



# LESSONS FROM THE KINGS

A BIBLE STUDY  
ON THE KINGS OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH

## We Want A King!

“We want a king!” the people cried. It was a simple request, really. The king would speak, everyone would listen. He’d be in charge. That’s the way it worked for the rest of the nations around them. At least that’s the way it was *supposed* to work.

Samuel heard their request. He wasn’t a king. He was a prophet. When it came time for any decision he sought the Lord’s guidance. This was the arrangement. God, their Lord and King, would direct his people. They would listen to him through his prophets. He would, in grace as he promised, bless them. Simple arrangement, right?

Samuel knew how wonderfully this worked too! He called the people to serve the Lord wholeheartedly, they did. Year after year he traveled throughout Israel serving as a judge. When you picture the time of Samuel you can picture a time of peace for Israel, a time when the Lord was well-known, well-trusted, and served by the people. The Lord spoke, they all listened. Undeserved blessings of his grace followed. It had to have been awesome! There’s nothing greater than when God rules in the hearts of his people and in grace he blesses them!

Samuel was like a light for Israel. God’s Word was honored, and he continued from childhood to old age to say “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.” But the light began to grow dimmer as he grew older. As he grew older Samuel just didn’t have the strength. So he appointed his two sons to be judges over Israel. That’s where things began to go wrong.

For them, sure, the Lord might have spoken, but money talks too. They let money speak louder than the Lord. They accepted bribes and perverted justice. It got so bad that the people of Israel

pleaded with Samuel to fix things. The elders of Israel gathered around their old leader and pleaded, "Your sons don't walk in your ways...now appoint a king to lead us."

Can you blame Israel for pleading for a king? The people's solution seemed reasonable, "We want a king such as other nations have." They wanted a simple arrangement. The king would speak, and everyone would listen. Except, God was supposed to be that voice. He was their king. He said to Samuel "'Listen to all that the people are saying to you; They have not rejected you, they have rejected me as their king.'" - 1 Sa 8:7. S

It was a simple arrangement, really. "I speak, you listen. I'm in charge." That's the way it worked for ancient Israel. At least that's the way it was supposed to work with them and their God. Something was now missing from their checklist for a ruler: The Lord and his Word wasn't part of their equation. Their criteria? "Someone in charge... so we can be like the other nations."

Having an honest, intelligent, and just ruler is a good thing. But as the people of God we don't need to plead that God send us someone to lead us the way the rest of the world is led. We are different. We already have a king. Our King comes to us and leads us by his Word. Our hearts are guided by that word. That king is above all others in our hearts and minds.

And yes, he is a just, wise, and perfect king. What king would do what he has done? What king would come to save his people? What king would hang on a cross as his own people mocked him? Our King! Our good, gracious, merciful, wonderful king! It's a simple arrangement. He speaks, we listen. Why look anywhere else?

Take time to listen to the word of the Lord. He speaks, we listen. Join me for "Lessons from the Kings" as we go through the accounts of the kings of ancient Israel and Judah and find many truths for today. Why? There's nothing greater than when God rules in the hearts of his people through his Word, and in grace he blesses them!

"We want a king," and it must be Jesus. Jesus, my Lord, my king, my unending, unfailing source of peace!

### Discuss and Apply

Samuel's sons failed to be just and honest rulers. Make two lists: 1) The top five traits most people look for in a ruler. 2) Your own / your group's top five desirable traits for a ruler. **Read 1 Samuel 8** and evaluate Israel's reason for pleading for a king. What might their trait list must have looked like?

- 1) What most look for in a ruler:
- 2) Your group's list of top five desirable traits for a ruler
  
- 3) Discuss Israel's priorities: What dangers come from desiring rulers "such as other nations have."?
  
- 4) The Lord said, "They have rejected me as king." Explain.
  
- 5) How is Jesus ruling as our king? Discuss how only he can meet our every need.

## Abuse of Power

“Let them have what they want.” That’s not always something you want to hear. Maybe a teenage son wants to go to a party but his parents know there are likely to be people with drugs there. But the teen pleads anyways, “I’ll be fine, please just let me go.” Having just what you want can leave you with terrible consequences or leave you sitting in awful regret. That teen will come back from the party “You were right, mom and dad, there were drugs. And I didn’t fit in when I didn’t join them.” Or worse he won’t come back but will have to be picked up by his parents after the police have arrived. Or even worse, he won’t come back because of an overdose. “Let them have what they want” Can be a careless thing to say.

So why does God say that when the people are asking for a king? “Let them have what they want.” He says it but attaches a warning so that they might learn a lesson. He tells Samuel to let them have a king but give them a warning of what will happen. Samuel warned “The king who rules over you will take your sons and make them serve in his army, he will take your daughters and make them serve in his palace, he will take your best vineyards for himself and take your best crops and best animals. He will make you serve him.” Samuel’s sons distorted justice as judges. What was going to stop a king from being equally unjust and even more powerful?

Abuse of power will always come. The devil gives false promises that make us trust many different people as our rulers. But if that worldly ruler has their own way, according to the natural desires of the heart, they will make you serve them. It’s a real tragedy when worldly rulers become our source of hope. Why? They will always disappoint in the end. They can’t fulfill what we need. They are sinners just like us with their own limitations, their own weaknesses, and their own self-centered agendas.

Yes, thank God there are and have been godly rulers in this world. And the law often keeps others in check. But only one will *never* abuse or neglect proper use of his power and position. Only one deserves all our trust. He rules the world with truth and grace. He never rules for his own selfish end. In fact, our King, Jesus, came to serve. He is the only King who we can count on for such service. He gave himself for his people and the good of his kingdom. He now holds all authority and will never abuse it for selfish gains.

He has all power and we can be certain he will never abuse it. That’s the king we want, Jesus! Jesus, my Lord, my king, my unending, unending, unending source of peace!

### Discuss and Apply

- 1) Abuse of power is always going to be a problem. Identify two different ways it comes up in **1 Samuel 8**.
- 2) List some examples in Scripture which show God as one who never abuses his divine power and authority.

3) What false promises does the devil use to get people to turn to worldly rulers and trust them above God? Explain why this is such a tragedy.

## Patterns in History

Have you ever found yourself reflecting on something foolish you've done. "I can't believe I did that again!" I bought some Jell-O for my kids a while back. "This will be a fun treat!" I thought. The fun treat ended up in the carpet, on the shelf in the fridge, and smeared over several little hands that smeared it over several tiny shirts and pants. Later that evening I stepped on a squishy sticky spot that had remained hidden during our cleanup. "Never again," I told myself. "This sticky mess is not worth the fun treat. Jell-O and several toddlers can be a recipe for disaster.

Until a few weeks later I was in the store and my little shopping helper pointed to the Jell-O "Can we have that for our special treat!"

Without thinking I blurted out "Sure! Which flavor do you want?" (How can you say no to that excitedly squeaky little voice next to your shopping cart?)

This time it was green... on everything. "Never again..."

There is one cliché that begs to be repeated: "History repeats itself." This doesn't mean that the study of history is boring. It can be, but only if you don't begin to connect the dots to today's world. The phrase "history repeats itself" reminds us that we can learn something important for today by looking at the past.

Ancient Israel followed a miserable pattern in their history. They would turn aside from faithfulness to the Lord. Only afterwards, often years later, they would realize what a terrible mess they created. They would repent, be restored to joy by God's grace, and resolve as forgiven people to live anew. But history repeats itself. They fluctuated back into the same vices and evils they had only just escaped.

This happens not only with nations, but with institutions, churches, families, and individuals. Why? Sin has its hold. Temptation returns. Sheep stray. The devil seems to win the day.

But sin doesn't win the day. The greatest lesson in history is God's grace. History repeats itself: There he is. The Lord rebukes, he calls to repentance, he freely restores and forgives. His patience is so great -it spans thousands of years. It did for Israel. Won't his patience still be there for you?

He extends it today. It's for you, your nation, your culture, your community, your church, your spouse, your children, for you. Marvel at his grace for us all in Jesus as you begin a new day today. History repeats itself -and that includes forgiveness for you from the God of all grace.

### Discuss and Apply

The **time of the judges** ranged from when the Israelites first entered the promised land in 1400 BC until the prophet Samuel anointed the first king of Israel 1050 BC. We see a constant cycle of the people fluctuating from faithfulness to unfaithfulness. Each time they drift away from him the Lord sends an adversary so that they might repent and turn back to him. After many of them repent he raises up a ruler who leads the people to victory over their enemies. Each time,

however, the people eventually turn back into the cycle of sin. Can you relate to any similar experiences in your life or the lives of anyone you know?

- 1) What does this pattern teach us about human nature?
- 2) In your own words / with your group: what parallels to this trend are evident in recent world history and today?
- 3) The **book of Judges** concludes with the commentary, "In those days Israel had no king, everyone did as they saw fit." Yet they did have a king who would never abandon them. Explain. How does this record of the people's straying magnify God's record of grace and give you comfort?

## This Man Will Be the One To Fix Everything

People get frustrated during election season. The typical campaign will offer grand promises to fix every problem. No candidate ever says they will just try their best. They all say, "I can fix everything for you." We all know they can't. But we want to believe that there must be someone who can! So, we vote and choose accordingly.

The ancient Israelites wanted to believe there must be someone who could fix all their problems. We read in 1 Samuel 8:18-22 that they thought a new king would do it all! But like so many of us in an election year their hopes were short-sighted.

Our Lord warns in Isaiah 55 and John chapter 6 "Don't labor for bread that won't last!" What he warns against is our propensity to look for a quick-fix that is not centered on God. Especially if that quick-fix is centered on something entirely apart from God. Psalm 146 has an important reminder: "Do not trust in human helpers, in a mortal man who cannot save you."

But its easy to misplace our hopes. "This new boyfriend will fix all my issues," a single mother tells herself. But she continues to turn a deaf ear to Jesus. She'll grieve when she realizes this new boyfriend is just as sinful and selfish as the last. He lies, cheats, and doesn't really love her or care about her problems. The boyfriend couldn't fix anything.

"This new exercise equipment will help me get healthy again," says the man who struggles with more than an unhealthy body and has an unhealthy soul. He'll be crushed when he realizes that his stair climber is an endless chase for a healthy body. He will age, grow weak, and die. The stair climber couldn't fix everything.

Whether it is a person, a job, a home, a politician, or a new purchase, many promises are made and many hopes are centered on them. So, we vote or choose accordingly. If we don't take care we also misplace our hopes.

There's one man who we can put our hope in who never fails. He's more than a mortal man. He is the very Son of God. He does love that single mother and does truly care for her, will never lie to her or leave her. He does care for the body of that man hoping to fix his unhealthy body. He has purchased it from the grave and will restore him to a new glorified body. Jesus does fix every problem. To look elsewhere is to put all your eggs in the wrong basket. Don't fall into the hype of a quick-fix. Take refuge in your king who provides an everlasting solution. Jesus, our King, promises what no man can, "I can and will fix everything for you!"

### Discuss and Apply

It is easy to be swept away by empty promises. When David's son Absalom, for example, started to make grand claims to the people, he quickly won over their hearts. Politicians do this. Products are advertised to do this. And we are tempted to turn to people and things as a fix-all solution. Think back to the most recent election year. What grand ideas or promises have politicians led people to believe they could achieve?

- 1) Make a list of at least four things (or people) that you trust will make life better for you. How could you end up trusting too much in those things?
  
- 2) **Psalm 146** tells us not to put our trust in mortal man. Explain why we shouldn't. In Isaiah 55 and John 6 we are reminded not to labor for bread that spoils. Explain how everything we work for will spoil. God offers something far greater! Explain the axiom: "We are restless until we find rest in Jesus."
  
- 3) The people insisted on having a king. They hoped he would solve all their problems. **Reread 1 Samuel 8:18 -22.** Agree or Disagree: "God gave the people just what they were asking for."
  
- 4) Discuss: "When God says to the stubborn heart: 'Have it your way.' he can do this in both judgment and love.
  
- 5) What things has Jesus already done for you? Make a list of the top five things you look forward to having fixed in Jesus' eternal kingdom:

## Give Him An Inch He'll Take A Mile

Our three-year-old gets along well with our small dog. But there's one big problem. The dog likes to think he's in charge of the three-year-old. This happens because if you give him an inch, he'll take a mile. For example, when the three-year-old lets the dog put his paw up on his lap, the dog ends up putting both his front legs fully extended on him in order to get what he wants and trample over him. Our dog isn't necessarily being mean. He just starts to think he's the one in charge. When the three-year-old lets the dog lick his hand, the little dog ends up boldly grabbing the sandwich from his hand and running off with it. Of course the three-year-old is passively allowing the dog to do what he wants. Unless someone like an adult steps in, the dog takes a mile and greatly oversteps his barriers.

What about when God gives us an inch? In grace he permits us to have or do something we have asked for -even though we don't deserve it. Do we then assume we can take it all and act like we are in charge? That's what happened with ancient Israel when they asked for a King.

Saul is a tragic example of what happens when we demand something from God and then go too far. Sometimes the worst thing God can say to the sinful demands people make is, "Have it your way." He concedes to the clamoring from Israel and selects a king for them. The Lord graciously equips Saul, the first king, with his Spirit and gives him success in battle. He gave the people their request. He was gracious with Israel.

But what so often happens when we find blessing and success? Saul wants to call the shots. He wants more power than God has given him. Saul begins to think he is above God his King. God gave Saul some power, Saul wanted it all. So, God has to step in. He had lifted up Saul in grace. When Saul abused that gift God would bring him down in judgment. God lifts up the lowly -even an unknown man from the tribe of Benjamin. God brings down the proud - even the first king over Israel. Won't he do the same with you and me when we take more than we should and think we can call the shots?

You will see many patterns in Saul's life which every person struggles with. Don't we all struggle to have the proper attitude toward God as our King? See in the life of Saul the dangers of the progression of unrepentant sin. We learn by example from Saul the meaning of Paul's words, "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death." (2 Cor 7:10)

But also note God's great patience in dealing with Saul and his people. The Lord remains their gracious King. He continues to lead, guide, and protect through his Word.

The Lord himself has already chosen the humble King who will come who will do what is right - he will be lifted up. That coming King, Jesus, is the only one who truly brings the kingdom from tragedy to triumph.

## Discuss and Apply

Read **1 Samuel 9-10**. Identify three things that demonstrate Saul's good character and two things which cause you to wonder about his character.

Good?

Questionable?

Jesus is the true first king of Israel and as the only one in who remains king forever. Identify at least three examples or events from his earthly ministry that demonstrate his true character for us and cause us to marvel at his good character:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

## “There is no one like him!”

Samuel had a pretty tough job. He had to get everyone behind a brand-new king. There had been no dynasty in Israel before his time. There was no “son of the king” who all the people could rally behind. Samuel had to start from scratch. You could almost describe him acting as a campaign manager. He had to rally an entire nation and convince them to follow Saul as king.

And Saul didn’t make it easy. It was inauguration day. And what was the new king doing? He was hiding among the supplies. He looked like a cowardly man who didn’t want any part in the proceedings. How is Samuel supposed to get them all excited about him being the chosen king?

Fortunately for Samuel, Saul stood out from his peers. He is described as being “an impressive young man. There was no one more impressive among the Israelites than he. He stood a head taller than anyone else.” (1 Samuel 9:2) When they finally bring out Saul in front of the people the prophet’s work was cut out for him. He just had to gesture toward the tall kingly looking guy and say, “See the one the Lord has chosen? There is no one like him!” And you couldn’t argue with that. Once Saul was no longer hiding, he was standing out.

But was Samuel emphasizing the right traits? Like a political campaign manager or a public relations agent he appeals to what essentially doesn’t matter, Saul’s appearance. He made the easy appeal instead of the godly one.

What did matter? It was mentioned in passing in Saul’s new title, “the one the Lord has chosen.” God chose him! With that fact the people ought to have been placated. Knowing that God has called and appointed someone ought to be the highest and most important aspect. If Samuel were to point to a blind, crippled man, who was aged and weak and say, “this is the one the Lord has chosen” everyone ought to have exclaimed, “Amen.” If God calls someone, that is all that really matters. Samuel ought to have focused on the fact that the Lord has chosen him. End of story.

But Samuel didn’t think that was quiet enough. Almost as if he needed a little more to please everyone he appealed to Saul’s appearance. And in doing so, Samuel acted as if God’s call was only a suggestion, only a preliminary point. Saul needed more before they would accept him.

If there is a pastor or teacher called by God through his church to serve you and your family, what do you look for? When you explain why someone is pastor or teacher do you focus on outward things? Or do you say, “He’s called by God”? It’s easier sometimes to appeal to trivial things rather than godly things.

Saul, and many others after him were impressive in appearance. But God would soon teach his people not to look at the outward height or strength of a man. He would prepare them to see the “one the Lord has chosen” coming in lowliness and with nothing in his appearance that was impressive. As it was, Jesus, was rejected by many, though the Lord had chosen him. A lowly humble man who died for his people -there’s truly no one like him.

### Discuss and Apply

- 1) Read **1 Samuel 10:23-24**. Samuel had to serve as the first “campaign manager” for the first king. Evaluate how he does his job. How would you describe the man God chose?

What traits made him please some right away and leave others displeased at his selection?

- 2) Explain why it might have been better for Samuel to focus on Saul's title as "the one the Lord has chosen" rather than his impressive appearance.
- 3) What can happen if we focus more on appearances than on the divine call given to leaders in God's church?
- 4) In what ways might we end up focusing more on inconsequential and trivial outward things rather than God's calling when speaking about those he calls and appoints to lead his Church.
- 5) The prophet Micah's name means "Who is like God?" Jesus was also chosen as King, but he alone was chosen because of his inherent qualifications and traits. List some unique aspects and traits of our King Jesus that you would present when describing him to someone.

## Yield to God's Representatives

Why would anyone ever yield to having someone else in charge? It's not easy. Who wants someone else to be in control? God's people do. They even support it. That's what we see when God appointed his first king over Israel.

A new king was on the scene! It was Saul, the first one. The terms of the kingship were laid out. Samuel wrote down the rights and duties of a king over Israel. Something like a constitutional monarchy was now set in place in Israel. It all happened so quickly! Many nations take years or centuries to arrange an established form of government. Those governments must struggle to define and defend their authority. But in Israel? Within the matter of a single gathering it was all done. It seems it took a single day! The king was identified, inaugurated, and a constitution was written down. It must have been a whirlwind event which completely changed the face of the nation of Israel.

Some responded well. It says that some valiant men followed Saul. They became his first royal court, advisors, and royal body guards, the first official administrative cabinet in Israel under their new king. Why? These men responded with faith. It says, "God had touched their hearts."

Others, however, despised the new king. They scoffed, "how can this man save us?" They gave him no support and no gifts. Those men who despised Saul may have thought someone else should be in charge. Maybe they thought they should be in charge. Whatever the case they missed out on the point. God was in charge of their lives. God has appointed Saul as their king. To reject their new king was to reject their God.

Our sinful nature hates to let others be in charge. But when we recognize in faith that God has appointed kings, rulers, parents, pastors, teachers, and all authority over us, we respond with fruits of faith. God is good. Those men who supported Saul didn't need to know anything more than God had appointed Saul. That was enough.

Why would anyone else ever yield to having someone else in charge? It starts by letting God be in charge! And in faith we recognize God is not just in charge, he is good. God, who is always good, establishes authority over us for our good. That truth takes faith to hold to!

May God forgive us for the times we've disparaged authority appointed over us. May he cause us to see authority as established by him. May he touch our hearts and cause us and all his people to support and uphold that authority with honor and respect -whether it be king, governor, judge, parent, teacher, or pastor.

We honor authority because know that no matter how godless or good authority is on earth there is coming a day when God will reveal his appointed king Jesus. Every knee will bow on that day whether they like it or not. In a single day that king will take his kingdom. The everlasting rule of his kingship will be established over all the earth. And he will rule forever in our hearts and lives with unending goodness. We will serve him in his kingdom forever because God touched our hearts and brought us to faith in him.

### Discuss and Apply

Read **1 Samuel 10:24b-27**. Samuel wanted the people to honor God's appointed ruler. Saul was received well by some. Others despised and rejected him from the start.

- 1) Identify (according to Romans 13:1-7) who is over us as an authority? Who put them in a position of authority?
- 2) List some things you or others might be guilty of which wrongly dishonor God's governing authorities today.
- 3) What ought we do for authorities in our government?
- 4) How can you apply these same truths to other authorities such as parents and spiritual leaders in your life?