

JUDGES AND KINGS

SAMUAL AND SAUL

FALL

Lesson 13

NOVEMBER 30, 2025

LESSON TEXT

I Samuel 8–10

FOCUS VERSES

I Samuel 8:7–9

⁷And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.

⁸According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee.

⁹Now therefore hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and shew them the manner of the king that shall reign over them.

TRUTH ABOUT COVENANT

God's plans for His people are better than their own plans.

MY RESPONSE TO COVENANT

I will trust God's plan for me, even when it is at odds with the prevailing worldview.

COVENANT CONTEXT

Following a failed period of leadership known as the Judges, Israel rejected their covenant with God by asking for a human king to lead them. God relented and gave them what they asked for, but they soon discovered they already had what they needed; they just needed to follow God's will rather than their own.

TEACHING OUTLINE

Icebreaker: What is something that seemed like a good idea at the time, but you are glad it didn't work out?

Teacher Tip: Connect the group's answers to illustrate how God sometimes give us what we want, even if it's not what we need.

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection.

I. THE CALL FOR A KING

A. We Want a King

DISCUSS: *Rather than ask for a king, how should Israel have looked to God for His help?*

B. Rejecting God

DISCUSS: *Have you ever repeatedly asked for something only to find out it wasn't what you really wanted or needed? How did it turn out?*

C. God will not force us to follow His plan. (V)

II. SAMUEL ANOINTED SAUL AS KING

A. Looking for a King

DISCUSS: *Why do we sometimes look past warning signs to get what we want? How can we see those warning signs more clearly?*

B. Saul's Anointing

C. Hiding among the Stuff

D. I will follow when God sends His Spirit to confirm His will.

III. KING SAUL'S PRIDE AND FALL

A. A King in Decline

DISCUSS: *What were some of the signals that Saul was growing distant from God? What are the signals we should watch for in our own lives?*

B. Trusting Saul's Plan

C. God wants to be the only King of my heart.

DISCUSS: *What have you learned by Saul's failure as a king? How will you follow God with your whole heart?*

Internalizing the Message (I)

PRAYER FOCUS

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For God to help us avoid making unwise demands
- For God to help us to humble ourselves and accept His plan

LESSON CONNECTION

It had been a bumpy few years—decades actually. After political turmoil and revolt, the American Revolutionary War had brought on even more hardship. The British forces, superior in number and training, had decimated the ragtag rebel bands. Casualties in war were one thing; navigating rings of traitors and almost starving to death at Valley Forge were another. The constant through it all was George Washington. By anyone's account he was the fearless leader who rallied American forces, such as they were, to hold off the British for over eight years until King George III's representatives signed the Treaty of Paris, formally concluding the war.

Following the treaty, each colony fended for themselves, operating loosely under Articles of Confederation. Yet even with the colonies' preference for autonomy, the need for a chief head of state was clear, and the war hero was far and away the favorite. In the fall of 1788, the US Congress ratified the Constitution and began clamoring for Washington to be president. Washington described himself as "a culprit who is going to the place of his execution: so unwilling am I, in the evening of a life nearly consumed in public cares, to quit a peaceful abode for an Ocean of difficulties." But serve he did.

The Electoral College elected him unanimously and spent considerable time debating whether to call him "His Elective Majesty" or "His Highness the President of the United States of America." With only the British monarchy as their heritage, and monarchy being so common among other nations, leaders in America grappled with recreating the only form of government they knew. Such was their perspective and Washington's popularity that many historians suggest Washington could have assumed the same power as his peer kings. Washington chose to leave office at the end of his second term, indicating he did not want to die in office and open the door to the assumption that the presidency was a lifetime appointment. Thus set the precedent of the two-term US presidency, officially codified into the Constitution in 1948.

Much like the fledgling American nation contended with desire for a king, the children of Israel had a similar longing. Israel's history up until the Book of I Samuel was a theocracy—God was the people's King. Chosen leaders, like Moses and Joshua, fulfilled special

roles, such as adviser and general, but the Lord reigned. In the Book of Judges, God anointed warriors to deliver the people; kingship did not come to Israel until around 1000 BC.

The Philistines posed a threat, even capturing the Ark of the Covenant, the symbol of God's abiding presence in Israel. The people assumed they had good reasons to call for a king. Without empires like the Egyptians to thwart their plans, they could proceed. They saw the corrupt leadership of the sons of Eli and later the sons of Samuel, so they felt justified in replacing a theocracy with a monarchy. They could not have been more wrong.

BIBLE LESSON

I. THE CALL FOR A KING

People often clamor for new leadership during times of trouble. Although Samuel had stood in the gap for the Israelites, they had forgotten all the good deeds the prophet had done. They failed to remember their time of great fear when the Lord responded to Samuel's sacrifice by thundering against the Philistines. They did not appreciate all the times the man of God prayed for them. Now they desired to replace the prophet and their heavenly King with a king they could see with their eyes, not through eyes of faith.

The ever-present, growing Philistine threat made the people feel a king was necessary, but they had not calculated the full cost of their request. Samuel offered them a vision of the future, showing them how poorly a king would treat them. Nevertheless, the people foolishly persisted in their demands.

A. We Want a King

The Israelites wanted a king so they could be like all the other nations, but they forgot they were not like the other nations because they served the God of the universe. They made one of the worst trades in the history of humanity. Israel wanted to transition from a theocracy where the Lord ruled to a monarchy where a king held sway over them. Rather than trusting in the covenant God had made with them—and kept by protecting them and fighting for them time and time again—the Israelites pressed for a king they could see. This visible leader would fight for them and subdue their enemies. They would soon watch their king face severe internal battles that would shake the nation of Israel to its core.

***DISCUSS:** Rather than ask for a king, how should Israel have looked to God for His help?*

B. Rejecting God

Samuel wrestled with the situation internally. He was deeply hurt. He felt rejected by the people's request, but the Lord assured His prophet that the Israelites had rejected Him, not just Samuel. Long before Isaiah's prophecy that Jesus would be despised and rejected of men (Isaiah 53:3), the Lord felt the sting of the Israelites' rejection.

Parents deal with similar scenarios. When their children ask for something they should not have, sometimes a parent relents to teach a lesson. God repeatedly warned the Israelites of the consequences of having a king. Although a king would go to battle for the people, he would also draft their sons into military service and their daughters to serve in his kingdom. To hold onto political power, the king would give the best fields and lands to his officials. He needed their support to maintain order. Israel had traded the awesome power of God for paltry politics.

***DISCUSS:** Have you ever repeatedly asked for something only to find out it wasn't what you really wanted or needed? How did it turn out?*

C. God will not force us to follow His plan.

The situation reveals the nature of God to allow us to have free will. Despite His incalculable power, Almighty God does not force

people to follow His plan. While God moved the wicked Pharaoh to do God's will by hardening Pharaoh's heart, the Lord treats His children differently. God used Pharaoh's natural inclination to defy God as a way to show His glory. We, however, must make our own personal decision to live a life that gives God glory.

Because God will not force His will on us, we must submit our will to His. Despite our best intentions, our inclinations may prove to be wrong. In many cases we may feel like we have a good reason for our decisions. However, we would do well to consider this cautionary tale of the Israelites in I Samuel 8. Their plan for a king seemed like a good idea, but they failed to fully consider all the ramifications.

II. SAMUEL ANOINTED SAUL AS KING

After Israel made their request, God reluctantly answered yes and created a scenario to crown Saul as the first king in Israel. Saul's father sent him with a servant to find some lost donkeys. They felt like they had searched everywhere, but they could not find the donkeys. Saul's servant suggested the two seek the assistance of the seer named Samuel. Surely, the man of God would be able to help. Providentially, the Lord set the meeting between Saul the king-to-be and Samuel the prophet to give Israel its first king.

In a private conversation Samuel told Saul he would be king. Samuel prophesied of various signs that would come to pass as the Spirit empowered Saul, and every promise came to pass. When Saul left, he did not need to worry any more about finding his father's lost livestock because the donkeys had returned home.

A. Looking for a King

This private meeting between Samuel and Saul set the stage for Saul, from the tribe of Benjamin, to ascend to the throne. However, the people needed to coronate Saul as their king. Samuel poured anointing oil over him to signify he was the one God had chosen to lead His people. The opinion polls might have supported Saul's inauguration because the young man seemed to possess all the attributes the people would want in a king.

Head and shoulders taller than the rest of the people, Saul looked like a formidable warrior. His towering presence hid his inner insecurities. At this stage in life, he possessed great humility. Both by outward appearance and inner fortitude, he seemed like an excellent choice. But red flags began to fly early in the story of Saul. He failed to demonstrate good leadership skills. The servant was spiritual enough to present the idea of appealing to Samuel for help when he and Saul could not find the donkeys. Saul did not even have the money to give a gift to the prophet, but the servant did. Even when Saul behaved with humility, he may not have possessed the necessary qualities to prioritize God first and effectively manage his resources.

***DISCUSS:** Why do we sometimes look past warning signs to get what we want? How can we see those warning signs more clearly?*

B. Saul's Anointing

Thankfully, the Lord had a plan to transform Saul. The prophet would anoint Saul to be king, and God's Spirit would empower him to lead the people. In the Book of Judges, most of the leaders God chose had the distinction of the Spirit being on them. Samson was different because Judges declares the Spirit of the Lord rushed on him. The first two anointed kings of Israel, Saul and David, knew what it felt like for the Spirit to rush on them similar to the mighty rushing wind on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2.

C. Hiding among the Stuff

Saul would need the rush of the Spirit to empower him for the immense task ahead of him. When God chose the Benjamite to be king, no one could find him because he was hiding among the stuff. During perhaps the most important meeting of his life, Saul remained with the baggage. Many have pointed to Saul's humility in this action, but Saul's location creates a strong contrast with the next king,

David. The shepherd boy left all his baggage behind before he fought Goliath. David charged a keeper with watching the sheep when he journeyed to the battlefield to take food to his brothers. David also refused the armor of Saul. Unlike Saul, David would not allow anything unnecessary to weigh him down.

D. I will follow when God sends His Spirit to confirm His will.

Both Saul and David felt the rush of the Spirit, but they responded very differently. Saul initially acted in humility but later grew prideful. Saul's story is a warning. Even if we have experienced the power of the Spirit through the infilling of the Holy Spirit, we must consistently seek the will of God. We need God in every moment, not just in the public moments everyone can see.

III. KING SAUL'S PRIDE AND FALL

At first, Samuel anointed Saul in private—not even allowing Saul's servant to see him pour the oil on the new king. Next, God revealed His divine plan to the entire kingdom when Samuel publicly revealed God's choice for king. Saul also proved himself by winning a great battle over the Ammonites. Things seemed to be going well for Saul. Even when others told Saul to deal harshly with his detractors, the king showed mercy. Sadly, the anointed king would spiral out of control as he replaced the Spirit as his guide and chose to follow the selfishness of his own prideful heart.

A. A King in Decline

The once mighty and promising king entered a time of decline. Saul's prideful impatience, impulsiveness, disobedience, and paranoia caused his kingdom to unravel. Saul's behavior worsened throughout his reign. He battled a spirit that troubled him. He sought a musician to play music to soothe his soul. Enter David, the psalmist. David played and God calmed Saul, but over time, David unwittingly ignited Saul's anger even further. The king threw a spear at the young man, which he barely escaped. David eventually ran for his life from a man who had ruined his own life and made it his mission to end David's.

***DISCUSS:** What were some of the signals that Saul was growing distant from God? What are the signals we should watch for in our own lives?*

B. Trusting Saul's Plan

When the people demanded a king, they could not have envisioned all the problems that would befall them so quickly even though Samuel warned them. Unfortunately, the people did not have the vision to recognize they had traded the glory of their heavenly King for the psychosis of an earthly king bent on destroying himself and others. In this way, they were breaking the covenant God had made with them to provide for them and protect them.

Saul's poor leadership demonstrated that Israel should have trusted God's plan instead of demanding their own will. The fast deterioration would soon lead to a rivalry between Saul and David and eventually pit brother versus brother in Israel's own brutal civil war. Kingship would be known more for division than unity.

C. God wants to be the only King of my heart.

If we separate ourselves from God, we will find it difficult to maintain unity with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Sometimes divisions that arise may be a sign of not being as close to the Lord as we need to be. While we may blame our fellow Christians for the problem, perhaps we should first take a close look and ask if we are the problem.

God wants sole possession of our hearts, but we can become distracted by the things of this world. We can put possessions or even other people on the throne of our hearts. Worse yet, we can become prideful and conceited like Saul and make ourselves the king or queen of our own personal kingdom. We must avoid the trap of pride. We must trust God's plan for our lives even when the will of God seems counter to our own plans, especially when it is counter to the world's plans.

DISCUSS: *What have you learned by Saul's failure as a king? How will you follow God with your whole heart?*

Teacher Option: *Tell the story below or share one of your own to illustrate the value of following what God wants, not just what we want.*

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Sports fans often think about what might have been when they discuss the worst trades in history. Every sport features its own tale of woe, but perhaps the most terrible trade in history occurred when Harry Frazee, the owner of the Boston Red Sox, traded Babe Ruth (nicknamed the Bambino) to the New York Yankees for \$100,000 and requested a \$300,000 loan as part of the deal. The exchange occurred in the 1920s, sending the Bronx Bombers roaring to success while the lowly Red Sox began an extended period of decline.

The trade proved so foolish that many baseball fans thought it brought bad luck to Beantown. Many referred to the losing ways of the Red Sox as the "Curse of the Bambino." Calling the situation a curse detracts from the truly terrible decision Frazee made. In his pinstriped Yankees uniform, Babe Ruth hit 93 percent of his career homers: 665 out of a total of his 714 homeruns. He played twenty-two seasons from 1914 to 1935. His homerun record would not be broken until 1974, when Hank Aaron clobbered his 715th homerun over the fence in Atlanta. The Bronx Bomber's record stood for around forty years until Hammerin' Hank wrote his name in the history books above Ruth's.

The Red Sox made some history of their own—bad history. Boston had won its fifth straight World Series with the help of Ruth in 1918, but the Red Sox would not win another Major League Baseball title until 2004. While many fans focus on the long drought of the Red Sox, the hitting prowess of Ruth, and the rivalry between Boston and New York, a key detail is often omitted. Many do not know the colossally foolish reason Frazee traded Babe Ruth. The Red Sox owner wanted to finance a Broadway musical, and he owed a mortgage on Boston's Fenway Park.

The long-term consequences of the Babe Ruth trade demonstrate how we must be extremely careful in our actions. Even our best logic may sometimes defy us. Perhaps Frazee assumed his team with five consecutive championships could continue its winning ways without Babe Ruth. Perhaps his desire to diversify his investments in the entertainment industry seemed promising, thinking he could make money off fans at games and audiences on Broadway.

Even though Frazee might have had some good reasons to support his decision, the results speak for themselves. Millions of Red Sox fans endured season after season of torturous misfortune. Worse yet, their archrivals continued to win championships. When we think of the trade of Babe Ruth and look at the story of Israel demanding a king, we see two cautionary narratives that warn us about the dangers of following our own designs or the designs of the world instead of God.

The Red Sox were not cursed by the trade, but we cannot ignore the fact that the Lord does set blessings and curses before us. May we always choose wisely and live fully committed to God's covenant plan and purpose for us and those around us.