

# The First Kings of Israel

Listen, Obey, Love

## DAY 1: A “Religious” King

1. After the time of the Judges the Israelites have a desire to be like all the other nations and demand to have a king. One of Israel’s great leaders, a man named Samuel reluctantly picks a shy man named Saul who’s main qualification seems to be that he is taller than everyone else. Saul had various problems. Emotionally he was up and down, he was never quite on the same page with God, or with Samuel. While he was superstitious and he tried to do religious things to get on God’s good side, he had trouble listening for what God truly wanted.

2. Here is a story that sums up Saul’s problem. Notice in verse 5 that the Philistines are the enemy and they have thousands of chariots and an immense army.

*1 Samuel 13: 1-10 Saul was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned over Israel forty-two years.<sup>2</sup> Saul chose three thousand men from Israel; two thousand were with him at Mikdash and in the hill country of Bethel, and a thousand were with Jonathan at Gibeah in Benjamin. The rest of the men he sent back to their homes.<sup>3</sup> Jonathan attacked the Philistine outpost at Geba, and the Philistines heard about it. Then Saul had the trumpet blown throughout the land and said, “Let the Hebrews hear!”<sup>4</sup> So all Israel heard the news: “Saul has attacked the Philistine outpost, and now Israel has become obnoxious to the Philistines.” And the people were summoned to join Saul at Gilgal.<sup>5</sup> The Philistines assembled to fight Israel, with three thousand chariots, six thousand charioteers, and soldiers as numerous as the sand on the seashore. They went up and camped at Mikdash, east of Beth Aven.<sup>6</sup> When the Israelites saw that their situation was critical and that their army was hard pressed, they hid in caves and thickets, among the rocks, and in pits and cisterns.<sup>7</sup> Some Hebrews even crossed the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. Saul remained at Gilgal, and all the troops with him were quaking with fear.<sup>8</sup> He waited seven days, the time set by Samuel; but Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and Saul’s men began to scatter.<sup>9</sup> So he said, “Bring me the burnt offering and the fellowship offerings.” And Saul offered up the burnt offering.*

3. How would you describe the situation? (5-7)

4. With his own soldiers deserting daily, Saul feels pressured to act. What does he do? (9-10)

5. Was that a good thing to do? Why?

It might seem like a good thing. It’s certainly a religious thing. Sort of like a pre-game prayer, Saul wants to get God on his side before going into battle. But there was one problem – the Lord had commanded that only a priest could offer a sacrifice like that. Saul was so anxious to do the religious thing that he failed to do the obedient thing.

## DAY 2: A Kings' Mistake...

Yesterday we left Israel in a very dire situation. The Israelite army was tremendously outnumbered, they had deserters on a daily basis and the troops that were left, were literally shaking in their boots. On the eve of battle, in a panic, Saul makes a rash decision. Instead of waiting for Samuel, the priest, to come and make an offering to God before they fight, he decides to make the offering himself. Although, making an offering seems like a good idea, it is a practice that God commanded only a priest could take part in. In an effort to do the religious thing, Saul neglected to do the right thing. Unfortunately for him, there were very drastic consequences:

*1 Samuel 10-14*<sup>10</sup> Just as he finished making the offering, Samuel arrived, and Saul went out to greet him.<sup>11</sup> “What have you done?” asked Samuel. Saul replied, “When I saw that the men were scattering, and that you did not come at the set time, and that the Philistines were assembling at Mikdash,<sup>12</sup> I thought, ‘Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the LORD’s favor.’ So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering.”<sup>13</sup> “You have done a foolish thing,” Samuel said. “You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. <sup>14</sup> But now your kingdom will not endure; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him ruler of his people, because you have not kept the LORD’s command.”

1. What are the consequences of Saul’s mistake?
2. According to verse 14, who will God select to replace Saul as “ruler of his people”?
3. Do we ever do religious things instead of obedient things? Like what?

We occasionally play the “Christian game.” We go to church and pretend that everything is fine when actually we are struggling with some major sins. The problem here is we are boxing up our lives into different compartments – which is similar to what Saul did. We do some Christian activities, hoping that it will get God off our back; the rest of the time we do whatever we want. Not that there is anything wrong with going to church. We just need to be honest with who we are and what we need. Church attendance by itself will not make things right. We need to communicate with God and then commit ourselves to do what he says.

### DAY 3: God's Own Heart

Over the last two days we learned a little about Saul and his attitude. We learned that God puts less emphasis on overly religious rituals and more importance is placed on obedience. 1 Samuel 15: 22-23 sums it up fairly well:

<sup>22</sup> *But Samuel replied:*

*“Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices  
as much as in obeying the LORD?”*

*To obey is better than sacrifice,  
and to heed is better than the fat of rams.*

<sup>23</sup> *For rebellion is like the sin of divination,  
and arrogance like the evil of idolatry.*

*Because you have rejected the word of the LORD,  
he has rejected you as king.”*

The Lord rejected Saul as king and he began looking for a new one. He sent Samuel to the home of a rancher named Jesse, who lived in Bethlehem. (For you trivia buffs, Jesse is Ruth's grandson.) Samuel would be anointing one of Jesse's sons as the new king. In fact, Samuel takes a look at Jesse's oldest son and sees some kingly material there:

*1 Samuel 16: 6-7* <sup>6</sup> *When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, “Surely the LORD's anointed stands here before the LORD.”*

<sup>7</sup> *But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”*

What does God have to say about Samuel's choice?

This is in clear contrast to the last king that Samuel chose, who seemed to have been picked by his height and appearance. This is a pretty big indicator of what God values. The world tells us that the beautiful people, the athletes and the rich are our role models. They are the kind of people that we should strive to be like. Yet, God tells us to “look at the heart.”

*1 Samuel 16: 8-12* <sup>8</sup> Then Jesse called Abinadab and had him pass in front of Samuel. But Samuel said, “The LORD has not chosen this one either.” <sup>9</sup> Jesse then had Shammah pass by, but Samuel said, “Nor has the LORD chosen this one.” <sup>10</sup> Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but Samuel said to him, “The LORD has not chosen these.” <sup>11</sup> So he asked Jesse, “Are these all the sons you have?” “There is still the youngest,” Jesse answered. “He is tending the sheep.” Samuel said, “Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives.” <sup>12</sup> So he sent for him and had him brought in. He was glowing with health and had a fine appearance and handsome features. Then the LORD said, “Rise and anoint him; this is the one.”

If you're thinking Cinderella, you've got the picture. Seven sons of Jesse get rejected, but the right one is the youngest, and he is out tending the sheep. His name is David.

## DAY 4: The Psalmist

David became the best king Israel ever had. He made his mistakes, but he had a heart for God. Beside his military and political success, he also wrote many songs that Israel used in their worship:

**Psalm 18: 1-2** <sup>1</sup>I love you, LORD, my strength.  
<sup>2</sup>The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer;  
my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge,  
my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

What do these verses tell us about David, the psalm writer?

In this week so far we have learned some important lessons from the ancient Israelite leaders: Listen, Obey, and Love.

1. With Samuel, we need to listen for God's voice. What is He telling you?
2. From Saul, we learned a bad example that religious rituals don't mean much, apart from life commitment, we need to obey what God is telling us
3. And with David, we need to love the Lord with all our heart. We want to find a heart-connection with this God who loves us.

Jot down some thoughts on how you can Listen to, Obey, and Love God:

Some thought's on... Listening.

Some thought's on... Obeying.

Some thoughts on... Loving

## **DAY 5: A Warrior and a Friend**

We talked about Samuel the prophet, Saul the king and David the man after Gods own heart. There was one other man mentioned way back on day 1... his name was Jonathan.

Jonathan was an intelligent and courageous defender of Israel. He led 1,000 men in defeating the Philistines at Gibeah (1 Samuel 13:2-3), along with his armor bearer killed 20 enemy troops in a single ambush (1 Samuel 14:13-14), and was a marksman in archery and slinging. If Saul hadn't had himself disqualified as king, Jonathan would have been king of Israel instead of David.

Although Jonathan was fiercely loyal to his father, they gradually grew apart because of Saul's increasingly foolish and erratic behavior. Saul's repeated attempts to kill David, who Jonathan knew would become Israel's next king (1 Samuel 23:16-18), caused much alienation between them. In the end, Jonathan became a supporter and ally of David (1 Samuel 20:1-42), while steadfastly remaining at his father's side (1 Samuel 20:42).

The end came for Saul and Jonathan in battle against the Philistines:

*1 Samuel 31:1-6 "Now the Philistines fought against Israel; and the men of Israel fled before the Philistines, and fell slain on Mount Gilboa. And the Philistines overtook Saul and his sons; and the Philistines slew Jonathan and Abinadab and Malchishua, the sons of Saul. The battle pressed hard upon Saul, and the archers found him; and he was badly wounded by the archers. Then Saul said to his armor-bearer, "Draw your sword, and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and make sport of me." But his armor-bearer would not; for he feared greatly. Therefore Saul took his own sword, and fell upon it. And when his armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell upon his sword, and died with him. Thus Saul died, and his three sons, and his armor-bearer, and all his men, on the same day together."*

Upon hearing of the death of Jonathan and Saul, David composed his famous "How The Mighty Have Fallen" lament -

*2 Samuel 1:19-27 "Thy glory, O Israel, is slain upon thy high places! How are the mighty fallen!" "Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised exult." "Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew or rain upon you, nor upsurging of the deep! For there the shield of the mighty was defiled, the shield of Saul, not anointed with oil. From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan turned not back, and the sword of Saul returned not empty." "Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely! In life and in death they were not divided; they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions." "Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you daintily in scarlet, who put ornaments of gold upon your apparel." "How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! "Jonathan lies slain upon thy high places. I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; very pleasant have you been to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women." "How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!"*

**More on Jonathan this Sunday...**