A King for Israel

Throughout many generations of early Israelite history charismatic leaders upon whom the spirit of the Lord descended delivered the Israelites from the hand of their enemies. These deliverers and saviors were known as judges. Although the Lord did send saviors unto his people to deliver them from their enemies in proportion to the faith and righteousness that they exercised, such intermittent leadership taxed the people's sense of security. So they clamored unto God for the institution of kingship that they might be like the other nations which surrounded them (1 Samuel 8:20).

Samuel was prophet over Israel at this time and though he explained all of the disadvantages of having a king the Israelites persisted in their desire for a king. ((1 Samuel 8:10-19. See similar concepts expressed in the Book of Mormon: 2 Nephi 5:18; Mosiah 29; Ether 6:19-27.)) Placing the matter before the Lord, Samuel received a revelation instructing him to establish a king for the children of Israel (1 Samuel 8:21-22).

About this time a choice young man named Saul ((In Hebrew Saul means "the one asked for, requested." His name correlates with the idea that the children of Israel requested a king. See *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, edited by David Noel Freedman, vol. 5 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), p. 990.)) from the tribe of Benjamin was upon his father's errand diligently seeking after lost donkeys. Knowing that there was a seer in the land Saul determined to inquire of the Lord through Samuel where he might go to find the lost animals. Together with one of his servants

> They went up into the city: and when they were come into the city, behold, Samuel came out…now the LORD had told Samuel in his ear a day before Saul came saying, To morrow about this time I will send thee a man out of the land of Benjamin, and thou shalt anoint him to be captain over my people Israel, that he may save my people out of the hand of the Philistines: for I have looked upon my people, because their cry is come unto me. And when Samuel saw Saul, the LORD said unto him, Behold the man whom I spake to thee of! this same shall reign over my people. (1 Samuel 9:14-17)

Samuel greeted Saul and revealed to him that he was to be a great man among the Israelites. Bewildered at such words Saul responded to this most unexpected revelation by saying,

> Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? wherefore then speakest thou so to me? (1 Samuel 9:21)

This is reminiscent of the words of humility expressed by others called into the service of God such as Enoch and Moses:

> And the Lord said unto Enoch: Go forth and do as I have commanded thee, and no man shall pierce thee. Open thy mouth, and it shall be filled, and I will give thee utterance, for all flesh is in my hands, and I will do as seemeth me good. (Moses 6:32)
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> And when Enoch had heard these words, he bowed himself to the earth, before the Lord, and spake before the Lord, saying: Why is it that I have found favor in thy sight, and am but a lad, and all the people hate me; for I am slow of speech; wherefore am I thy servant? (Moses 6:31)
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> And Moses said unto the Lord, O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue. (Exodus 4:10)

The Lord had chosen Saul from the lowest station as his servant and captain over the children of Israel. In the transition from intermittent and charismatic judges who delivered Israel from her enemies to the solid institution of

Israelite kingship Saul was the hinge. The Lord established Saul as the one to save his people from the hands of the Philistines, just as the Israelite judges of the past had done against various enemies. Unlike the previous Israelite judges Saul was anointed to be king over Israel by the hand of a prophet of the Lord.

> Then Samuel took a vial of oil, and poured it upon his head, and kissed him, and said, Is it not because the LORD hath anointed thee to be captain over his inheritance? (1 Samuel 10:1)

When the day arrived for Saul to be presented unto the people as their king,

> He stood among the people, [and] he was higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward. And Samuel said to all the people, See ye him whom the LORD hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people? And all the people shouted, God save the king. (1 Samuel 10:23-24)

Even though the Lord had chosen a king for Israel, the prophet Samuel and the people of Israel saw the outward appearance of the man Saul and his mighty stature. They judged erroneously that this was the reason that Saul had been chosen of God to be king and captain over Israel. Contrast this with the words of God to Samuel when David was identified as the next king.

> But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart. (1 Samuel 16:7)

Leadership & Covenants

Soon after these events, the Ammonites came against one of the Israelite cities to make war. These Israelites appealed to Saul for help and deliverance and just as in the days of the charismatic Israelite judges the Spirit of God came upon Saul in preparation for battle. To rally all of Israel to his cause in this critical hour Saul invoked a covenantal rite:

> He took a yoke of oxen, and hewed them in pieces, and sent them throughout all the coasts of Israel by the hands of messengers, saying, Whosoever cometh not forth after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done unto his oxen. And the fear of the LORD fell on the people, and they came out with one consent. (1 Samuel 11:7)

This form of "cutting covenant" is found throughout scriptures employed to bind promises and obedience upon an individual as well as penalties for infidelity. We see this "cutting covenant" between God and Abraham in Genesis 15. In exchange for Abraham's faith, obedience and fidelity, God promised unto Abraham posterity without number and then he ratified the covenant by passing through the severed animals in a smoking furnace. More like Saul's "cutting covenant" is that of Captain Moroni in the Book of Alma. Like Saul, Moroni was captain of the armies of the righteous. Dire circumstances of infidelity, treachery and treason had fallen upon the Nephites in the midst of their war against the Lamanites. Moroni recognized that he needed the full cooperation and obedience of each Nephite.

> And it came to pass that he rent his coat; and he took a piece thereof, and wrote upon it—In memory of our God, our religion, and freedom, and our peace, our wives, and our children—and he fastened it

> upon the end of a pole.
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> And he fastened on his head-plate, and his breastplate, and his shields, and girded on his armor about his loins; and he took the pole, which had on the end thereof his rent coat, (and he called it the title of liberty) and he bowed himself to the earth, and he prayed mightily unto his God for the blessings of liberty to rest upon his brethren, so long as there should a band of Christians remain to possess the land —
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> For thus were all the true believers of Christ, who belonged to the church of God, called by those who did not belong to the church.
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> And those who did belong to the church were faithful; yea, all those who were true believers in Christ took upon them, gladly, the name of Christ, or Christians as they were called, because of their belief in Christ who should come.
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> And therefore, at this time, Moroni prayed that the cause of the Christians, and the freedom of the land might be favored.
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> And it came to pass that when he had poured out his soul to God, he named all the land which was south of the land Desolation, yea, and in fine, all the land, both on the north and on the south — A chosen land, and the land of liberty.
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> And he said: Surely God shall not suffer that we, who are despised because we take upon us the name of Christ, shall be trodden down and destroyed, until we bring it upon us by our own transgressions.
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> And when Moroni had said these words, he went forth among the people, waving the rent part of his garment in the air, that all might see the writing which he had written upon the rent part, and crying with a loud voice, saying:
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> Behold, whosoever will maintain this title upon the land, let them come forth in the strength of the Lord, and enter into a covenant that they will maintain their rights, and their religion, that the Lord God may bless them.
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> And it came to pass that when Moroni had proclaimed these words, behold, the people came running together with their armor girded about their loins, rending their garments in token, or as a covenant, that they would not forsake the Lord their God; or, in other words, if they should transgress the commandments of God, or fall into transgression, and be ashamed to take upon them the name of Christ, the Lord should rend them even as they had rent their garments.
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> Now this was the covenant which they made, and they cast their garments at the feet of Moroni, saying: We covenant with our God, that we shall be destroyed, even as our brethren in the land northward, if we shall fall into transgression; yea, he may cast us at the feet of our enemies, even as we have cast our garments at thy feet to be trodden under foot, if we shall fall into transgression. (Alma 46:12-22)

Just like the Nephites did for Captain Moroni, the Israelites rallied around Saul for battle against the Ammonites. The Israelite forces were victorious. Afterwards they offered up sacrifices of thanksgiving and peace unto the Lord under the direction and authority of God's priest/prophet Samuel.

A King Falls; A King Rises

Several years into his reign Saul made some serious mistakes for which the Spirit of the Lord withdrew from him and Samuel was led to anoint a new king over Israel. There is much that we can gain from Saul's losses.

During one particular military campaign against the Philistines the Israelites found themselves in grim circumstances. Saul recognized that he needed the help of the Lord mediated through the prophet Samuel. However, after a week of anticipation and waiting, Samuel did not arrive to perform the required sacrifices. So Saul illicitly took unto himself the power and authority of a prophet and priest; he stood in the position of the prophet Samuel commanding,

> Bring hither a burnt offering to me, and peace offerings. And he offered the burnt offering. (1 Samuel 13:9)

But how foolish this act was, for

> as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, that he might salute him. And Samuel said, What hast thou done? And Saul said, Because I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that thou camest not within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered themselves together at Michmash; Therefore said I, The Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication unto the LORD: I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt offering. And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the LORD thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the LORD have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the LORD hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the LORD commanded thee. (1 Samuel 13:10-14)

Apparently Saul did not learn his lesson for not long after this sad incident he again blatantly disobeyed the commandments and revelations from God as delivered to him through God's chosen prophet Samuel.

> Samuel also said unto Saul, The LORD sent me to anoint thee to be king over his people, over Israel: now therefore hearken thou unto the voice of the words of the LORD. Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass. But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them: but every thing that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly. The came the word of the LORD unto Samuel, saying, I have set up Saul to be a king, and he repenteth not that he hath sinned, for he is turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments. (1 Samuel 15:1-3, 9-11)

When Samuel confronted Saul he excused his disobedience by claiming that he had been obedient to the word of the Lord! Saul contorted the words and commands of the Lord that he might pursue his own desires and agenda; he even blamed other people for his own sins.

> And Saul said unto Samuel, Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and have gone the way which the LORD sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God in Gilgal. (1 Samuel 15:20-21)

Not at all pleased with such arrogance, infidelity and irresponsibility Samuel said unto Saul,

> Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. (1 Samuel 15:22)

Samuel continued with the pronouncement of woe and loss of the kingdom,

> Thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD hath rejected thee from being king over Israel…The LORD hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day…the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart. (1 Samuel 15:26, 28; 13:14)

And such a man the Lord did find, although in outward appearance even the prophet Samuel was surprised by the Lord's choice. The Lord commanded Samuel to go unto Jesse of Bethlehem and find Israel's new king among his sons. Obedient to the command and in fear of his life because of Saul, Samuel went to Bethlehem and found Jesse and his sons. When he had seen the eldest son it appeared to Samuel that the eldest and greatest in stature should be anointed as the next king, much like Saul who was of great stature among the Israelites. Yet even Samuel the prophet needed instruction and guidance concerning the Lord's patterns for choosing his servants and leaders.

> The LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart. (1 Samuel 16:7)

Instead of choosing Jesse's eldest son the Lord chose as a king a man after his own heart, one with an eye single to his glory, one who had faith, hope and charity (D&C 4:5). David, ((In Hebrew David means "beloved.")) the beloved of God, was chosen, called up, and anointed to be a king unto Israel and to represent on earth the Heavenly King.

Leadership & Obedience for our Day

In our day we have the servants of the Lord before us, teaching us the truth and leading us in the paths of righteousness. They are servants after the Lord's heart. Yet there are those who would usurp the power and authority of God's chosen and anointed priests and prophets as did Saul, setting themselves up as lights unto the children of men, claiming that they know the way, that they can offer the truth and that they have the authority to act in the name of God. There are those who in the audacity of their hearts vigorously campaign on issues proclaiming that the Brethren need to receive revelations different than that which has already been received and established. True it is that this Church is led by continuing revelation, but when we seek to counsel the Lord about how to conduct his plan of salvation we run the risk of jeopardizing all of the beautiful blessings and promises to be enjoyed on this earth and in the life to come. We each have a role to play. We each have been chosen to participate in God's work. We each have the capacity to receive revelation and to act within the sphere of our responsibility and stewardship. When we harmoniously blend courage, faith, humility and obedience we can achieve the greatness of our divine potential without overstepping the boundaries of our authority and position. Saul had every opportunity to achieve his divine potential, but when social pressures weighed upon him, when fear gripped his heart, when pride overruled his humble obedience and rationality he sacrificed illicitly, he disobeyed the voice of the Living God, he refused to heed the true counsel of the Lord's anointed prophet and thus won for himself the sad regret of all that could have been had he humbly allowed the Lord to rule his heart and to make him a man after the Lord's own heart.