

LESSON 3

KING SAUL

(READ 1 SAMUEL 9-11)



Introduction

The clamor for a king rang throughout Israel. It did not matter that God warned them of the pitfalls of a human king. We can still hear the pain in God's words to Samuel today, "Obey their voice and make them a king" (1 Samuel 8:22). A defining moment in Israel's history took place—the God who holds all history in His hands allowed Israel's switch from a theocracy (a government focused on God and His holy ordinances) to a monarchy (a government by a king). The question now: Whom will God choose as Israel's king? The search begins.

As our study begins, Samuel takes us to the tribe of Benjamin. This tribe descended from Benjamin, the youngest son of Jacob, whose mother died in giving him life (Genesis 35:16–17). Ten of Benjamin's sons traveled to Egypt to settle there (Genesis 46:21). This number grew to 35,400 (Numbers 1:37). A second census shows how the Lord had blessed them in number—45,600 in all (Numbers 26:41). God gave this tribe land in the middle of Canaan (Joshua 18:11). Its principal cities included Jericho, Bethel, Mizpah, and Gibeon. Although Jerusalem fell within the tribe's territorial boundaries, this city remained in the hands of the Jebusites until David conquered it years later. Notable Benjamites include Ehud, Israel's second judge (Judges 3:15). Benjamites helped defeat Sisera's Canaanite army at the time of Deborah and Barak (Judges 5:14). God begins the search for Israel's king among the Benjamites.

An Earthly King

Israel wanted an earthly king. It did not matter how much God warned them against establishing a monarchy. Every nation around Israel had a king. They wanted one too! Ignoring God's gracious advice, they gave God an ultimatum, "Give us a king or we will appoint one ourselves" (see 1 Samuel 8:19–20). God had called the Israelites, like you and me, to be in the world but not of the world. Our world, like theirs, comes fraught with danger, and going into battle against it under any banner other than God's simply invites difficulties.

32. Imagine you are an Israelite looking for an earthly king. What characteristics must this new king possess?
33. Looking back in time, it might seem ridiculous to us that the Israelites would seek an earthly king. Yet peer pressure, then as now, affects actions. Who pressured Israel for a king?



God Chooses Saul

Read 1 Samuel 9:1–10:8. God promised Israel a king, and He sent Samuel to a man named Kish, a Benjamite. Kish had a son named Saul. God brought Samuel and Saul together.

34. From a purely human perspective, what attributes (physical and otherwise) did Saul possess that made him desirable as Israel’s king (9:2)?
35. After anointing Saul with oil (10:1), Samuel foretold three encounters by which God would prove to Saul that His appointment as Israel’s king was genuine. Describe these three encounters.
 - A. 1 Samuel 10:2—
 - B. 1 Samuel 10:3–4—
 - C. 1 Samuel 10:5–6—

Israel’s First King

Read 1 Samuel 10:9–27. In biblical times, priests commonly drew lots to determine God’s will (Joshua 18:10; Joel 3:3; see also the last use of lots in the Bible, Acts 1:26). Samuel, God’s priest and prophet, probably drew lots in Israel’s presence to select the tribe of Benjamin.

36. Samuel had already anointed Saul king, yet he still drew lots in front of the Israelites. Why do you think Samuel did this before announcing Saul as Israel’s first king?
37. What characteristics of a king did God desire (Deuteronomy 17:14–20)? Did Saul appear to possess these characteristics? If so, how?

Jabesh-gilead Rescued

Read 1 Samuel 11:1–11. As this chapter opens, we find Saul at work tending his father’s field. However, a national crisis was brewing at Jabesh-gilead as the Ammonites surrounded the city. The Israelites living there asked Nahash the Ammonite for treaty conditions, but they gasped when they heard them.

38. What conditions did Nahash set?
39. How did Saul galvanize Israel to fight against Nahash the Ammonite (vv. 7–8)?
40. The Israelites credit Saul for delivering Jabesh-gilead from the Ammonites. How does 1 Samuel 11:7 point to God as Israel’s uniting agent and true King?

Saul Confirmed as King

Read 1 Samuel 11:12–15. God delivered Jabesh-gilead through Saul, a fact Saul acknowledged in true humility (v. 13). At this point, it appeared that Saul’s reign as Israel’s first king was off to a good start.

41. At first, some “worthless fellows” doubted Saul’s selection as king and despised Saul for it (10:27). What happened to these men after Saul’s great victory (11:12–13)?



42. Gilgal, east of Jericho, served as the place for Israel’s covenant renewal with God prior to conquering the land of Canaan (Joshua 5:1–9). What did Samuel want Israel to understand by selecting Gilgal as the place to “renew the kingdom” under Saul?

God’s Word for Today

Although Israel had a king, her true King was God, who guided and sustained her. He guarded her and loved her throughout history. Saul appeared to meet all of Israel’s—and God’s—requirements for a king.

43. How might Saul have provided a godly influence for the Israelites to see? What impact might this have had upon Israel and her pagan neighbors?

44. At your Baptism, God anointed you with the Holy Spirit, setting you apart to witness to His love to others. Although you are not a king, you are not without influence. What godly impact might you have on friends, co-workers, and family members when it comes to Christ?

In Closing

- Read 1 John 1:9. Think about God’s promise to forgive us when we confess our sin.
- Define *repentance* using a Bible dictionary or other reliable resource.
- Read **1 Samuel 12–15** to prepare for the next session.

Pray: Lord, often I go about my life thinking I have no influence on anyone’s beliefs—and sometimes peer pressure prevents me from speaking of Your salvation. Send Your Holy Spirit to strengthen me in my time of need. Through Christ I pray. Amen.