



Saul Becomes Israel's First King



Scripture Reference:

[1 Samuel 8-10](#)

Suggested Emphasis: We shouldn't try to copy other people. We should follow God and be what he wants us to be.

Memory Work: "Do you think I am trying to make people accept me? No! God is the One I am trying to please. Am I trying to please men? If I wanted to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ." [Galatians 1:10, ICB](#)



Story Overview:

Although God warned Israel of the many problems associated with having a king, the people still demanded one. They wanted to be like the nations. Though reluctant, a handsome young man named Saul was anointed as Israel's first King. The people quickly found out that having a king was not as good as they thought it would be.

Background Study:

Samuel had a busy schedule as a judge over Israel. He travelled a circuit year after year and also served in his own town of Ramah ([1 Samuel 7:15-17](#)). Now that he was older, it was time to share some of the heavy workload. Samuel appointed his sons, Joel and Abijah as judges.

Samuel, like Eli before him, failed to see the fault in his own sons. Some have speculated that Samuel, like Eli before him, spent so much time travelling and helping other people that he did not give enough attention to raising their own sons. This may be true or maybe Samuel's sons chose to be ungodly despite a good upbringing. In either case, the leaders of Israel were not happy to let these men lead the country.

The people of Israel wanted a king so that they could be like the other nations around them. This upset Samuel. He knew that Israel was the chosen nation of God. It did not need to try to be like the other nations.

The Lord told Samuel to do as the people asked, but first to tell them what it would be like to have a king. A king would take their sons and daughters for service to him; he would take the best of everything they owned (crops, cattle, and so on). They would eventually become slaves to the king.

Even though Israel had never had a king, the Lord knew all along that they would want one. Years before the time of kings, He had even given them rules and qualifications for a king. ([Deuteronomy 17:14-20](#))

Saul was completely unaware that he was to be the ruler of Israel. He spent his days watching his father's donkeys. One day, when the donkeys wandered off, Saul went looking for them. Knowing that Samuel was a man of God, Saul and his companion went to ask him if he could use his divine gift to locate the donkeys.

When Samuel saw Saul the Lord revealed to Samuel that this was the new king, Samuel invited Saul to stay with him. Saul did not realize what lay ahead until Samuel anointed his head with oil. Pouring oil on the head was part of the ceremony of giving a position to anyone. Samuel told Saul that God had chosen him to be the leader of Israel. As Saul turned to leave, the Lord changed his heart. He now had the ability to prophecy.

Samuel called a meeting of the people of Israel to reveal that Saul was God's choice. This was done by calling all of the tribes forward, one by one, and using the process of elimination until the tribe of Benjamin was chosen. From the tribe of Benjamin the clan of Matri was chosen. Finally, Kish's son, Saul was the choice. Although the choice was already made, this ceremony allowed the people to see clearly that the Lord made his choice. The method of selection is not clear. Perhaps it was done with lots.

What an emotional time for Saul! He had hidden himself behind some baggage. He was brought out and the people had their first look. He was a kingly man indeed, taller than anyone else in the crowd, and God had chosen him! Joyously the people shouted, "Long live the king!" But Saul was not to be an absolute ruler. There were regulations for the king as well as for the people.

As the first king of Israel, Saul had nothing - no army, no palace, and no royal city. He was not eager to become king. After Samuel anointed him before the people, Saul went back to his home in Gibeah. He continued to work on his father's land until he was needed to lead the people in battle.



Way to Introduce the Story:

"Who knows what a king is? Has anyone ever seen a king or queen?" (Show some coins or notes with the queen's picture or show pictures of other royalty from books or magazines) "What do you think it would be like to be a king or queen? What would happen if the king told you to do something? Would you have to do it? Would you have to pay tax money to the king? Israel did not have a king but they started thinking that maybe they should have one."

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The Story:

For many years Judges had led the people of God. Samuel was a Judge over Israel. He was also a priest. He loved God and always tried to do what was right. Samuel tried to teach his sons to be judges but they did not obey God. Samuel's sons tried to cheat the people instead of helping them.

Some of the people noticed that Samuel was getting old. They did not want Samuel to die and leave his sons to be the leaders of the people. They started wondering what it would be like to have a king.

"We want a king! We don't want any more judges. All of the nations around us have kings," they told Samuel. "We want to be like them."

"Why don't they want me to be their leader anymore?" Samuel thought.

Samuel prayed to the Lord and the Lord told Samuel not to feel bad. It was not that the people did not want Samuel as their leader – they did not want the Lord to be their leader. Still, the Lord told Samuel that he would let the people have their way.

Samuel told the people that having a king would not be all good. They would have to pay taxes and some of them would have to be servants.

"It doesn't matter! We still want a king," the people said. "We want to be like the other nations."

Meanwhile, in another place, there was a young man named Saul. He was from the tribe of Benjamin and the clan of Matri. His father's name was Kish and Kish owned a lot of donkeys. Saul was supposed to be watching after the donkeys but the donkeys were lost. Saul and his father's servant looked all over the hill country for the donkeys but they could not find them anywhere. They kept going further and further from home but they still did not find the donkeys. Finally, Saul told the servant that they had better go back home. Kish would be worried about Saul.

"I have an idea," said the servant. "I heard that Samuel, the man of God, is in the next town. God gives prophets special powers. Maybe he can pray to God and ask him where the donkeys are."

So Saul and the servant went to the next town to find Samuel's house. When Saul saw a man walking along the road he asked, "Do you know where Samuel's house is?"

Saul got a big surprise when the man said, "Hello, Saul. I am Samuel. Stop worrying about the donkeys. They have been found. You are going to come to my house today and eat a special meal. Tomorrow morning I will tell you everything that is in your heart."

Even though they had never met, Samuel already knew who he was and knew his name! And he knew about the donkeys! This really was a man of God.

Saul went inside Samuel's house and ate a special meal with him. The next morning they walked outside and Samuel gave Saul a special message from God.

"Saul, the Lord has chosen you to be the king over all of Israel."

Then Samuel did a special thing to show that Saul had been chosen by God. He poured oil on Saul's head. Pouring oil on a person's head to show a special purpose is called anointing.

Samuel wanted Saul to understand that God was choosing him to do something very special. If Saul could see God's power then he would know it was true. So Samuel told Saul exactly what would happen for the rest of the day as Saul was travelling.

First, when Saul left Samuel's house he would see two men by a famous tomb called "Rachel's Tomb". The men would tell Saul that the donkeys had been found and that they were back at Saul's house.

Second, when Saul came to a tree called "The Great Tree of Tabor" he would see 3 more men. The men would give Saul food.

Third, when Saul came to a town in Gibeah he would meet a group of prophets who were playing musical instruments and prophesying about God.

Samuel said, "When you have seen all of these things I want you to go to Gilgal and wait for me."

When Saul started to turn away he knew everything was true. His heart became strong. Saul knew that God had a special purpose for him.

Saul left Samuel and began to walk along the road. Everything happened just like Samuel said it would. He met the two men who told him about the donkeys, the three men by the tree gave him food, and he prophesied with the prophets who were playing instruments.

So Saul went to Gilgal to wait for Samuel.

All the people were waiting for Samuel in Gilgal too because they wanted Samuel to tell them who the new king would be.

When he arrived this is how Samuel told them God's choice. First, Samuel showed that the Lord had chosen a man from the tribe of Benjamin. Then, he said that from the tribe of Benjamin, the Lord had chosen the new king from the clan of a man named Matri. From the clan of Matri, the family of Kish was chosen. Finally, all of Kish's sons came forward and Samuel said that the new king would be Kish's son, Saul.

Everyone looked around but, where was Saul? Even Samuel couldn't see Saul anywhere. Finally, Samuel prayed to the Lord again and the Lord told Samuel that Saul, the new king, was hiding behind some baggage."

Saul must have been very nervous but the people thought he looked like a perfect king. He was taller than all of the other men. The people were finally happy. They could have a king of their own.

The people began shouting, "Long live the king!" Saul was the first king of Israel. The people were happy because now they could be like the other nations.

The people were happy but Samuel knew that problems would soon come. The people were more worried about being like other nations than following God.

How about you? Do you always wish you were like other people? Remember that God is the best example. If we try to be the kind of person that God wants us to be then we will always be happy.

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Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using a variety of methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection, student interaction and/or emotion.

[Click here for visual aids and story-telling methods.](#)

[Click here to download these illustrations and slideshow.](#) Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

Review Questions:

1. Why did the people of Israel want a king? To be like the other nations
2. What job was Saul doing for his father? Trying to find lost donkeys
3. Why was Saul surprised when he came to Samuel's house? Samuel knew who he was and knew all about the donkeys
4. What did Samuel do to Saul to show that God had chosen him as king? Anointed his head with oil
5. Where was Saul hiding when Samuel announced that he was the king? Behind some baggage

Song Suggestions:

- [Three Kings of Israel Song](#)
- [I'm in the Lord's Army Song](#)
- [Books of the Old Testament Song](#)
- Refer to the [Song Page](#) on this website for more options.

Learning Activities and Crafts:

[\(How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation\)](#)

Activities:

- Draw a vertical line down the middle of the chalk/whiteboard. On one side, draw a crown. On the other, draw an "X". Have the students read the following scripture (or read it to them) and then list the pros and cons of having a king ([1 Samuel 8:6-19](#)).
- Bring suitcases and baggage to class and let younger children hide behind the baggage like Saul.
- Use water and let the children take turns pretending to anoint Saul (a volunteer) with "oil".
- Older children can discuss situations in which we think we need to be like other people (clothes, parties, drinking, and smoking). Also, discuss how we might think we need to be like other religious groups (priests, cathedrals, christening babies, musical instruments, etc.)
- Older children can read [Judges 2:16-3:7](#) and discuss how the time of the Judges might have affected the people's desire for a king.
- Use the Flip Chart (drawn by Samer Samlertaree for [www.missionbibleclass](#)) at right to tell the story.
[Click here or on picture to download the pictures and words.](#)

Crafts:



- Cut crowns from gold paper and decorate them with "jewels" from a craft store.
- Discuss kings and what they do.
- Draw a large crown and write "SAUL" on it. In the next few weeks, write words on the crown that describe Saul. Later, make one for David and then Solomon. Add to these each week.



- Print bookmarks, trading cards or timelines ([printable pages](#)).
- Visit the [Teaching Ideas](#) page for additional activities and crafts.

Other Online Resources:

- [Colouring page with text \(Ministry Spark\)](#)
- [Craft: Instructions for a simple paper crown \(DLTK\)](#)
- [Craft: Donkey puppet made from a paper bag \(printable\) \(DLTK\)](#)
- [Craft: Paper craft donkey \(printable\) \(DLTK\)](#)
- [Printable Books of the Bible Bookmarks \(DLTK\)](#)
- [Wordsearch for books of the Old Testament \(Christian answers\)](#)
- [A variety of ideas and links can be found \(Childrens Church\)](#)
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