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# Looking for a Leader

## Studies in Samuel and Kings

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### Warm up

- Have you ever asked for something, received it, and then wished you never had it?  
.... Saul may be that kind of king.

### Saul: the leader the people ‘asked for’

In our last study we saw God’s people reject his rule by asking for a king like the other nations surrounding them. Strangely, God tells Samuel to go ahead with the request, even though it is sinful at its core. Saul is then chosen in response to this request. Interestingly, the name Saul means, “asked for”.

Throughout 1 Sam 9-11 there is a reframing of the model of kingship that Saul will operate under. Initially Samuel rejected the model of a king the people asked for—a king like all the nations surrounding Israel (1 Sam 8). In 1 Sam 10:24-25, when Saul is publicly identified as the LORD's 'chosen' and acclaimed by the people, Samuel teaches them the regulations of the monarchy. Presumably Samuel refers the people to God's instructions recorded in Deut 17:14-20.

#### **Optional Exercise: Read Deut 17:14-20.**

- How would you describe this model of monarchy?
- What is the King's role in relation to God's word and instructions?

In 1 Sam 11, the Spirit of God motivated and enabled Saul to lead the people in rescuing the town of Jabesh from the Ammonites (1 Sam 11:6-8). After the battle Saul is quick to affirm that God is the one who has delivered his people (1 Sam 11:13). So because Saul has embraced God's model of kingship Samuel leads the people in affirming ‘the kingdom’ (1 Sam 11:14-15). That is, Samuel affirms the kingdom where God reigns over the ‘king,’ who willingly heeds the word of the Lord. In this way, God rules his people *through* a human king. And so Saul is confirmed as king, “in the presence of the Lord” (1 Sam 11:15).

### Saul as King

So Saul is king and everyone seems happy. But what kind of king will he be?

#### **Read 1 Sam 13:1-15**

1. Why do you think Saul did what he did? Why do you think Samuel said he acted foolishly?
2. How many soldiers did God really need to defeat the Philistines? (see 1 Sam 14:13-15)

3. What do we learn about Saul's character here?

The contrast between Saul and Samuel in this crisis situation is stark. Saul acted as a pragmatist—he did whatever he could do to rally his troops and win the war. Samuel, on the other hand, was insistent upon obedience to God's ways. Samuel knew the war was God's responsibility but Saul *thought* the war was his responsibility.

We see this same theme played out in another war later in Saul's reign.

**Read 1 Sam 15:1-26**

This passage throws up the question of 'holy war'. If this is of interest to you, see this notes at the foot of this page. If not, read on!

4. Why is Saul rejected as king? How does the confrontation between Samuel and Saul highlight the reason for Saul's rejection?
5. What does Saul do to indicate his self-importance?
6. In the midst of Saul's condemnation, we learn the importance of obedience to God's commands (see v22-23). What excuses might we make for disobedience?
7. When Saul seeks forgiveness there seems no chance that his kingship will be restored (v 24-26). Do you know of occasions where God forgives sin but we still must endure the consequences of that sin?
8. What assurance does the Christian have of forgiveness of sins?
9. What do you think is the key verse in this passage and why?

*For next week: read 1 Sam 16-31*

**For further thought:**

1 Sam 15:1-3 shows God declaring 'holy war' on the Amalekites. The Hebrew term used in these verses and throughout the passage refers to the irrevocable giving over of persons and/or things to the LORD, often by means of total destruction. This was divine judgment executed upon the Amalekites because of their attack on God's people during the Exodus from Egypt (Ex 17:8-14).

This is not the first time in the Bible God has executed direct judgment on nations or people for their utter sinfulness: remember the flood (Gen 6-9), Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18-19), Achan (Josh 7), and Korah (Num 16), to name a few. In this case, God uses the army of Israel as his instrument of judgment--s rather than water, fire and brimstone, or the earth just swallowing people up.