

## Lesson 75

# Israel's First King

God chose Saul to be Israel's first king, but Saul disobeyed the Lord.

# Overview

## Lesson Focus

Israel rejected God as king and instead asked Samuel for a human king. Samuel warned them what would happen with their kings, but the people insisted. God chose Saul to be Israel's first king. Saul began his reign in humble obedience to God, but then he disobeyed specific commands God gave him. For his disobedience, Saul would lose the kingdom, the Spirit of God, and his friendship with Samuel.

## Key Passages

1 Samuel 8:6–7, 8:19–20, 10:20–24, 13:5–12, 15:7–9, 15:22, 13:13–14, 15:26, 15:35, 16:14

## Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Identify the first king over Israel.
- Describe the consequences of Saul's disobedience to God.

## Memory Verse

Psalm 34:17–18 When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their

troubles. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.

## **Prepare to Share**

### **Scriptural Background**

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages for this lesson along with this background.

Samuel's allegiance to God during his leadership in Israel established a time of peace between Israel and the Philistines (1 Samuel 7:13–14). Samuel appointed his sons as judges after him. Unfortunately, they did not follow Samuel's example. They became greedy, taking bribes and perverting justice (1 Samuel 8:3). This was when the elders of Israel gathered to ask Samuel to appoint a king who would rule them like all the other nations (1 Samuel 8:3–5).

The Israelites' desire for a king—a permanent ruler who would be responsible for the well-being of the nation in a comprehensive way and who would therefore have comprehensive authority—revealed their desire to switch their loyalty to a man rather than depending on and obeying God. It was this inclination that God addressed when he said to Samuel, "They have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them" (1 Samuel 8:7). Samuel warned the people that the king would tax them and take their children and possessions. Despite the

warnings, the people reaffirmed that they wanted an earthly king to lead them and fight their battles; they wanted to be like all the other nations. God declared that he would grant their desire; Samuel was to appoint a king (1 Samuel 8:10–22).

1 Samuel 9 and 10 give the details of Samuel choosing and anointing Israel's first king, Saul. In God's providence, they met and Samuel anointed Saul (1 Samuel 10:1). God's message to Saul through Samuel was that the Spirit of God would come upon him and he would become another man (1 Samuel 10:6). In this way, God transformed Saul and prepared him to be king.

1 Samuel 13 picks up two years after Saul became the king. Israel was afraid of the multitude of Philistines who seemed about to attack. Saul was in Gilgal, and the people with him were trembling with fear (1 Samuel 13:7). Saul felt the need to offer a burnt offering to request the Lord's protection in the coming conflict. However, Samuel had told Saul to wait for him seven days (1 Samuel 13:8), and Samuel had not yet arrived.

Disregarding Samuel's instructions, Saul decided that it would be better to offer the sacrifices himself rather than to wait for Samuel (1 Samuel 13:9). This might appear reasonable. Saul was apparently seeking to honor the Lord and to ask for his protection, and the people were scattering from him (1 Samuel 13:11). However, when

Samuel arrived, he made it clear that Saul had acted foolishly (1 Samuel 13:13). Saul had not obeyed the Lord. In spite of what Saul perceived as real, imminent danger, he should have obeyed and trusted God to prevail. The anxiety and concern Saul felt over the Philistines was the product of his lack of trust in God, which led to his disobedience. And we will see that God's priority is always a trusting, obedient heart, not the outward performance of religious duty.

God still gave Saul and his son Jonathan victory over the Philistines (1 Samuel 14), and Saul fought against his enemies on every side (1 Samuel 14:47–48). He had not, however, learned the lesson of obedience to God. The events of 1 Samuel 15 show again Saul's tendency to trust his own judgment rather than to obey God. In this chapter, Israel fought against and defeated the Amalekites. God had clearly commanded Saul to destroy all of that tribe, including women, children, and animals (1 Samuel 15:3). But again Saul considered his own wisdom greater than God's wisdom. In disobedience to God's direct command, Saul kept the king and the best of the animals alive, presumably for the purpose of showing off the defeated king and making sacrifices to God (1 Samuel 15:15). Samuel confronted Saul again with God's priority, declaring plainly that God desires obedience from his people more than even the sacrifices that are meant to honor him (1 Samuel 15:22). Saul not only disobeyed, but he also set an example for the people of Israel

that God would not tolerate, trusting self as opposed to trusting God.

Saul suffered severe consequences for his disobedience. The Lord rejected him from being king over Israel (1 Samuel 15:26). The Lord promised that the kingdom would be taken from him and given to a better man, a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14, 15:28). Saul would no longer benefit from the wise counsel of Samuel, his friend and God's prophet and priest (1 Samuel 15:35). The Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and a harmful spirit from the Lord troubled him (1 Samuel 16:14).

As we consider the life of Saul and his failure to trust and obey God, we know that the unchanging God still demands obedience from his people. In simple terms, John 14:15 states this critical biblical principle: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." A heart that loves God will produce a life that keeps his commands—not perfectly, but characteristically. And if good fruit is lacking, the answer is not in self-effort, but examining oneself to see if he really is in the faith, turning in repentance and faith to Christ.

## **Historical/Apologetics Background**

In order to appreciate what the people were asking when they wanted a king, it is helpful to consider the difference between a judge and a king. A judge was called by God for one main

purpose—deliverance from enemies. A king, in that culture, was sovereign over all the affairs of the tribe or nation. A judge led by persuasion—the people followed him or disregarded him as they thought best. (The book of Judges repeats the phrase “everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”) A king ruled by right—the people owed unconditional allegiance to the king. A judge’s rule was limited to accomplish a particular purpose of deliverance. A king’s rule was unlimited and included succession from generation to generation. The judges, we have seen, were led by God to deliver Israel in a way that would specifically show its dependence on God alone.

Saul’s anointing as Israel’s king begs the question: why would God grant this desire of Israel’s people for a king, when we know that the desire constituted a rejection of God? Consider that King David succeeded Saul after Saul failed. Now consider the details of God’s covenant made to David—that his throne would be established forever (2 Samuel 7:16). That throne would one day be occupied by Jesus Christ, who is the King of kings and the Lord of lords (Revelation 19:16). Jesus is not only man, but God. He is the Word of God who became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14).

The inescapable conclusion is that God turned the sinful desire of Israel to his own purposes. The people rejected God’s reign in favor of a man (Saul) to be king. But that rejection of God

led to the fulfillment of God's plan of redemption through Jesus Christ—the final and everlasting King. How often God works in this way! Man's sins are not excused at all, but regardless of man's failures, God works out his perfect will. Joseph was sold cruelly into slavery by his brothers, but that act was used by God for good, to save the brothers later (Genesis 50:20). Peter and John were beaten for teaching about Jesus, but their faithful, courageous endurance of suffering was used to bring great boldness to the church (Acts 4:18–31). And most importantly, Jesus, the Christ, was delivered to be tortured and crucified. But that very act, the worst murder ever committed, was carried out according to God's "definite plan and foreknowledge" (Acts 2:22–23) to be the atoning sacrifice that saves God's people from their sins and brings them God's righteousness (see 2 Corinthians 5:21).



# Limited License to Reproduce

A limited, non-exclusive, non-transferable, nonsublicensable license is hereby granted to a single local church or organization to print copies of the PDF materials in the Teacher Digital Resources if 1) you are the original purchaser; 2) you are using the copies for noncommercial purposes (such as for teaching in class) exclusively within your single local church or organization (multi-campus churches, and national/regional denominations are not covered under this license); and 3) you follow the instructions provided in the curriculum pertaining to the printable materials.

This license is for the specific purchaser of the product and does not include affiliated groups or organizations, or other churches or groups in the same denomination as the purchaser, not identified as the actual purchaser. There is no limit to the number of printed copies for use within the single local church or organization which is the actual purchaser. None of the material in this curriculum may be reproduced for any commercial promotion, advertising, or sale of a product or service, or to share with any other persons, churches, groups, or organizations.

The media (audio/video) portions are copyrighted and duplication is prohibited. This license is for materials in the Teacher Digital

Resources only and does NOT include reproduction rights for pre-printed teacher books, student guides, student take home sheets, or posters, except on an emergency basis when purchased quantities are not sufficient for a given week.

## **Bible Version**

Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.