

Bi235 Old Testament 2

Lesson Bi235-15 God Rejects Saul as King

In your last lesson you learned that God had chosen Saul as king of Israel through Samuel's anointing. Then followed the tribal leaders' popular selection of Saul by lot. He looked like a king, and at first acted like a king. But before long he showed that he lacked the character traits of a godly king.

We remember Saul as the first king of the united tribes. He was able to gather an army from among all the tribes. These soldiers fought back against Israel's enemies. Their most dangerous enemy was the Philistines, who controlled the seacoast lands. They also were technically advanced; they had chariot forces and used iron weapons. Israel had only foot soldiers with bronze weapons. The Philistines sought to keep the tribes separate and not united against them.

Saul's first success was east of the Jordan at the town of Jabesh. Enemies in the region threatened to control Jabesh and to partially blind the men of the town. The loss of one eye would be the sign of their enslavement. The enemy gave the town seven days to make its decision to surrender. Their cry for help reached King Saul. He quickly gathered an army from the tribes, marched against the enemy near Jabesh, and defeated them totally. Saul said, "Today Yahweh has rescued Israel."

At his home in Ramah, Samuel heard about Saul's great victory. He then put out a call to the tribes, "Come, let us go to Gilgal and there renew the kingship" (1Sam 11:14). Gilgal was in the Jordan Valley and was still the central place of Yahweh worship. There the people renewed their loyalty to King Saul and celebrated God's victory through their new king.

Samuel used this occasion at Gilgal to give a long and important speech to the people. "I have been your leader all my life," he said. "Have I been an honest and trustworthy leader?"

The people agreed, "You truly have been an honest and trustworthy leader."

Samuel then recounted a history of God's faithfulness to Israel in the past. He told the story how God had raised up Moses and Aaron as leaders when the tribes had been suffering in Egypt. He reminded them of the cycle of their past: they had turned against God and served Canaanite gods. Then God had allowed their enemies to oppress them. In their times of suffering, the tribes had repented before God and had pled for deliverance. In his mercy God had sent deliverers like Gideon, Jephthah, and Samuel to deliver them from their enemies. God had done all this without a king.

"Now," Samuel continued, "you want a king to rule over you—even though Yahweh your God was your king. Here before you is Saul your king, the one God has chosen. If you serve Yahweh and obey him and do not rebel against his commands, it is good. If both you and your king follow Yahweh your God, it is good. But if you do not obey Yahweh, his hand will be against you" (1Sam 12:1-15).

Then Samuel said, "It is wheat harvest now, isn't it? There's no rain in Israel this time of year. I'm going to call upon Yahweh to send thunder and rain. Then you will realize that you have

insulted God by demanding a king.” That same day after Samuel prayed, Yahweh sent thunder and rain.

The people were shocked. “Ask Yahweh to forgive us,” they cried, “for demanding a king.”

“Do not be afraid,” Samuel replied. “Don’t turn away from Yahweh, but serve him with all your heart. Have nothing to do with useless idols. They can do you no good; they can’t rescue you. Remember that Yahweh chose you as his people. Be assured that I will never stop praying for you. I will keep on teaching you the good and right way to live” (1Sam 12:16-24).

Many years went by. Saul and his son Jonathan led Israelite armies against many enemies. One time before an important battle, Saul was waiting for Samuel at Gilgal. He had wanted Samuel to pray for him and the fighters, but Samuel had not come for several days. Saul became impatient and offered up a sacrifice himself, although he was not a priest like Samuel. Then Samuel arrived and saw what the king had done. “You have done a foolish thing,” said Samuel. Now, because you have disobeyed the Lord, your kingdom will not endure. Yahweh has sought for a man after his own heart and appointed him to succeed you.” Then Samuel left (1Sam 13:13-14).

From this time on, Saul had few successes and many failures. A key battle sealed Saul’s fate. Samuel had commissioned Saul to destroy the Amalekites. God had announced the doom of the Amalekites years before. They had attacked Moses and the tribes without provocation (Ex 17:14). Saul and his fighters pursued the Amalekites southward into the desert. God had commanded total destruction, but Saul spared the Amalekite king and the best cattle and sheep.

God told Samuel that Saul had disobeyed the command for total destruction. “I regret that I have made Saul king; Saul has turned away from me,” God said. Samuel was angry and brokenhearted; he prayed about it all night.

Samuel set out to find Saul. When Saul saw him, he said, “May Yahweh bless you, Samuel. I have done what he commanded.”

But Samuel asked, “Why am I hearing the bleating of sheep and the mooing of cattle?”

“Oh,” Saul said, “the soldiers brought some back to sacrifice to Yahweh, but the rest we totally destroyed.”

“Don’t say any more,” said Samuel. “Listen to what Yahweh told me last night. Yahweh made you king. Yahweh sent you on a mission to punish the Amalekites. Why didn’t you obey Yahweh? Why did you pounce on the plunder and do evil in the sight of Yahweh?”

Saul protested that he had obeyed the Lord. 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 listen is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of witchcraft, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you as king” (1Sam 15:22-23).

Saul was sorry for what he had done, and pled with Samuel for another chance. But Samuel said, “Yahweh has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to one of your neighbors—to one better than you. God will not change his mind about this.” Samuel then killed the

Amalekite king, as God had commanded. Samuel then left Saul and went back to his home in Ramah. Samuel never went to see Saul again, but he mourned for Saul until he died.

This story is **important** because it shows us how Yahweh continued to fulfill his promise to give Israel a land of their own, and to create in Israel a people for himself. Through a human king and his leadership, God was unifying the Israelite people as his people, and settling them in their own land.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that Saul was anointed by God as king of Israel, but Saul turned against God and lost the kingdom. Although he continued to reign as king for many more years, his sons would not rule after him. He was the only one of his family to rule Israel.

Let's **review** this lesson—

1. Why is Saul important in Israel's story? [Pause]
 - A. If you said, "Saul was the first king of a united Israel," you are correct.
2. Samuel told King Saul and the people a requirement for success as a kingdom. What was this requirement? [Pause]
 - A. If you said, "They must serve Yahweh, obey him, and not rebel against his commands," you are right.
3. What was Saul's first act of disobedience to God? [Pause]
 - A. If you answered, "Instead of waiting for Samuel to offer a prayer and sacrifice before battle, he offered the sacrifice himself," you answered correctly.
4. Why did Yahweh command the total destruction of the Amalekites? [Pause]
 - A. If you said, "A long time ago the Amalekites had attacked Moses and the tribes without cause," you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen to it at least three times. As you listen each time, pay attention to the way God encouraged Saul through the words of Samuel. You may want to memorize the passage from 1 Sam. 15:22-23: "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of witchcraft, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry." This is the key to spiritual growth: obeying God is better than sacrifice; listening to God is all-important.