turns away from him. As he goes, Saul grabs hold of his robe, and it tears, a picture, Samuel says, of how the Kingship has been torn from Saul.

Saul continues to plead with Samuel, asking him at least to come and worship with him, so that he is not dishonoured before the people, and Samuel goes and worships with him. Here, Samuel calls for Agag, the Amalekite king who has been kept alive, and himself executes him at Gilgal.

Afer this, Samuel and Saul never meet again during his lifetime, although Samuel is full of grief for the king. Finally, the Lord's regret at having made Saul king is repeated.

Samuel's words echo to us through the millennia; the Lord desires obedience more than sacrifice, and rebellion and arrogance are as bad as sorcery. Saul's presumption was eventually his downfall. The answer was for Saul to stay close to God and seek His best. But instead, he sought his own glory and wealth, and was disowned by God, making the Lord sorry for his crowning.