



Unit .10

Session .03

God Rejects a King

Scripture



**1 Sam. 8:4-9,19-20;
13:6-9,13-14; 15:10-11,22**

4 So all the elders of Israel gathered together and went to Samuel at Ramah. **5** They said to him, “Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Therefore, appoint a king to judge us the same as all the other nations have.” **6** When they said, “Give us a king to judge us,” Samuel considered their demand wrong, so he prayed to the LORD. **7** But the LORD told him, “Listen to the people and everything they say to you. They have not rejected you; they have rejected me as their king. **8** They are doing the same thing to you that they have done to me, since the day I brought them out of Egypt until this day, abandoning me and worshiping other gods. **9** Listen to them, but solemnly warn them and tell them about the customary rights of the king who will reign over them.” ... **19** The people refused to listen to Samuel. “No!” they said. “We must have a king over us. **20** Then we’ll be like all the other nations: our king will judge us, go out before us, and fight our battles.” ... **6** The men of Israel saw that they were in trouble because the troops were in a difficult situation. They hid in caves, in thickets, among rocks, and in holes and cisterns. **7** Some Hebrews even crossed the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. Saul, however,

was still at Gilgal, and all his troops were gripped with fear. **8** He waited seven days for the appointed time that Samuel had set, but Samuel didn’t come to Gilgal, and the troops were deserting him. **9** So Saul said, “Bring me the burnt offering and the fellowship offerings.” Then he offered the burnt offering. ... **13** Samuel said to Saul, “You have been foolish. You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you. It was at this time that the LORD would have permanently established your reign over Israel, **14** but now your reign will not endure. The LORD has found a man after his own heart, and the LORD has appointed him as ruler over his people, because you have not done what the LORD commanded.” ... **10** Then the word of the LORD came to Samuel, **11** “I regret that I made Saul king, for he has turned away from following me and has not carried out my instructions.” So Samuel became angry and cried out to the LORD all night. ... **22** Then Samuel said: “Does the LORD take pleasure in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the LORD? Look: to obey is better than sacrifice, to pay attention is better than the fat of rams.

Intro Options



Main Point:
When it comes
to following God,
half-hearted obedience
is still disobedience.

Option 1

Hand out three 3x5 index cards to each of your students. Tell them to pretend that they have found Aladdin's lamp: they've rubbed it, a genie has popped out, and they can now make (just about) any three wishes they want. They should write each wish on a separate index card. They may want to disguise their handwriting, if possible.

Collect all the index cards and mix them up in a hat or basket. Then pass the cards out at random; each student gets three cards. They should look to see what the three wishes they got are. Their job now is to guess at two motivations for each wish. On the one hand, they should try to guess a godly motivation someone might make the wish; on the other hand, they should also try to guess an ungodly motivation someone might make the same wish.

Afterward, discuss how there are some wishes that cannot come from godly motivation (e.g., for someone else to be kidnapped), but that most wishes could have a good or bad motivation. Lead into how the Israelites will ask for the king: how could they be asking for godly reasons? Ungodly reasons? Which do you think it will end up being?

Option 2

Tell your students: Imagine that you are a spy high up in the ranks of the fictional country of Maduplase (get it? Made-up-place?). Your country shares a border with Nexdur, a prosperous land with an outstanding ruler; the only catch with the monarch of Nexdur is that no one has ever seen him or her. Nevertheless, all the commands and directives coming from the monarch have done nothing but good for the country. The monarch of Maduplase wants to usurp the throne from the monarch of Nexdur, and he/she has assigned you to enact subterfuge in Nexdur to try to get the people to be dissatisfied with their king. As individuals or in small groups, come up with a plan to shake people's faith in the monarch of Nexdur.

Give them time to come up with some plans, and then hear what they have. Did they come up with a smear campaign in the press or social media? Did they decide to sow doubt by pointing out the apparent non-presence of the monarch of Nexdur? Did they extol how much better things were in Maduplase?


Point out the parallel with ancient Israel: like Nexdur, it had a good king who provided for all their needs, but who could not be seen. What strategy got the Israelites to reject this king? For the most part, it was wanting to be like Maduplase, like the nations around them. Did this desire make any sense, given that all their other needs were met? How does their desire show the irrationality of sin and warn us not to embrace it?

TEACHING PLAN


Samuel became one of Israel's greatest prophets. He heard from God and then spoke on behalf of God to the people. Unfortunately, Samuel's sons didn't follow in the footsteps of their father, and their rebellion provided the chance for Israel to request something they had been after for quite some time.

Read 1 Samuel 8:4-9,19-20.



Scripture reveals that it was always God's will for a man one day to sit on a throne over His people. So, the people's request for a king was not necessarily bad, but the heart behind their request was not in the right place; they desired to be like the other nations around them. God called His people to be separate from the world and holy to the Lord (Ex. 19:5-6; Lev. 18:24; 20:26; Deut. 7:1-6). He called Abraham out from his family to obey Him in faith. He redeemed the Hebrews out of slavery in Egypt. He gave them His law in the wilderness to govern their nation, their worship, and their behavior. His people were to be unique, set apart, different, the Lord's own possession, a kingdom of priests, and a blessing to the whole world—not like the other nations. 

▪ What are some reasons we struggle with wanting to be like the world?

There was something else problematic with Israel's request that Samuel picked upon—they were rejecting God as their King. The people wanted a human king to judge them and lead them in their battles, but the Lord Himself, through leaders such as Moses, Joshua, and Samuel, had commanded them, led them, provided for them, fought for them, and ruled over them since the exodus. They needed no one else, but that didn't stop them, so God gave them what they wanted. 

In Israel's story, we see two ways to reject God: one is to reject Him outright; the other is to claim you follow Him, but you do not truly depend on Him. This second form of rebellion is expressed whenever you insist on a number of other things being present in your life before you can feel secure. Is it not easier to “trust God” when everything you think you need is right in front of you? School is going well, your relationships are good, and the people within your life are healthy. But when one of those things is missing, we sometimes get insecure, anxious, or unhappy.

▪ What are some things that offer you a sense of fulfillment or a feeling of security? What are the signs that we are trusting in these things and not in God alone?

After the people insisted on a king, Samuel sent them home. Then God arranged a private meeting for Samuel in which he anointed a man named Saul as king over Israel. Following a public recognition, Saul and his army camped at Gilgal in opposition to the Philistines, and there he waited for Samuel's promised arrival.

COMMENTARY

1 Samuel 8

Main Point:
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4-9. The Israelites found themselves in a déjà vu moment. First, the Philistines, among other nations, were a constant threat in the promised land. Second, Samuel had appointed his two sons as judges over Israel, but like Eli's sons, they took advantage of their position (1 Sam. 8:1-3). The last time they faced circumstances like these, they lost in battle, they lost the ark, and they lost God's presence and glory. Naturally, the Israelites wanted to change their path, so they asked Samuel for a king to judge them.

In God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants, He included the promise of kings to come (Gen. 17:6,16; 35:11; 49:10; Num. 24:7,17-19). He even gave instructions for how a king should be chosen and reign in Deuteronomy 17:14-20. Furthermore, the Book of Judges showed the necessity of a king to rein in the sinfulness of God's people (Judg. 21:25), and Hannah prophetically praised God for raising up a king to do just this (1 Sam. 2:10).

Had the Israelites prayed and asked for the Lord's direction, had they asked Samuel for advice or even listened to his warnings (1 Sam. 8:10-18), they would have fared better for the next forty-two years (the length of Saul's troubled reign as the first king over Israel). Instead, they suffered under the consequences of their selfish choice to reject God's leadership through Samuel.

10-18. Samuel didn't hold back when he foretold the consequences of Israel's demand for a king. He tells them that a king will take their sons and daughters; he will take their crops and their lands; he will take the best years of their lives. And he will exploit them for himself.

The irony here is tremendous. The Israelites expected a king to guarantee prosperity and security. What they would receive instead were kings who would take those things from them. They wanted a king whom they could control. Instead, their kings would wind up controlling them. What they thought would empower them would actually enslave them!

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 24, DDG)

Sin as Missing the Mark

One aspect of sin is missing the mark of God's standards set for humanity. This missing of the mark is not a simple mistake but a falling short of God's glory through conscious choosing of sin. We may refer to sin as a failure on the part of humans to live according to God's standards, but we must recognize that this failure is intentional. We miss the mark when we deliberately choose to cast aside God's intention for us.

TEACHING PLAN

Read 1 Samuel 13:6-9,13-14.



Saul looked the part of a king, and his first actions as king secured the approval of his people. But faithful leadership is more than skin deep—it is a matter of the heart. Saul was commanded by Samuel to wait for him for seven days in Gilgal, when he would come to offer sacrifices and give instructions for the battle (10:8). Saul waited, but all the while his troops were deserting him in fear. When he couldn't take it any longer, he gave up waiting and made the sacrifices himself; in his own fear, Saul took into his own hands a responsibility that belonged to priests alone. And then Samuel arrived (13:10).

Samuel listened to Saul's excuses: he saw his people deserting, he had not yet seen Samuel, and he feared the Philistines (13:10-12). But no excuse justified Saul's rash action. He disobeyed Samuel's command and thereby disobeyed God. The people's foolish request for a king resulted in a king who made a foolish decision on behalf of his people. Saul's lack of faith led to disobedience and to consequences—there would be no dynasty for Saul and his descendants.

▪ What is the relationship between faith and obedience?

King Saul showed himself to be an able defender of the people of Israel from their surrounding enemies (1 Sam. 14:47-48). But he still couldn't shake his lack of faith and resulting disobedience, which led to even greater consequences for Saul.

Read 1 Samuel 15:10-11,22-23.



The time had come for God's judgment to fall on the Amalekites, a nomadic nation south of the promised land, for attacking the Israelites during their exodus from Egypt. According to God's command through Samuel, Saul was to kill all the Amalekites and their animals (1 Sam. 15:1-3; see Ex. 17:14; Deut. 25:17-19). Saul destroyed everyone and everything, but he spared King Agag and the best of the animals to use as sacrifices to the Lord. When confronted by Samuel for his disobedience, Saul insisted that he had obeyed; he could not understand how he had fallen short of God's command.

According to Samuel, partial obedience is still disobedience. Unfortunately, many people in our churches are giving 90% obedience, just like Saul, and are completely at peace with it. And those of us who are religious are often tempted to cover rebellion with rituals. We disobey in one area and try to "make it up" to God with some offering in another area. Like the student who tries to justify being in an unhealthy romantic relationship by saying he or she is trying to share Christ with the other person. God is not fired up about people singing some songs or giving some of their money when their hearts are far from Him. What thrills God is a heart that obeys Him.

- Like Saul, what are some ways you have noticed yourself or others justifying or rationalizing sin?
- Have you ever considered the fact that partial, delayed, or conditional obedience in your life is still disobedience? What are some areas where you see these half-hearted types of obedience the most?

COMMENTARY

1 Samuel 13

Main Point:
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6-14. Saul's impatience with Samuel stemmed from a lack of faith in God.

1) Saul saw his army dwindling while Samuel seemed to be dawdling. How could he fight against the Philistines, much less defend against them, with his army shrinking day by day from fear? He must have forgotten about Gideon and his army of three hundred selected by God to rout the Midianites (Judg. 7).

2) Saul needed God's favor to defeat the Philistines, and for that, he reasoned, sacrifices had to be made, as if God were a deity who needed to be placated. His misunderstanding of the nature of God forced him to disobey, but soon he would learn that the Lord desires obedience rather than sacrifice (1 Sam. 15:22).

Saul's lack of faith and trust in the Lord stood in contrast with an unnamed man who did trust the Lord, described as being a man after God's own heart. He would eventually succeed Saul and reign as God's king. This king was David. With a heart primarily focused on the glory of God, David would be promised an everlasting dynasty, which would be fulfilled in the eternal kingship of his descendant Jesus. Saul received his due consequences because he followed his own heart and failed to trust in the Lord's wisdom and timing.

Activity

Ask your students to come up with a list of "little white sins": seemingly little, minor sins that people (adults or students) might do.

Cheating on taxes

Cheating on schoolwork

Lying to others

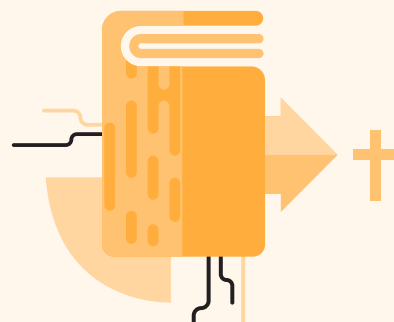
Others?

Once you have compiled a list, ask your students to come up with reasons why people commit these sins. How do they rationalize such behavior and attitudes?

Saul was disobedient out of fear. Ask your students to consider how many of the motivations for the sins in your list stem from fear: fear of missing out, fear of harmful consequences, fear of loss of popularity, etc.

(p. 26, DDG) Christ Connection

The people of Israel rejected God as their King and demanded a human king like the nations around them. God warned them and gave them Saul who failed to trust and obey God. Israel needed a lasting kingdom ruled by Someone who would trust and obey God fully. Through the perfect obedience of Jesus, God would establish His rule over His people forever.



Our Mission

God's Story has always been designed to connect with our story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own. Suggested answers to these questions can be found on the right-hand side of the page for leaders.

Head



Why is it important to remember that our desires are not always good for us?

Share about a time where you think you may have been protected by God's mercy when He did not allow a prayer to be answered.

Heart



The people desired a lesser or earthly king to rule over them. What are some examples of "lesser kings" we turn to for fulfillment other than God?

How do these lesser kings fail to deliver on their promises?

Hands



What are some lessons we learn on how to live before God by looking at the mistakes made by Saul?

How will those lessons inform the way you live this week?

Main Point: When it comes to following God, half-hearted obedience is still disobedience.



Head

God called Israel's request for a king disobedience, but then He allowed it. If this request was so bad, why did God grant it to them? Why not simply say, "No?" This is why: God sometimes answers your prayers to let you learn the hard way that your motivation was wrong. In Romans 1:24, Paul says that God delivers people over to the "cravings of their hearts." In other words, God's judgment was to give them over to what they wanted. Of course, it is also true that some of God's greatest mercies come in the form of unanswered prayers. Refusing to answer a prayer may be God's way of protecting you.



Heart

As we learn from this account, when you have other kings besides God, those kings do not save you; they enslave you. You become a slave to the things you depend on for happiness and security. For example, if you have to be in a relationship to be happy, you become a slave to romantic relationships. If you need the praise of other people to find fulfillment, you become a slave to the opinions of others. Everything you do is aimed at getting the approval of others, even to the point of feeling jealous of others and resenting them when you think they are liked better than you.

Every life has a king. Every human heart has a throne upon which someone or something sits. A king in your life is whatever you must have in order to be happy and secure. And kings make all of their subjects into servants. Everybody serves something. There are no exceptions. You are either submitted to Someone who brings life (God), or you are enslaved to something that brings death.



Hands

In the story of Saul we see a clear example of what empty religion looks like. Empty religion tries to pay God off so that people can maintain control of their lives. Empty religion wants to obey God but on its own terms—terms consisting of partial, delayed, or conditional obedience. But as we have learned, all of those are just various forms of disobedience. True religion, on the other hand, is whole-hearted devotion to God through a relationship with Christ. And it recognizes that while we may fail on a daily basis to give God our full obedience, the love of God in Christ empowers us to repent of our shortcomings and once again step back onto the path of discipleship.