

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 454

1 Samuel 8-10, Part 1

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Episode Summary

In 1 Samuel 8 the people of Israel ask Samuel to choose a king for them who would be like the kings of other nations (1 Sam 8:5). Samuel opposes the idea, giving rise to a larger interpretive question: Was Israel wrong in wanting a king? In this episode of the podcast, we explore the wider context of the “king making” section of 1 Samuel 8-10. Specifically, what do the Torah and other passages, specially those prior to 1 Samuel in the biblical storyline, say about kingship? Was the idea looked upon positively or negatively?

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 454: 1 Samuel 8-10, Part 1. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike! How 'ya doing?

MH: So-so today, but we'll power through it. We've got something interesting to talk about.

TS: Yeah, absolutely. We're covering three chapters here for Part 1. Looking forward to it. But before we get into it, Mike, real quick we need to give a shout-out to our sponsor, Logos (if you don't mind). We're talking about Logos 10, specifically—the new version that's out. What more can we say that we have not already said, but you've mentioned it and we've mentioned it numerous times. If you want to dive deeper into biblical study of any nature—prep for a sermon or just understanding a difficult passage or having a reading plan—you can do all that and more with the study tools and theological library in Logos 10.

MH: Yeah, and in this case, as I always recommend, people can get into the ecosystem of Logos with a small base package and then start adding the things that you want. In this episode of the podcast, we're going to be interacting with two scholarly journal articles, both of which are available in Logos. That isn't true for lots of journals, but other than getting the access to journals through library databases (maybe in your town or a local university or something like that),

Logos is actually a solution for that, at least to a large extent. They have dozens of journals available in their format, so we're going to be using some of that today.

TS: Perfect, absolutely. And you can find the best package for you by going to www.logos.com/nakedbible. With it, you can uncover biblical insights, whether you have five minutes or five hours. And the new Logos is lightning-fast on your desktop, web, mobile, anywhere you can access it. It has a sleek, modern look that helps you focus on what matters in scripture. It's endorsed by so many people, including Dr. Heiser here on our show (as he just mentioned). So live in the world with Logos 10. Visit www.logos.com/nakedbible to find the best Logos package for you. Again, we want to thank them for sponsoring our show. All right, Mike! With that, I'm interested in 1 Samuel 8-10!

MH: This is Part 1. It's the backdrop to the wider issue of kingship in Israel. When you hit 1 Samuel 8, this is the chapter where Israel asks for a king. I was always taught in church growing up as a teenager and a new believer that it was wrong for Israel to ask for a king. And that seems to be what's suggested in 1 Samuel 8. But there's actually a problem with that because earlier than 1 Samuel 8, like back in the Torah (back in Genesis, for instance), you have positive endorsements of the idea of kingship. In Deuteronomy, you have rules for a king. So it doesn't seem that kingship itself was wrong, so what's going on in 1 Samuel 8-10? Well, in this Part 1, we're going to go through the larger issue of kingship and that's going to form sort of our look at the wider backdrop. And I'm going to interact with three scholarly sources primarily. Two them are journal articles and one of them is a book. The journal articles themselves interact with this book, as well. So the articles are David Howard, "The Case for Kingship in the Old Testament Narrative Books and the Psalms." That was from *Trinity Journal*, Volume 9, back in 1988. And then David Howard wrote a follow-up article, "The Case for Kingship in Deuteronomy and the Former Prophets" in *Westminster Theological Journal*, 52:1, in 1990. And they're interacting with a book by Gerald Eddie Gerbrandt entitled *Kingship According to the Deuteronomistic History*, which is part of the SBL (Society of Biblical Literature) Dissertation Series (SBLDS), back in 1986. So these are going to be our three sources (not exclusively, but primarily) to interact with as we discuss this whole issue.

5:00

By way of introduction, in one of Howard's articles, he begins this discussion about kingship. Well, he does this in roughly similar ways in both the articles so we might as well include both here. For example, here's one of them. He writes:

The issue of God's attitude toward the human institution of kingship in Israel is one concerning which the biblical texts appear — on the surface — to be ambiguous. On the one hand, God blessed the monarchy, and he even chose a kingly line from which to appear in human form. An impressive theology of kingship can be traced throughout the OT and into the NT. On the other hand, we read in several texts in 1 Samuel about Samuel's and God's displeasure over the Israelites' request for a king, and it appears that God's granting of a king is a second-best concession to the people's sinful request, much in the way that Moses permitted divorce as a concession to the people's hardness of heart ([Matt 19:8](#)).

However, this analogy is not a good one, since God did not bless and use divorce the way he did the institution of kingship. Furthermore, the prevailing pictures of the idea of monarchy in the OT are consistently positive ones; it is difficult to accept the fact that this view of the monarchy was a concession to a second-best ideal. The answer to the apparent tension in the biblical texts is rather to be sought in the reasons for Israel's request for a king, and not in the question of whether God intended for there to be a king in Israel at all.

And then in another place, he writes this:

The question of whether God was originally in favor of the institution of kingship in Israel has received much attention among biblical scholars, but often the conclusions reached are less than satisfactory. This is at least partly because the biblical texts themselves would seem to point in opposite directions on the issue. On the one hand, a large body of texts portrays the Davidic kingship in very positive terms and a significant biblical theology arises around it. On the other hand, several texts, particularly in 1 Samuel, appear to be against the institution.

The conclusion usually reached concerning this state of affairs is that God was not in favor of this institution, and that whatever positive pictures of the monarchy be found in Scripture represent either his gracious accommodation to an inferior ideal or opposing (usually minority) viewpoints within Israel. Neither of these solutions is entirely satisfactory, however. This is particularly so in view of the predominantly positive view of the monarchy in most of the OT.

Now in both of these articles, Howard interacts heavily with the book by Gerbrandt as he finds his presentation of the kingship problem persuasive. And I would agree. I'm in agreement with Gerbrandt and so I'd be in agreement with Howard's assessment of it.

What we're going to do is we're going to work through those interactions in this episode and then turn to the details of 1 Samuel 8-10 in the next episode. So again, we're going to go through the theoretical stuff (the broad overview) here, then next time we'll hit the details of 1 Samuel 8-10.

Gerbrandt's thesis is that the view in what is commonly called the Deuteronomistic History of the institution of kingship in Israel is essentially a favorable one and not a negative one, as is commonly supposed. The real issue in the biblical texts is what kind of monarchy was to exist or be exercised, not whether Israel should have a monarchy or not. In Gerbrandt's own words, Israel's king was:

...to lead Israel by being the covenant administrator; then he could trust Yahweh to deliver. At the heart of this covenant was Israel's obligation to be totally loyal to Yahweh." The godly king was to lead the people in worship and in keeping covenant, and to trust in *YHWH* to fight Israel's battles. The true reason for the disapproval of the people's request for a king in 1 Samuel 8 was because they wanted a king "like all the nations" (8:5, 20), who would "go out before us and fight our battles" (8:20). Those kings who were the closest to the ideal — David, Hezekiah, and Josiah — were ones whom the texts especially emphasize as trusting in YHWH and keeping the Law.

10:00

Now in Howard's own view (and I'd agree), Gerbrandt's thesis provides a compelling argument in its harmonizing of those texts within the Deuteronomistic History that have appeared on the surface to be anti-kingship and those that are clearly pro-kingship. And since it is the texts within this corpus that appear to be the most anti-kingship, his solution effectively resolves the tension. For establishing the coherence of this approach, Howard applies it to narrative books—books in the Torah, Ruth, Chronicles, for example—and in the Psalms in one of his articles. Then he applies it to the Deuteronomistic History in another. For our purposes, we won't worry about the Psalms. Just think of the Davidic or Messianic Psalms and their positive portrayal of kingship, and you get the idea. Psalms are very positive when it comes to the kingship, so why do we get what we get in 1 Samuel 8? We've taken note of some of the data in the interviews with David Mitchell. We've talked about some of those Psalms, so we're not going to go back and repeat that material here. This also isn't an exhaustive survey of the passages that could contribute to the discussion. We're just going to pick a few. We're going to be more selective for time's sake.

We'll go back and look at the Torah, and we'll start in Genesis. Howard writes that it is significant that from the very beginning, the promise of kings was given

to the Patriarchs. On three different occasions, God included kings as a blessing (along with other blessings) upon Abraham and his family. For instance, Genesis 17:6 says:

⁶ I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you.

That's spoken to and about Abraham. Later in the chapter (Genesis 17:16):

¹⁶ I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her."

That's spoken to Abraham about Sarah. And Genesis 35:11 says:

¹¹ And God said to him, "I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply. A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come from your own body.

That was spoken to and about Jacob, in this instance. And these references are not merely predictions of a negative state of affairs that would obtain at some later time (again, assuming kingship was negative). Rather, they are part and parcel of good things—positive things—of blessings that God intended to confer upon Abraham's line. Genesis 49:10 is another example. Let's just read that. This is ESV:

**¹⁰ The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
until tribute comes to him;
and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.**

This is the famous scepter prophecy. There are lots of text-critical issues with this passage. Some of your English translations might read differently than "the scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a ruler's staff from between his feet." Some other translations might have something about Shiloh in there. But again, that's because there's a text-critical problem that needs to be resolved. So what ESV has and what the NET Bible has (which is similar to ESV) is going to be the proper translation. Howard notes of the passage that almost all commentators and translations understand the first lemma ("the scepter") and the second ("the ruler's staff") by noting the royal imagery of tribute.

The evidence of royal imagery in the passage includes the following: (1) v 10b α , which depicts a ruler's arrival; (2) v 10b β , where the obedience of the peoples is fit only for a king; (3) v 11a, where the reference to the donkey anticipates the royal imagery of Zech 9:9, in which the victorious king comes riding on a donkey (and cf., of course, the NT references to Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on a donkey, Matt 21:1-9 and parallels); (4) the language throughout vv 10b β , 11-12 — and, indeed, all of vv 8-12 — is typical of a royal oracle, in promising peace, prosperity, and uncontested dominion.

These are all positive portrayals and are anticipatory of a good future for Israel, not something negative.

Elsewhere in the Torah, we have Numbers 24:17-19. It's another scepter prophecy. It reads as follows:

15:00 **17 I see him, but not now;
I behold him, but not near:
 a star shall come out of Jacob,
and a scepter shall rise out of Israel;
 it shall crush the forehead of Moab
and break down all the sons of Sheth.
18 Edom shall be dispossessed;
 Seir also, his enemies, shall be dispossessed.
 Israel is doing valiantly.
19 And one from Jacob shall exercise dominion
 and destroy the survivors of cities!"**

There's really no way to construe this as a negative view of kingship. This is a star coming out of Jacob and a scepter that shall arise out of Israel, and it's a good thing. The elect people of God (Jacob/Israel) are going to have kingship. They're going to have power and dominion over their enemies.

The third example (and this is outside the Torah; it's in the book of Ruth)... As is well-recognized by Old Testament scholars, the royal context and significance of the book of Ruth derive from the wording of the blessing of Boaz in 4:11-12 and in the Davidic genealogy at the end of the book (Ruth 4:18-22). Both the blessing and genealogy link David with Judah and the Patriarchs. Howard writes as follows:

The blessing on Boaz does this in at least three ways. First, it mentions two of Jacob's wives: Rachel and Leah (who was Judah's mother). Second, it includes Ephrathah and Bethlehem, which are first juxtaposed in Gen 35:16–19, in connection with the death of Rachel and the birth of Benjamin, step-mother and brother of Judah, respectively. Third, it mentions Judah himself, the father of Perez by Tamar, who are also mentioned. Ruth herself is to be like all three of these patriarchal wives, who were mothers of a great lineage.

In the genealogy, the ancestry of David is traced from Perez to David, including Boaz, Ruth's husband. This serves to link the short genealogy in 4:17 with the mention of Perez in 4:12. The significance of Perez here is that he was the son of Judah [MH: again, the kingly line].

Ruth and Boaz are thus pivotal figures in the Davidic line. The blessing in 4:11–12 shows us their ties with Judah, Tamar, and the patriarchs; the genealogies in 4:17, 18–22 show us their ties with David. The emphasis on the patriarchs as a whole serves to highlight the continuities between the Davidic and Abrahamic Covenants, particularly since nothing concerning Moses or the Mosaic Covenant is mentioned in the book.

Again, outside the Torah, another good example Howard uses is 1 and 2 Chronicles. So you have a number of positive assessments of kingship and then you get to Chronicles. Scholars and students of Chronicles know that much of the two books concerns David and his dynasty. The Chronicler as a habit omits negative information about David and Solomon in his accounting of their reigns and lives, therefore presenting an ideal kingship—what life in Israel should have and could have been like, had the kingdom not split and had David and Solomon not sinned in the ways they did. Howard summarizes the data as follows:

1-3 Chronicles opens with a massive genealogical section which begins in chapter 1 with Adam and ends in chapter 9 with the post-exilic community. The shaping of these genealogies highlights the interest in Judah, the Davidic dynasty, and the institution by David of centralized worship at Jerusalem and the Temple. For instance, the introductory section (chap. 1) moves quickly from Adam to Jacob ("Israel"), and then the body of the genealogical section (chaps. 2–8) focuses in depth on Jacob's descendants, mostly from the pre-exilic period, and particularly from the time of David.

David himself is the focus of the remainder of 1 Chronicles (chaps. 10–29) and his son Solomon of the first part of 2 Chronicles (chaps. 1–9). The remainder of the

book focuses on the fortunes of the kingdom of Judah, the heir of the promises of the Davidic Covenant (chaps. 10–36). In particular, the importance of David and Solomon as ones who established the Temple and the true cult in Jerusalem is an important theme in Chronicles.

20:00

The point here is that this is clearly a positive portrayal of kingship. There is no "we shouldn't have asked for a king" lament in any of it. 2 Chronicles ends with the hope of the reestablishment of the centralized worship in Jerusalem that David and Solomon had launched (2 Chronicles 36:22-23).

As far as the Deuteronomistic History (the Deuteronomistic material of which 1 Samuel is a part), this material is the core of the issue for many scholars, due to the negative portrayals of kingship in Deuteronomy and criticisms of kingship in books like 1 and 2 Samuel. Since Howard is an evangelical and is not fully committed to the source-critical views of JDEP or of the Deuteronomistic Hypothesis (that Deuteronomy is entirely non-Mosaic), he disagrees with Gerbrandt on the authorship issue. Howard opens his second article with a disclaimer. He wants to say he agrees with a lot that's going on in the talk about the Deuteronomistic History (and I would put myself in here, as well), but as far as the matter of Deuteronomy having nothing to do with Mosaic authorship, he's a little more dubious (and I would be there, too). Howard writes in one of his articles:

The term "Deuteronomistic History" refers to the books from Deuteronomy to 2 Kings. As used by Gerbrandt and most others, it also assumes some type of unified authorship for all of these books in one or more strata of the texts. I use the term here to refer to the same corpus, but I understand the term "Deuteronomistic" in a descriptive way—i.e., to refer to those books or ideas reflective of the distinctive viewpoints found in Deuteronomy—with no conclusions concerning authorship of Deuteronomy or the other books implicit in my use of the term. Similarly, Gerbrandt speaks of the "Deuteronomist" to refer to the author of this unified corpus. I would prefer to use a more neutral term, such as the "author(s)" or "editor(s)" of the final work. For convenience, however, I use Gerbrandt's term here throughout, to avoid the cumbersome device of constantly distinguishing Gerbrandt's use and my own.

And that's fair. It's good of him to mention that. Now, Gerbrandt's view is that the Hebrew Bible (including the Deuteronomistic writer or editor) presents a unified, positive view of kingship throughout the whole thing. More precisely, he writes:

The correct question with which to confront the Deuteronomist... is not whether he was anti-kingship or pro-kingship. Rather, we need to ask what *kind* of kingship he saw as ideal for Israel, or what *role* kingship was expected to play for Israel.

Now as Howard's summary article points out, Gerbrandt's major contribution in this book is in detailing what type of kingship the Deuteronomist favored. He shows that the function of the God-fearing king was to lead Israel in keeping covenant and to trust God for deliverance. Israel's sin was in asking for a king who would be like those other nations, leading the nation in battle. Now, Gerbrandt states that the king was...

...to lead Israel by being the covenant administrator; then he could trust Yahweh to deliver. At the heart of this covenant was Israel's obligation to be totally loyal to Yahweh (page 102).

Rather than start where most scholars do to study the Deuteronomist view of kingship (they typically start with 1 Samuel 7-12, where we're at now), Gerbrandt starts with 2 Kings 18-23 and its description of the reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah. The rationale here is that by studying the Deuteronomist's assessment of these two kings, one can best discern the Deuteronomists attitude toward kingship generally. As Howard notes:

Of the 20 Judahite kings, only eight are judged by the biblical writer to have been "good" kings, and, of these, six are said to have neglected to remove the high places. Thus, only Hezekiah and Josiah remain, clearly on a higher plane than the others. Of each of these it is said that there was none like him before or after (2 Kgs 18:5; 23:25).

A few observations here on Josiah and Hezekiah, drawn from Howard's work, will suffice. As far as Josiah is concerned, Howard writes:

25:00

For the Deuteronomist, the central point of evaluation was whether the king "turned" toward Yahweh in devotion and loyalty or not. Josiah "turned [*šûb*] to YHWH" (2 Kgs 23:25).

...[T]he specific phrase found in 2 Kgs 23:25 to describe *how* Josiah turned to YHWH—"with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might"—is found again in the Deuteronomistic History only at Deut 6:5, which instructs Israel as to how to love YHWH its God. This is the desired response to Deut 6:4, the Shema.

[Howard quoting Gerbrandt] “Deuteronomy 5–11 present the fundamental requirements of Israel’s law, and the *Shema* (6:4–9) represents the heart of this law. Thus, “By using this phrase the Deuteronomist was giving Josiah the highest marks possible. King Josiah had obeyed the law of Moses” (p. 55).

The basis for this high evaluation of Josiah was essentially that Josiah not only turned to YHWH in his private life, he acted upon this repentance in public as well. The bulk of 2 Kings 22–23 is devoted to the specific reforms that Josiah instituted and how he led Judah in covenant renewal. In all his acts, he functioned as a true leader of the nation. In this respect, he “adopted a role similar to that which Moses and Joshua had earlier fulfilled” (p. 67). He was the administrator or mediator of the covenant in the same way that these two had been. [MH:That was a quotation taken from Gerbrandt.]

Now as far as Hezekiah goes, Howard summarizes:

Like Josiah, Hezekiah was in a category all his own (2 Kgs 18:5). However, the basis for the high evaluation of Hezekiah is *not*, as most scholars have supposed, his reforming activities. These are mentioned only twice in three chapters: in 18:4 and 18:22.

Rather than his reforming activity, Gerbrandt well notes that the basis for the high praise is Hezekiah’s *trusting* (*bṭḥ*) in YHWH. This term is found at the core of the Deuteronomist’s evaluation (18:5).

Another significant emphasis is on the root *dbq* (“to cling”): it occurs ten times in this section (nine in chap. 18). Outside of this passage, the Deuteronomist uses the term only six more times, and none of these has anything to do with trusting in YHWH (p. 77). In this passage, however, that is precisely the thrust

What Gerbrandt argued (and what Howard has summarized) is that this type of kingship was desirable and the goal of kingship all along—to have someone to lead the nation in believing loyalty, someone to be the par excellence example of trusting in Yahweh. Militarily, this meant that the king would follow in the steps of Moses and Joshua, believing that Yahweh would fight for Israel and soliciting his direction in battle. The request for kingship in 1 Samuel 8 was viewed negatively because of the way it was sought and why (again, the circumstances of how it was sought). Howard summarizes things this way:

The significance of Gerbrandt’s work is at least twofold. First, he provides an effective counterargument to the widely held view that the Deuteronomist was anti-kingship. Thus, the way is opened for seeing the important theology that

developed around the Davidic kingship as having been part of God’s intent from the beginning, and not merely an afterthought, a concession to a second-best ideal, or a reflection of David’s political dominance. Second, he succeeds in clarifying—in a way that had not been done previously—why Israel’s request to have a king “like the nations” was so devastating to her relationship with YHWH: it broke their covenantal relationship and “deposed” YHWH as Israel’s warrior.

That's very important. It essentially removed Yahweh from the place of leading Israel in battle. So in the circumstances in which Israel asked for a king, this is effectively what it did—they forsook Yahweh's role as military leader. Howard:

30:00

It ought not be argued then that kingship of itself was wrong or undesirable. The Torah, messianic psalms, and other passages call for it or presuppose it. Rather, the kingship question was one of kind or type, and had believing loyalty to Yahweh at its core. This is certainly part of the logic of each king having a copy of the Torah at their disposal, for right living and leadership.

To me, this whole thesis of Gerbrandt makes sense out of the idea that the king was supposed to copy out the law for himself—have a copy and actually produce a copy for himself, for his reign. That rule makes sense in light of this whole idea that kingship was good. The king was supposed to be the ideal leader in terms of believing loyalty in Yahweh. So Deuteronomy 17:18 says this:

18 “And when he [the king] sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests.

Of this expectation (and it's really a duty—that the king was supposed to write out his own copy of the law), Jeff Tigay notes in his commentary in Deuteronomy:

[“and when he sits on the throne”] probably means “as soon as he takes the throne.” The study of God’s Teaching is a duty incumbent on every Israelite from childhood on (5:1; 6:6–8; 11:18–19). The king must continue to study it while in office. It is to be not only a past influence on him but a current one as well... [S]ince the king is under his own authority and no one will rebuke him for his actions, and he has the power to harm the people, he must study God’s Teaching as a safeguard and a constant reminder to subdue his inclinations and obey God...

That's Tigay's assessment of that, which I think is quite good. Then he comments about “he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law”:

Rather, “he shall write a copy of this Teaching for himself on a scroll from the one that is in the charge of the levitical priests.” The king makes his copy from the original given to the priests by Moses after he finished writing it (31:9, 24–26). According to Philo, the king is required to make his own copy because writing makes a more lasting impression than does merely reading (Philo, Spec. 4.160).

So again, I think this is really helpful to show how Israel's king was supposed to be the model of believing loyalty in Yahweh. And when it came to the military, he was supposed to view Yahweh as the one who fights for Israel, who fights their battles. And he would receive instructions from Yahweh like Moses and Joshua did in what to do. But that is not why Israel asked for a king in 1 Samuel 8. They asked for a king because they wanted a military deliverer. After all, Samuel in 1 Samuel 7 had just delivered Israel from the Philistines. This is what they want. They want somebody to be like the rest of the nations, to have a king that leads them in battle. Again, that runs contrary to what God wanted kingship to be as an institution. He wanted to be Israel's own warrior and he would work through the king. But Israel doesn't see that. Israel just sees having a king like the other nations, and that was the problem.

To wrap up, this sort of kingship was the goal and was always desirable. This is Gerbrandt's thesis, and I think it's a coherent one, given the rest of scripture around 1 Samuel. We should not let a few comments in 1 Samuel 8 make us forget this. So next time we'll take a look at the people's request for the kingship and how Saul became Israel's king.

TS: I like that practice: "My king is writing down the law so they don't forget." I think we need to practice that in today's time!

MH: Yeah, wouldn't that be nice if they actually had to write out their own copy of the constitution?

TS: Absolutely. I don't know how we'd get that started, but we need to.

MH: Not a bad idea.

TS: All right, another good one. Looking for Part 2 next week. Don't forget to go visit our sponsor, Logos. You can get Logos 10 at www.logos.com/nakedbible. We look forward to next week, Mike. And with that, I want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.