

Introduction: “Is Saul Among the Prophets”?

Last time we skimmed over the group of prophets that was introduced in chapter 10, verse 5.

We don't know much about them.

How were they connected to Samuel?

Did they study with him?

And what did it mean to “prophecy”?

Like I said – lots of questions!

Not many answers.

There are only three things that I can say based on the Word of God!

First, they are associated with the “high place” –

a place of worship (a place for sacrifices and offerings).

Later in Israel's history, the high places will become a problem.

But for now – when the ark is in hibernation,

and there is no sanctuary –

the high places are the only places where you can worship God.

So the prophets are associated with worship.

Second, they prophesy with instruments!

Harp, tambourine, flute, and lyre.

Musical instruments will also be associated with worship –

with the sacrifices of Israel.

Here they are associated with prophecy.

Later, David will place the lyre in order to drive away an evil spirit from Saul.

And third, when Saul meets them (v6), the Spirit of the LORD will rush upon you,

and you will prophesy with them and be turned into another man.

And our story in our passage for tonight is what happens when the Spirit of the LORD turns Saul into another man!

We sometimes talk about how the first Joshua resembles the second Joshua (our Lord Jesus).

Perhaps we should also talk about how the first Saul resembles the second Saul (the apostle Paul).

Both have a remarkable encounter with God

(this Saul with the Holy Spirit – in Acts it will be the exalted Lord Jesus)

And both, it could be said, were turned into another man!

Now, at first blush, 1 Samuel 10-12 sounds awfully pro-Saul.

Israel sinned in rejecting the LORD as king,

but Saul seems to do everything right!

In other words, our author is an honest man.

He admits that Saul started out well.
But he also hints at what is to come.

1. Saul Proclaimed King (10:17-27)

¹⁷ Now Samuel called the people together to the LORD at Mizpah. ¹⁸ And he said to the people of Israel, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘I brought up Israel out of Egypt, and I delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of all the kingdoms that were oppressing you.’ ¹⁹ But today you have rejected your God, who saves you from all your calamities and your distresses, and you have said to him, ‘Set a king over us.’ Now therefore present yourselves before the LORD by your tribes and by your thousands.”

²⁰ Then Samuel brought all the tribes of Israel near, and the tribe of Benjamin was taken by lot. ²¹ He brought the tribe of Benjamin near by its clans, and the clan of the Matrites was taken by lot; and Saul the son of Kish was taken by lot. But when they sought him, he could not be found. ²² So they inquired again of the LORD, “Is there a man still to come?” and the LORD said, “Behold, he has hidden himself among the baggage.” ²³ Then they ran and took him from there. And when he stood among the people, he was taller than any of the people from his shoulders upward. ²⁴ And Samuel said to all the people, “Do you see him whom the LORD has chosen? There is none like him among all the people.” And all the people shouted, “Long live the king!”

²⁵ Then Samuel told the people the rights and duties of the kingship, and he wrote them in a book and laid it up before the LORD. Then Samuel sent all the people away, each one to his home. ²⁶ Saul also went to his home at Gibeah, and with him went men of valor whose hearts God had touched. ²⁷ But some worthless fellows said, “How can this man save us?” And they despised him and brought him no present. But he held his peace.

Now Samuel called the people to the LORD at Mizpah.

Mizpah was one of the three cities where Samuel judged Israel.

It was the place where Samuel had begun his judgeship in 1 Samuel 7:5-6.

But that is not *all* that you need to know about Mizpah!

Mizpah is the place where Israel had gathered to judge Benjamin
after the great crime of Gibeah in Judges 20:1

There is a certain irony in this.

Israel gathered at Mizpah in the days of the judges in order to destroy Benjamin
because of what Gibeah had done.

Now they are gathering at Mizpah in order to set a man from Gibeah of Benjamin
as king over them.

Either this is a beautiful story of the redemption of Gibeah,
or else it is a foreshadowing what is to come!

Or maybe both!

Samuel’s speech does not leave much doubt as to what we should expect:

*Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel,
‘I brought up Israel out of Egypt,
and I delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians
and from the hand of all the kingdoms that were oppressing you.’
But today you have rejected your God,
who saves you from all your calamities and your distresses,
and you have said to him, ‘Set a king over us.’ (10:18-19)*

God says, look, I have been faithful as your king.
I have defeated your enemies and delivered you from all who oppressed you.

In other words, God has done what a good king does.
But Israel has rejected God.
As I suggested last time,
this is not so much anti-monarchical as it is anti-Israel.
Israel has failed to be and to do what Israel was called to be and to do.
Therefore the establishment of the kingdom is the sign of the end of Israel—
just as Moses had foretold.

Samuel has already anointed Saul,
but that anointing must now be confirmed by the people.
And so Samuel brings all the tribes near and cast lots,
and the lot fell to Benjamin.
And of all the clans of Benjamin, the clan of the Matrites was taken.
And of all the clan of the Matrites, Saul the son of Kish was taken.

But when they sought him, he could not be found.
Saul is hiding.
Why?
Is it genuine or false humility?
Let’s not try to figure out what was in his heart.

The point of the text is quite different.
Normally the lot is taken of those who are present.
In this case the lot fell to someone who wasn’t present!
(The same thing will happen when Samuel goes to anoint one of the sons of Jesse)
The point is not what Saul is doing,
the point is that God is determined to make Saul king.

Saul is *undoubtedly* the man of God’s choosing!

*So they inquired again of the LORD, ‘Is there a man still to come?’
And the LORD said, ‘behold, he has hidden himself among the baggage.’
Then they ran and took him from there.
And when he stood among the people,*

*he was taller than any of the people from his shoulders upward.
And Samuel said to all the people,
‘Do you see him whom the LORD has chosen?
There is none like him among all the people.’
And all the people shouted,
‘Long live the king!’*

*Then Samuel told the people the rights and duties of the kingship,
and he wrote them in a book and laid it up before the LORD.
Then Samuel sent all the people away, each one to his own home.
Saul also went to his home at Gibeah,
and with him went men of valor whose hearts God had touched.*

This is a king you can follow.
And while there is certainly foreshadowing as the reader wonders,
“Can anything good come out of Gibeah?”
There is still every hope that Saul will prove to be a faithful king.
And God touches the hearts of men of valor,
and they follow this new, untested king of Israel.

*But some worthless fellows (literally, ‘sons of Beliar’—just like the sons of Eli)
said, ‘how can this man save us?’
And they despised him and brought him no present.
But he held his peace. (10:27)*

Saul understood that he was untested.
And so he endured the criticism—because his trust was in the LORD.

2. Saul Acts Like a King (11:1-15)

11 Then Nahash the Ammonite went up and besieged Jabesh-gilead, and all the men of Jabesh said to Nahash, “Make a treaty with us, and we will serve you.”² But Nahash the Ammonite said to them, “On this condition I will make a treaty with you, that I gouge out all your right eyes, and thus bring disgrace on all Israel.”³ The elders of Jabesh said to him, “Give us seven days’ respite that we may send messengers through all the territory of Israel. Then, if there is no one to save us, we will give ourselves up to you.”⁴ When the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul, they reported the matter in the ears of the people, and all the people wept aloud.

⁵ Now, behold, Saul was coming from the field behind the oxen. And Saul said, “What is wrong with the people, that they are weeping?” So they told him the news of the men of Jabesh. ⁶ And the Spirit of God rushed upon Saul when he heard these words, and his anger was greatly kindled. ⁷ He took a yoke of oxen and cut them in pieces and sent them throughout all the territory of Israel by the hand of the messengers, saying, “Whoever does not come out after Saul and Samuel, so shall it be done to his oxen!” Then the dread of the LORD fell upon the people, and they came out as one man. ⁸ When he mustered them at Bezek, the people of Israel were three hundred thousand, and the men of Judah thirty thousand. ⁹ And they said to the messengers who had come, “Thus shall you say to the men of Jabesh-gilead: ‘Tomorrow, by the time the sun is hot, you shall have salvation.’” When the messengers came and told the men of Jabesh,

they were glad. ¹⁰ Therefore the men of Jabesh said, "Tomorrow we will give ourselves up to you, and you may do to us whatever seems good to you." ¹¹ And the next day Saul put the people in three companies. And they came into the midst of the camp in the morning watch and struck down the Ammonites until the heat of the day. And those who survived were scattered, so that no two of them were left together. ¹² Then the people said to Samuel, "Who is it that said, 'Shall Saul reign over us?' Bring the men, that we may put them to death." ¹³ But Saul said, "Not a man shall be put to death this day, for today the LORD has worked salvation in Israel." ¹⁴ Then Samuel said to the people, "Come, let us go to Gilgal and there renew the kingdom." ¹⁵ So all the people went to Gilgal, and there they made Saul king before the LORD in Gilgal. There they sacrificed peace offerings before the LORD, and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly.

We've heard a good deal about the Philistines.

The Philistines were a threat from the west—living on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea. But at this time Israel faced a second threat from the east—the Ammonites.

The Ammonites were cousins of Israel,
being descended from Lot, Abraham's nephew.
But they had been enemies of Israel ever since the Exodus.

*Then Nahash the Ammonite went up and beseiged Jabesh-gilead,
and all the men of Jabesh said to Nahash,
'Make a treaty with us and we will serve you.'*

Such is the state of Israel!

There is no confidence left.

When an enemy attacks they are ready to capitulate.

The word "treaty" is *berith*—the Hebrew word for covenant.

They are ready to accept Nahash as their covenant lord--
which again illustrates how Israel has fallen from grace.

But Nahash is not just interested in winning—
he wants to humiliate Israel.

*On this condition I will make a treaty with you,
that I gouge out all your right eyes,
and thus bring disgrace on all Israel.*

Why does Nahash say this?

Nahash apparently is not interested simply in capturing Jabesh.

He wants to pick a fight.

This condition is plainly unacceptable.

If Israel refuses to fight,

that would be a clear invitation to Nahash to take over the whole country.

Remember Nahash,

because when we get to Goliath we will see Israel's king in a less glamorous light!

The men of Jabesh request seven days, and Nahash grants it.
He *wants* to provoke Israel into a fight – so he’s willing to wait!
And so the messengers go throughout Israel–
but especially they are sent to “Gibeah of Saul.”

Here’s where it is useful to know the history of Israel.

Why would the men of Jabesh send messengers to Gibeah of Saul?

Well, he’s the new king!

Shouldn’t he come to their defense?

Yes, but there is more to the story.

Remember that our story has already been bound up with the story of the sin of Gibeah.

Israel gathered at Mizpah and swore an oath to destroy Benjamin for that sin.

And only 600 men of Benjamin survived that purge.

All the women and children of Benjamin were killed.

And at Mizpah, Israel had sworn an oath,

“No one of us shall give his daughter in marriage to Benjamin.”

So now Benjamin was about to be destroyed from the face of the earth.

When the 600 survivors of the Benjaminite genocide died,
the entire tribe of Benjamin would be dead.

But Israel had also sworn an oath,

that if anyone of Israel failed to appear at Mizpah,

and to go up to battle against Benjamin,

he would be put to death.

And no one from Jabesh-Gilead had come.

And so Israel had gone and struck the inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead with the sword,
preserving only the 400 virgin daughters of Jabesh-Gilead,
and giving them as wives to the Benjaminites.

So Jabesh-Gilead is probably the home of Saul’s great-great grandmother.

This provides motivation for Saul to want to defend it.

It also provides us with additional fodder for wonder at what God is doing.

Saul is the offspring of *both* Gibeah—the city that can only be compared with Sodom!
and Jabesh-Gilead—the city of cowards who did not stand to fight for the LORD!

Either this is going to be a story of redemption as the lowest of the low is exalted,
or else this is but a foretaste of worse things to come!

Saul’s response is filled with irony:

Saul was coming from the field behind the oxen.

The king of Israel is still plowing his fields,
just like an ordinary guy!

*And Saul said, ‘What is wrong with the people that they are weeping?’
So they told him the news of the men of Jabesh.*

*And the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon Saul when he heard these words,
and his anger was greatly kindled.
He took a yoke of oxen and cut them in pieces
and sent them throughout all the territory of Israel by the hand of messengers,
saying, 'Whoever does not come out after Saul and Samuel,
so shall it be done to his oxen!
Then the dread of the LORD fell upon the people, and they came out as one man.*

Again,

on the surface it looks so good!

The Spirit of the LORD rushes upon Saul.

He calls the people to battle like the judges of old.

The dread of the LORD falls upon them and they follow him “as one man.”

But his chosen method of sending the message reminds us of the Levite of Judges 19,

who cut his dead concubine into 12 pieces and sent her body parts throughout Israel.

Saul’s great-great-great grandfather had barely survived what Israel did to Benjamin in that day.

Now Saul is imitating the slayers of his tribe.

But of course the slayers of his tribe had done so with God’s blessing!

And Saul also has God’s blessing as he goes up against the Ammonites,

and they slaughtered the Ammonites “so that no two of them were left together.”

Even as our first section concluded with the “sons of beliar”—the worthless men—
objecting to Saul’s coronation,

now there are those who say, “put them to death!” (11:12)

Note that they say this to *Samuel*.

Saul is the king,

but the people are still dealing with Samuel, the prophet, priest and judge
who is arguably still the real leader in Israel.

Without Samuel’s support, where would Saul be?

But Saul is coming into his own,

and he appears kingly in all that he does.

Not waiting for Samuel to speak,

Saul demonstrates that he is not only mighty in battle,
but he is wise and merciful.

He is not jealous of his own authority,

and he says, *Not a man shall be put to death this day,*

for today the LORD has worked salvation in Israel.

This is a king who recognizes that he is only the instrument of the LORD.

Greatly encouraged by this king, Samuel says,

Come, let us go to Gilgal and there renew the kingdom.

Saul had been proclaimed king in chapter 10.

But until he actually demonstrated his kingly authority
there was a provisional status to his kingship.

That is why the Saul of 1 Samuel 11 is still out in the fields plowing!

(It is perhaps useful to note that Saul is portrayed plowing his fields –
whereas David is portrayed as a shepherd caring for the flock.

Just like in Genesis 4:2, “Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground.”)

But now *all the people went to Gilgal, and there they made Saul king before the LORD in Gilgal.*

There they sacrificed peace offerings before the LORD,

and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly (11:15)

In other words, they worshiped God,

they partook of the peace offerings–rejoicing because the LORD had given them peace.

3. “You and Your King” (12:1-25)

12 And Samuel said to all Israel, “Behold, I have obeyed your voice in all that you have said to me and have made a king over you. ² And now, behold, the king walks before you, and I am old and gray; and behold, my sons are with you. I have walked before you from my youth until this day. ³ Here I am; testify against me before the LORD and before his anointed. Whose ox have I taken? Or whose donkey have I taken? Or whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed? Or from whose hand have I taken a bribe to blind my eyes with it? Testify against me and I will restore it to you.” ⁴ They said, “You have not defrauded us or oppressed us or taken anything from any man's hand.” ⁵ And he said to them, “The LORD is witness against you, and his anointed is witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand.” And they said, “He is witness.”

⁶ And Samuel said to the people, “The LORD is witness, who appointed Moses and Aaron and brought your fathers up out of the land of Egypt. ⁷ Now therefore stand still that I may plead with you before the LORD concerning all the righteous deeds of the LORD that he performed for you and for your fathers.

⁸ When Jacob went into Egypt, and the Egyptians oppressed them, then your fathers cried out to the LORD and the LORD sent Moses and Aaron, who brought your fathers out of Egypt and made them dwell in this place. ⁹ But they forgot the LORD their God. And he sold them into the hand of Sisera, commander of the army of Hazor, and into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand of the king of Moab. And they fought against them. ¹⁰ And they cried out to the LORD and said, ‘We have sinned, because we have forsaken the LORD and have served the Baals and the Ashtaroth. But now deliver us out of the hand of our enemies, that we may serve you.’ ¹¹ And the LORD sent Jerubbaal and Barak and Jephthah and Samuel and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side, and you lived in safety. ¹² And when you saw that Nahash the king of the Ammonites came against you, you said to me, ‘No, but a king shall reign over us,’ when the LORD your God was your king. ¹³ And now behold the king whom you have chosen, for whom you have asked; behold, the LORD has set a king over you. ¹⁴ If you will fear the LORD and serve him and obey his voice and not rebel against the commandment of the LORD, and if both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the LORD your God, it will be well. ¹⁵ But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then the hand of the LORD will be against you and your king. ¹⁶ Now therefore stand still and see this great thing that the LORD will do before your eyes.

¹⁷ *Is it not wheat harvest today? I will call upon the LORD, that he may send thunder and rain. And you shall know and see that your wickedness is great, which you have done in the sight of the LORD, in asking for yourselves a king.* ¹⁸ *So Samuel called upon the LORD, and the LORD sent thunder and rain that day, and all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel.*

¹⁹ *And all the people said to Samuel, "Pray for your servants to the LORD your God, that we may not die, for we have added to all our sins this evil, to ask for ourselves a king."* ²⁰ *And Samuel said to the people, "Do not be afraid; you have done all this evil. Yet do not turn aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart.* ²¹ *And do not turn aside after empty things that cannot profit or deliver, for they are empty.* ²² *For the LORD will not forsake his people, for his great name's sake, because it has pleased the LORD to make you a people for himself.* ²³ *Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you, and I will instruct you in the good and the right way.* ²⁴ *Only fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart. For consider what great things he has done for you.* ²⁵ *But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king."*

With the kingdom safely established,
and the hearts of the people turned toward their new king,
Samuel steps down and hands over authority to the new king.

*Behold I have obeyed your voice in all that you have said to me and have made a king over you.
And now, behold, the king walks before you, and I am old and gray.*

Samuel asks *whom have I defrauded?*
I have been your judge for all these years.
If I have done wrong, show me, and I will restore it.

And the people say, no, we have nothing against you.
You have been faithful as our prophet and judge.

Okay,
If I have been faithful, then you can trust my words!

And he reminds them of their history.
*Stand still that I may plead with you before the LORD
concerning all the righteous deeds of the LORD
that he performed for you and for your fathers. (12:7)*

And Samuel traces the history of the Exodus, and the Conquest,
and the whole history of the judges,
how Israel continually *forgot the LORD their God. (12:9).*

And now you have asked for a king, and behold, here he is!
*If you will fear the LORD and serve him and obey his voice
and not rebel against the commandment of the LORD,
and if both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the LORD your God,
it will be well.*

*But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD,
but rebel against the commandment of the LORD,
then the hand of the LORD will be against you and your king. (12:14-15)*

What does Samuel mean by “the commandment”?

In Deuteronomy we hear that “the commandment” is the shema—the great commandment in Dt 6 to love the LORD your God with all your heart, soul and strength. That is most likely what Samuel has in mind.

The call to Israel and its King has not changed.

You have utterly failed to be and to do what God has called you to be and to do.
But your failure in the past does not mean that you must fail.
You are called to fear the LORD and serve him.

But *your wickedness is great* in asking for a king.

And as a sign of their great wickedness,
Samuel calls down rain and thunder in the middle of the wheat harvest.

(The next prophet to do this will be Elijah)

And all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel.

And they said, *Pray for your servants to the LORD your God that we may not die,
for we have added to all our sins this evil, to ask for ourselves a king.*

I think this demonstrates again that 1 Samuel is not anti-monarchical, but anti-Israel.

The request for a king simply demonstrated the failure of Israel.
They had failed to love the LORD their God with all their heart,
all their soul, and all their strength.
The request for a king was simply part of that unbelieving heart.

And Samuel’s response vindicates this approach.

Verses 20-25 are one of the most beautiful pastoral responses in the whole Bible.

Samuel speaks this to Israel,
but I speak it to you!

You, after all,

have also turned aside from following the LORD.
You have not loved the LORD your God with your whole heart!
You have not been content with the kingly rule of Jesus Christ,
but you have sought out other gods—
other desires that have pulled you away from the living God.

And to you *I say*:

*Do not be afraid; you have done all this evil.
Yet do not turn aside from following the LORD,
but serve the LORD with all your heart.
And do not turn aside after empty things that cannot profit or deliver,
for they **are** empty.*

The things that you are chasing are empty!
They cannot satisfy!

And remember what God has said!!

*For the LORD will not forsake his people,
for his great name's sake,
because it has pleased the LORD to make you a people for himself.*

*Moreover, as for me, far be it from me
that I should sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you,
and I will instruct you in the good and the right way.
Only fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart.
For consider what great things he has done for you.*

But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king!

Israel had believed a lie.

They had believed that a king could deliver them
by going up before them against their enemies.

In fact, the king could only deliver them if the LORD went before them
(as Saul said in 11:13).

What lie are you believing?

Every time you sin you are believing a lie!
What lie have you given a foothold in your heart?

What is it that you fear?

Are you more concerned with what God thinks of you?
Or with what others think of you?