

Korach: 1 Samuel 11:14-12:22

Since Joshua's era, ad-hoc "judges" led the Israelites, mustering troops as needed against enemies. All were militarily inspired by God but while some had superior character and spiritual vision, others did not. The last and greatest of them was Samuel, a prophet and Nazirite who judged the peoples' disputes, and whose powerful prayers prompted God to save them from the Philistines. Nonetheless, elderly Samuel's sons, his potential heirs, were corrupt. At the same time, a new enemy, neighboring Ammon, threatened. Together, these prompted the people to seek to replace Samuel with a king to judge and fight for them. Their rejection of Samuel's leadership is similar to the rebellion against Moses' and Aaron's leadership in the Parashah. Although this request displeased God and Samuel¹, God instructed him to anoint a king, Saul, who then defeated the Ammonites at Jabesh-Gilead.

The Haftarah begins as Samuel rallies the people to publicly rejoice in Saul's rule. He then critiques them three times. First, echoing Moses's self-justification in the Parashah, Samuel challenges the people to proclaim the selflessness of his leadership. Second, he recounts that although the people continually backslid to idolatry, God nonetheless sent leaders to defeat their enemies from the time of the Exodus until their own day. Replacing their true king, God, with a man was unnecessary- yet God accepts it so long as they serve only Him. Finally, Samuel prays for God to send rain on their harvest. Fearfully recognizing their sin, they ask Samuel to pray that God spare their lives. Samuel tells them not to fear: so long as they and Saul remain loyal to God, God will never abandon them.

Haftarah Breakdown

Verses 11:14-15: After Saul's initial, decisive victory against Ammon as king, Samuel instructs the entire people to gather in Gilgal to reconfirm and celebrate Saul's kingship.

I Samuel 11:15	שמואל א י"א:ט"ו
All the people went to Gilgal. There they made Saul king before the Lord in Gilgal. There they slaughtered peace offerings before the Lord, and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly.	וַיֵּלְכוּ כָּל־הָעָם הַגִּלְגָּל וַיִּמְלְכוּ־שָׁם אֶת־שְׂאֹוֹל לְפָנָי ה' בַּגִּלְגָּל וַיִּזְבְּחוּ־שָׁם זִבְחִים שְׁלָמִים לְפָנָי ה' וַיִּשְׂמַח שָׁם שְׂאֹוֹל וְכָל־אֲנָשֵׁי יִשְׂרָאֵל עַד־מְאֹד: (פ)

Verses 12:1-5: Noting his advanced age and that his sons are not succeeding him, Samuel's authority as judge transfers to God's newly anointed king, Saul. The people agree to Samuel's request to testify before Saul and God that Samuel's judgments have been just, and not for personal gain.

I Samuel 12:5	שמואל א י"ב:ה
And he [Samuel] said to them, "The Lord is a witness against you, and His anointed [king, Saul] is witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand." [The people] said, "[We are your] witness."	וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־יְהוָה עֵד ה' בְּכֶם וְעַד מְשִׁיחוֹ הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה כִּי לֹא מִצְאָתָם בְּיַדִּי מְאוּמָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ עֵד: (פ)

Verses 12:6-12: Samuel rebukes the people for requesting a human king to lead them against Ammon. He recounts the people's cycle of sin, oppression, repentance, and salvation, as well as generations of victories- from their arrival in Egypt until their own generation- that their King, God, granted them through Moses, Aaron, and other leaders.

I Samuel 12:12	שמואל א י"ב:י"ב
When you saw the Ammonites' king, Nahash, come against you, you said to me, "No, but a king shall reign over us"- [but] the Lord your God was your king.	וַתֵּרְאוּ כִּי־נֹחַשׁ מֶלֶךְ בְּנֵי־עַמּוֹן בָּא עֲלֵיכֶם וַתֹּאמְרוּ לִי לֹא כִּי־מֶלֶךְ יִמְלֹךְ עָלֵינוּ וְה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם מֶלֶכְכֶם:

¹ [Malbim](#) and [others](#) offer many different explanations for what was wrong with the people's request.

Verses 12:13-15: The people and their king must loyally serve God or He will punish them.

I Samuel 12:15	שמואל א י"ב:ט"ו
If you will not obey the Lord's voice and rebel against the Lord's [word], then the Lord's hand will be against you [as it was] against your fathers.	וְאִם-לֹא תִשְׁמָעוּ בְּקוֹל ה' וּמָרִיתֶם אֶת-פִּי ה' וְהִיתָה יַד-ה' בְּכֶם וּבְאֲבוֹתֵיכֶם:

Verses 12:16-19: Samuel prays that God bring a thunderstorm during harvest season. This shows his closeness to God, God's control over their lives, the sin of replacing God with a king, and His resulting punishing anger. After God brings the storm, the people fear God and Samuel. They ask Samuel to pray that God will not destroy them.

I Samuel 12:17	שמואל א י"ב:י"ז
Is it not the wheat harvest today? I shall call to the Lord, that He will send thunder and rain. Know and see that your evil is great, which you have done in the Lord's eyes, to ask for yourselves a king!	הֲלוֹא קָצִיר-חִטִּים הַיּוֹם אֶקְרָא אֱלֹהֵי וַיִּתֵּן קִלְוֹת וּמָטָר וַיִּדְעוּ וַיֵּרְאוּ כִּי-רָעַתְכֶם רַבָּה אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתֶם בְּעֵינֵי ה' לְשִׂאֹל לְכֶם מֶלֶךְ: (ו)

Verses 12:20-22: Samuel tells the people not to fear nor to turn to idols that will not save them. So long as they serve and remain loyal to God, God will not destroy them because He remains pleased that He selected them as His people, as well as for the sake of His Name; i.e., lest other nations consider God impotent to save His people.

I Samuel 12:22	שמואל א י"ב:כ"ב
For the Lord will not forsake His people for His great Name's sake, because it has pleased the Lord to make you His people.	כִּי לֹא-יִטֹּשׁ ה' אֶת-עַמּוֹ בְּעַבְוֹר שְׁמוֹ הַגָּדוֹל כִּי הוֹאִיל ה' לַעֲשׂוֹת אִתְּכֶם לֹו לְעָם:

Connection

The Midrash derives a lesson about the **leaders of one's own generation** from Samuel's description of God's chosen leaders throughout the generations.

Kohelet Rabbah 1:4	קהלת רבה א:ד
Let the incoming generation be in your eyes like the generation that passed. Do not say, "If Rabbi Akiva was alive... or if Rabbi Zeira and Rabbi Yochanan were alive. I would learn before them." Rather, your era's generation and your era's sage are like the past generation and the earlier sages that preceded you. Rabbi Yochanan [similarly] said: "It is written (1 Samuel 12:6), 'It is the Lord who made Moses and Aaron'; and (ibid, 12:11), 'The Lord sent Jerubbaal, Bedan, Yiftach, and Samuel' ² ; and (Ps. 99:6), 'Moses and Aaron are among His priests, and Samuel is among them who call His name.' Scripture equates three light historical figures with three great historical figures, to teach you that Jerubbaal's court is as great and important before the Holy One, Blessed be He, as Moses' court, that Samson's court is like Aaron's court, and that Yiftach's court is like Samuel's court."	הִנֵּה בְּעֵינֶיךָ דוֹר שֶׁבָּא בְּדוֹר שֶׁהָלַךְ, שֶׁלֹּא תֹאמַר אֵלּוּ הָיָה רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא קָנָם. אֵלּוּ הָיוּ רַבִּי זִירָא וְרַבִּי יוֹחָנָן קַמְיָן הֵייתִי שׁוֹנֵה לְפָנֵיהֶם, אֶלָּא דוֹר שֶׁבָּא בְּנִמְיָךְ וְחָכָם שֶׁבְּנִמְיָךְ בְּדוֹר שֶׁהָלַךְ וְחָכְמִים הֶרְאִישׁוּנִים שֶׁהָיוּ לְפָנֶיךָ. אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן בְּתִיב (שְׁמוּאֵל א יב, ו): ה' אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה אֶת מֹשֶׁה וְאֶת אַהֲרֹן וְגו', וּבְתִיב (שְׁמוּאֵל א יב, ו): וַיִּשְׁלַח ה' אֶת יִרְבֵּעֵל וְאֶת בְּדָן וְאֶת יִפְתָּח וְאֶת שְׁמוּאֵל... וּבְתִיב (תְּהִלִּים צט, ו): מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן בְּכֹהֲנָיו וּשְׁמוּאֵל בְּקֹרְאֵי שְׁמוֹ, שֶׁקָּל הַפְּתוּב שֶׁלִּישָׂה קְלֵי עוֹלָם עִם שֶׁלִּישָׂה גְדוּלֵי עוֹלָם, לְלַמֶּדְךָ שֶׁבֵּית דִּינּוֹ שֶׁל יִרְבֵּעֵל גָּדוֹל וְחָשׁוּב לְפָנֵי הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא כְּבֵית דִּינּוֹ שֶׁל מֹשֶׁה, וּבֵית דִּינּוֹ שֶׁל שְׁמִשׁוֹן כְּבֵית דִּינּוֹ שֶׁל אַהֲרֹן, וּבֵית דִּינּוֹ שֶׁל יִפְתָּח כְּבֵית דִּינּוֹ שֶׁל שְׁמוּאֵל.

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² The Midrash (ad loc.) identifies Jerubbaal as Gideon and Bedan as Samson.