



A Kingdom Established • Saul Becomes King of Israel • 1 samuel 8-10 • 09/30/2018

Main Point

Samuel judges Israel well, saves them from the Philistines, and leads them back to God. But the nation does not want another judge. Instead they demand to be given a king in order to be like the other nations around them.

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Do we ever settle for good choices when the best choices are still out there? Explain. Have you ever made a choice you thought was right, only to find out later it was not the best choice?

How does what other people possess affect what you want? Do you think having these things just because someone else has them is best for you? Why or why not?

What does any of this have to do with trusting God?

Today's study begins with Israel's request for a king, a request rooted in their desire to be like their neighboring (pagan) nations. This request revealed their lack of trust in God's leadership, a theme that continued throughout Saul's life. Saul's life is a sad story of unrealized potential, but it's an important reminder of God's desire that we trust Him and His plans for our lives, and that we live fully devoted to Him.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| Have a volunteer read 1 Samuel 8:1-9.

What reasons did Israel's elders give in their request for a king (vv. 4-5, see also 19-20)?

What was their real reason, according to verse 7?

What was wrong with their desire to have a king?

How did Samuel respond to the elders? What is the key difference between Samuel's response to the elders and the elders's response to their situation?

Read Luke 23:1-5. How is Israel's demand for a king similar to the way many Israelites responded to Jesus when He was on earth? Why did people struggle to trust that Jesus was the Messiah?

These elders wanted a king who would provide military leadership and make the nation's borders secure. Furthermore the leaders apparently held the misconception that a king was less susceptible to corruption. The elders, however, chose to address one wrong with another wrong. There was no praying and seeking of the Lord. There was no solemn assembly—no crying out to God. The elders simply demanded that Samuel appoint a king to judge them “the same as all the other nations have” (1 Sam. 8:5). Their motives may appear commendable, logical, and timely. The trouble was that Israel was to be different from all the rest of the nations (Lev. 20:26; Num. 23:9). This fact was a fundamental principle of the Torah. God, and God alone, was Israel's King (Ex. 15:18; Pss. 10:16; 24:10; 93:1).

| Have a volunteer read 1 Samuel 8:19-22.

Why were the Israelites willing to ignore the warning about a king? Why does God seem to “give in” to their request? What does this teach us about Him?

When are you inclined to do something just to be “like everyone else”? What does that desire communicate to God?

When was the last time you bulldozed over God's will, only to have the walls crash down on you?

| Have a few volunteers read 1 Samuel 9:1-2; 9:14-17; 9:25-27; and 10:1.

What physical advantage did Saul have over his peers? How might that impress others?

What was God's purpose for the future king (v. 16)? What does this say about God's character? How does this affect our trust in God?

What is the significance of Samuel's private anointing of Saul (10:1)? How do you think Saul felt when Samuel anointed him?

Samuel's “message from God” first took the form of anointing, an action heretofore reserved for sacred objects and Aaronic priests. The act of pouring a flask of specially prepared olive oil on Saul's head apparently symbolized the staking of a divine claim on him, as well as the outpouring of the Lord's enabling Spirit into the newly designated king. Though Samuel anointed Saul, it was, in fact, the Lord who was responsible for designating Saul as the leader “over his inheritance” (v. 1). Though God desires for us to

choose the best and trust Him in those choices, He doesn't abandon us when we make a less than best choice. Though the Israelites had sinned, God was still providing for them.

When has God mercifully used your disobedience to bring about good in your life?

| Have two separate volunteers read 1 Samuel 10:2-16 and 10:17-27.

To dispel doubts concerning the Lord's claim on the young man's life, Samuel provided Saul with an unprecedented series of validating signs (10:2-8) that would be accomplished almost immediately—even before Saul could return to his own home. This early confirmation would, in theory, help Saul accept his new status immediately and thus prepare him to accept his role as Israel's king when it was publicly bestowed on him. Saul was reluctant to share Samuel's words about the matter of kingship when he first returned home. Perhaps he felt relatives and friends would have a harder time believing he would be their new leader.

In publicly anointing Saul, how does Samuel implicitly judge Israel and reward their protest (vv. 17-19)?

What do we learn about the level of trust Saul had in God for the task to which God assigned him?

How was God's power and purpose demonstrated in these passages? What does this demonstration tell you about trusting God?

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Why is trust such a hard thing for us to learn? What other things battle for our trust?

How is God currently at work in your life to lead or change you? What steps do you need to take to acknowledge your trust in Him in that process?

Pray

For a time of closing prayer, have group members discuss areas of life in which they are struggling to trust God. Then spend time praying for each person.

Commentary

| 1 Samuel 8:1-22

8:1-3. Samuel was the third Levitical judge mentioned in the Bible, Moses (Exod. 18:13-26) and Eli (1 Sam. 4:18) being the first two. When he grew old, Samuel obeyed the Torah (Deut. 16:18) by appointing judges—in this case his sons Joel and Abijah—to function as judges in Beersheba (vv. 1-2). The succession of Eli, Samuel, and his sons suggests that an attempt was being made to bring Israel back to the original Torah pattern of hierocracy, or at least rule by Levites (Deut. 17:8-13). Perhaps the belief was that Levites, members of the tribe divinely entrusted with the task of preserving the divine revelation and providing spiritual leadership for Israel, were uniquely qualified to provide the sort of leadership Israel truly needed.

Israel's experiment with hierocracy came to an abrupt halt, however, when Samuel's sons Joel and Abijah "turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice" (v. 3). Their actions were clearly in violation of the Torah and were certain to create conflict in society.

8:4-6 An influential delegation of Israel's tribal leaders came to Samuel at his home in Ramah to confront him with the failures of the existing form of government and to propose an alternative (v. 4). The fact that leaders from all tribes "gathered together" suggests the existence of some sort of ruling council or political body above the tribal level. The elders began their meeting with Samuel by delineating the facts of the present: Samuel had entered his years of physical decline, and his successors did "not walk in [his] ways" (v. 5). The apparently imminent return to the dismal pattern of failed judgeships, which Israel had known for so many years, would not be tolerated by the people.

An alternative pattern, one foreseen in the Torah and practiced by Israel's neighbors, was now demanded by the elders. In spite of its apparent attractiveness, the elders' demand contained at least one aspect that violated a fundamental tenet of the Torah. Israel was to be distinct from the nations (Lev. 20:26; Num. 23:9), and moves motivated by a desire to conform to pagan ways were bound to create problems. No doubt this request also was heavily motivated by the elders' desire to defeat oppressive enemies. However, it amounted to an attempt to accomplish through a political act that which could only be achieved through ongoing spiritual responsibility (Judg. 3:4).

Samuel is consistently portrayed as the ideal prophet. As such, he was necessarily a supporter of the Torah. Not surprisingly, therefore, the elders' request "displeased Samuel" (v. 6; lit., "was evil in the eyes of Samuel"). Before formulating a response to the elders, however, the prophet wisely took the issue before the Lord in prayer.

8:10-18. Having received the word of the Lord, the prophet carried it back "to the people who were asking for a king" (v. 10). Then in the third-longest recorded speech by Samuel in the Bible (eighty-five words in the Hebrew) he provided the people with a sober description of what they could expect from a king. Dominating Samuel's characterization of Israelite kings is the portrayal of the oppressive control they would take of Israelite lives, families, and possessions. In short, kings would be "takers" who would diminish others to further their own interests.

8:19-22. In spite of the prophet's sober warning, the people "refused to listen to Samuel" and reaffirmed their demand for a king. Their previously stated sinful desire to be "like all the other nations" was now augmented by the additional sin of desiring to remove the Lord from His position at the head of Israel's armies (Deut. 1:30; Exod. 14:14). The narrator's portrayal of Israel's rejection of Samuel's warnings is reminiscent of the Torah language depicting Pharaoh's stubborn refusal to submit to Moses; both "did not hear" (v. 19) so as to heed (Exod. 7:4,13,16,22).

In dutiful fulfillment of his mediatorial role as a prophet (Num. 27:5), Samuel repeated the peoples' words "before the Lord" (v. 21), that is, in the worship center at Ramah (Isa. 37:14). The Lord agreed to their request and commanded the prophet to "give them a king" (v. 22).

| 1 Samuel 9:1–10:25

9:1-2. As in the case of Samuel, Saul's formal introduction is preceded by the introduction of his father. Kish, like Elkanah, was supplied with a four-generation genealogy. He was "a man of standing" (v. 1; in Hebrew, literally, "powerful man of strength/might/wealth"); the use of this phrase, in combination with the notation that the family owned slaves, donkeys, and oxen, suggests that Saul came from one of the most influential families in Benjamin.

Besides his favorable family situation, Saul himself was "an impressive young man without equal among the Israelites" (v. 2). The feature that most obviously set Saul apart from other Israelites was his physical appearance; he was "a head taller than any of the others." Although this characteristic would normally be considered an asset, the narrator may have included this detail as a subtle indictment of Israel's first king. Saul is the only Israelite specifically noted in the Bible as being tall; elsewhere it was only Israel's enemies whose height was noted (Num. 13:33; Deut. 1:28; 1 Sam. 17:4). Israel had asked for a king "like all the other nations" (8:20), and the Lord was giving them the desires of their heart, even down to the physical details.

9:4-6. The hill country of Ephraim lay north of Benjamin and boasted fertile ground. Shalishah and Shaalim were districts northeast of Gibeah. Zuph lay about five miles north of Gibeah, Saul's hometown. The man of God was Samuel, though the text does not reveal this until verse 14. Saul's attendant described him as highly respected and as one whose word consistently proved true. The text may subtly suggest that Saul really did not know about Samuel, whereas his attendant and all Israel did.

9:7-13. Saul felt it inappropriate to approach the man of God without a gift. After all, the prophet's good counsel might result in the discovery of the lost donkeys, leading to his father's financial gain. Or perhaps Saul thought Samuel might expect a reward. At any rate, the attendant offered his own piece of silver. The women suggested the men hurry because of the impending sacrifice that Samuel would oversee. Saul and his attendant would want to meet Samuel before the beginning of that ceremony.

9:14-18. Having walked up the hill from the well, Saul and his servant entered the city gate just as Samuel was “on his way up to the high place.” A providential encounter ensued between these three men. To delineate this point, the narrator notes that on the previous day the Lord “had revealed to Samuel” that he would send him “a man from the land of Benjamin” (v. 16). Deeper than any mortal motives driving the encounter were the currents of divine will: the Lord was fulfilling His promise to give Israel their new leader, who would deliver Israel from “the hand of the Philistines.” Particularly striking in the instructions to Samuel in vv. 16-17 is the Lord’s fourfold repetition of the phrase “My people.” Though He had placed Saul in a position of authority over Israel, the Lord was in no way relinquishing His own claim to the nation: Israel would remain the Lord’s own treasured possession. At his finest, Saul would be a mere caretaker of God’s flock.

9:24-25. Since the Lord had told Samuel that he was sending him a guest (v. 16), the faithful prophet had duly prepared for the visitor’s arrival, even setting aside the choicest portion of the sacrificial animal, “the leg with what was on it” (v. 24), for Saul’s enjoyment.

Following the meal a nocturnal conversation ensued between Saul and the prophet on the roof of Samuel’s residence. The roof, always flat in ancient Israel, functioned in warm, dry weather as useful living space. Following the conversation, Samuel once again acted as the thoughtful host, permitting Saul to sleep in this preferred location, where breezes would have made the night more pleasant.

9:26-27. Rising about daybreak, Samuel summoned Saul from the roof back into the interior of the house so that final preparations could be made for the journey back home. As a proper host, Samuel then accompanied both Saul and the servant to the edge of the city; but in a break with customary practice, Samuel asked Saul to stay behind while sending his servant on ahead. The reason Samuel gave was provocative: “so that I may give you a message from God” (v. 27), a message that was to take the dual forms of a symbolic gesture as well as a spoken word.

10:1. The act of anointing Saul with oil was anticipated in 9:16. The rhetorical question “Hasn’t the Lord anointed you?” implies an affirmative answer.

10:2–12:25. When Saul arrived home, he said nothing about his encounter with Samuel and resumed his previous routine. Thereafter, Samuel summoned the Israelites to Mizpah. During the assembly he revealed the identity of their new king. However, Saul hid until the people seized him and proclaimed him king. Nevertheless, Saul continued his life as a farmer. When the Ammonites attacked Jabesh-gilead, Saul finally acted. Mobilizing the entire nation, he won a decisive victory. Consequently Saul’s kingship was confirmed in a national ceremony at Gilgal. The occasion marked the transfer of political leadership from Samuel’s judgeship to the monarchy of Saul.

READING ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

