Since I was a kid, I have loved the Book of First Samuel. There is a romance, a war, a drama - one after the other in this delightful book. It has amazing characters like Samuel, Saul, David, Bathsheba, Solomon, Rehoboam, Jeroboam, and so many others. In this extended study, we will delve into some of the greatest stories ever told!  

Wednesday, May 13, 2020 / First Assembly of God / Ft. Myers, Florida  
with Pastor Dan Betzer

The Jewish people arrived in the Promised Land of Israel sometime around 1400 B.C. For the next several centuries they were a ragtag un-united group of twelve tribes (named for the sons of Jacob) until their first king (Saul) was named and anointed by the prophet Samuel around 1030. He was followed by David, and the Israeli monarchy was begun. The historical story is given in I and II Samuel as well as in I and II Kings - and then somewhat retold in I and II Chronicles.

The first character we see is Samuel, the prophet. We just celebrated Mother’s Day. The lady who bore Samuel was a Godly woman, as the very first chapter teaches us:

1 Samuel 1:1-17

Now there was a certain man of Ramathaim-zophim, of mount Ephraim, and his name was Elkanah, the son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephrathite: [2] And he had
two wives; the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other
Peninnah: and Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children.
[3] And this man went up out of his city yearly to worship and to
sacrifice unto the Lord of hosts in Shiloh. And the two sons of Eli,
Hophni and Phinehas, the priests of the Lord, were there.
[4] And when the time was that Elkanah offered, he gave to Peninnah
his wife, and to all her sons and her daughters, portions: [5] But unto
Hannah he gave a worthy portion; for he loved Hannah: but the Lord
had shut up her womb. [6] And her adversary also provoked her sore,
for to make her fret, because the Lord had shut up her womb. [7] And
as he did so year by year, when she went up to the house of the Lord, so
she provoked her; therefore she wept, and did not eat. [8] Then said
Elkanah her husband to her, Hannah, why weepest thou? and why
eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved? am not I better to thee
than ten sons?
[9] So Hannah rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh, and after they
had drunk. Now Eli the priest sat upon a seat by a post of the temple of
the Lord. [10] And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the
Lord, and wept sore. [11] And she vowed a vow, and said, O Lord of
hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and
remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine
handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days
of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head. [12] And it
came to pass, as she continued praying before the Lord, that Eli marked
her mouth. [13] Now Hannah, she spake in her heart; only her lips
moved, but her voice was not heard: therefore Eli thought she had been
drunken. [14] And Eli said unto her, How long wilt thou be drunken?
put away thy wine from thee. [15] And Hannah answered and said, No,
my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunken neither
wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord.
[16] Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial: for out of the
abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto. [17] Then
Eli answered and said, Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee
thy petition that thou hast asked of him.
What a difference from many women today who willingly abort their unborn. The number now is in the millions. I cannot imagine that God will not hold America responsible for this slaughter of the innocent.

The child that Hannah bore was Samuel. When he was born, she dedicated him to God. That is something many churches, including ours, still follow - the dedication of their newborn. I cannot remember it, of course, but my folks assured me that one very cold Iowa winter day they bundled me up on a Sunday morning and got me to church where the Pastor (Smith) dedicated me to God. Note: That did not save me! When I became of age to understand the issues involved, I had to commit my own life to the Lord (salvation). But I have never been able to escape the reality of being “given” or dedicated to God as an infant. By my own will, I could have brushed it off, but there was just something about it that I have never escaped.

Samuel remained true to his calling. There were times, of course, when his humanity showed through. His dealings with King David might have been more circumspect. And his impatience with King Saul sometimes betrayed his true feelings. But that could have been expected, I think. For after all, before Saul, Samuel was “everything,” king, judge, counselor - everything.

But... more about Saul in a moment. First, I take you back to a drama we did in our sanctuary many years ago - to the time when Samuel first encountered young David and anointed him as the future king. Not a good time during those in-between years. It would be over fifteen years before the crown would rest upon David’s head. But, back to the drama. Here we will see Samuel ponder the great decision to anoint David - a task he did not relish and hoped would just pass away. ((VIDEO))

**KING SAUL**

When David finally became King, he ruled for a long time, 40 years in all, 33 in Jerusalem (when David made it his kingdom center) and 7 in Hebron, south of Jerusalem. Until he was crowned, David fled from Saul who hated him as he recognized the true greatness in the young man, a greatness he himself did not have. David and his small band of followers hid in the canyons of EnGedi (on the eastern bank of the Dead Sea).
We must remember that the tribes of Israel were not united. The 12 tribes were scattered and constantly battered by the Philistines (a nation that had migrated to Israel from the islands of the Mediterranean at much the same time as Joshua led the Israelites into Canaan (the Promised Land).

Probably most preachers I have met do not appreciate King Saul and usually put him down in their sermons or Bible studies. I am not one of them. I have a grudging respect for the man because:

1) He was a good father. His three sons died fighting at his side, while David’s kids were disloyal all too many times; and

2) It was Saul who united the 12 tribes into a cohesive and powerful nation.

However, Saul certainly had a flaw - and it proved to be fatal. Again and again he showed he had little regard for God and just did whatever he wanted – often times very wrong – whereas David, when he made mistakes would fall on his face before God, asking forgiveness – as we shall see as we go along. David was a womanizer; as far as we know Saul was not. I believe that was made apparent by Saul’s sons showing their loyalty and love for their father:

1 Samuel 31:8-13

And it came to pass on the morrow, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, that they found Saul and his three sons fallen in mount Gilboa. [9] And they cut off his head, and stripped off his armour, and sent into the land of the Philistines round about, to publish it in the house of their idols, and among the people. [10] And they put his armour in the house of Ashtaroth: and they fastened his body to the wall of Beth-shan. [11] And when the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard of that which the Philistines had done to Saul; [12] All the valiant men arose, and went all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth-shan, and came to Jabesh, and burnt them there. [13] And they took their bones, and buried them under a tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days.
Beth-shan - where Saul’s dead and headless body was placed on the wall. The foreground of this picture is the city sometime after the time of Jesus, while the huge mound in the background is the Old Testament “tel” of Beth-shan where Saul’s body was pinned.

The prophet Samuel was opposed to naming a king and argued:

1 Samuel 8:14-16
And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. [15] And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. [16] And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work.

And Samuel was right! In order to amalgamate a powerful and united nation Saul did all those things. But it was in the area of the military that Saul was exceptional. He mobilized the tribal militias and pushed the Philistines back most of the time - but not all the time.
His protégée, young David, took out the celebrated giant Goliath at the Valley of Elah. I may take some time with this because while young David was cheered for his victory, the truth is that Goliath never had a chance. He was actually a “sitting duck.

At last, Saul had to put David at the head of his army, igniting an intense rivalry between the king and the shepherd boy. But, Saul’s days were numbered, as we shall see.