

Life Lesson 60
The First King
Text: I Samuel 8

Introduction

Samuel served God as a little boy. He served God as a grown man, and he served God as an old, old man. The Bible tells us he served God all the days of his life. Isn't that wonderful? Wouldn't you like for it to be said of you that none of your life was wasted, that all of it was spent serving God?

The Story

When Samuel was very old, he made his sons to be judges over Israel, too. His sons, Joel and Abijah, weren't like their dad, though. They didn't love the Lord with all their hearts. They loved money more. They took bribes and judged unfairly.

You would think that Joel and Abijah would know better than to act so sinful. After all, their dad was such a righteous man! Many boys and girls are just like those two foolish sons of Samuel. They have parents who love God and serve Him. They have heard about the Lord and the way of salvation since they were babies. Yet, they aren't saved. Having Christian parents doesn't save you. Growing up in church doesn't make you saved either – anymore than growing up in a chicken house would make you a chicken.

Your parents can't make you right with God. The Bible says to "work" out your own salvation with fear and trembling. The state of your heart is between you and God alone. I hope you won't be like Joel and Abijah, but will be like Samuel – serving God all the days of your life.

The Israelites were happy with Samuel as a judge, but they didn't like his sons – and no wonder! They decided they would like to have a king instead of a judge.

"We want to have a king, like all the other countries around us," they said. "They get to have a king, so we want one, too."

Samuel was sad to hear them ask for a king, and prayed to God about it.

“Don’t be sad, Samuel,” the Lord told him. “The people aren’t rejecting you. They are rejecting me.”

And it was true. God had ruled the people through holy men He had called to serve Him. The people didn’t want to be ruled by God. They wanted a ruler like everyone else had.

“You may tell them that I will let them have a king, but warn them about what it will be like,” God told Samuel.

Samuel stood before all the people and told them God’s word.

“You may have a king,” Samuel told them, but you won’t like it. He will make all your young men serve in his army. He will make your daughters work for him in his palace. He will take your land away and give it to his friends. He will make you give up a tenth of everything you have for taxes. You may have a king, but you will be sorry!”

The people insisted, “We want a king like everyone else has.”

The foolish Israelites wouldn’t wait for the best, for what God had planned for them. They wanted their own way, so God gave them what they asked. He gave them a king.

God told Samuel, “Tomorrow about this time I’ll send a man out of the tribe of Benjamin to you. He’ll be the one I want you to anoint as king.”

Meanwhile, in the land of Benjamin, a man named Kish had lost his donkeys.

“Saul,” he said to his son, “I want you to take a servant with you and go look for my donkeys that are lost.”

So Saul and his servant set out to find the lost animals.

Saul was a good-looking young man. He was tall -- head and shoulders taller than the other men. He was handsome, too. He looked just like you would expect a king to look.

Although they searched and searched, they couldn’t find the lost donkeys.

“We might as well go back,” Saul told his servant. “By now my father will be worried about us instead of the donkeys.”

“Let’s not go back yet,” the servant replied. “There is a man of God near here. Let’s go see him. Maybe he can tell where our donkeys are.”

Saul agreed. Can you guess who the man of God was? It was Samuel. And Saul was the man for whom Samuel was waiting. Saul was the man chosen to be the first king of Israel. He was surprised when Samuel told him the news.

“Who, me?” Saul exclaimed. “I can’t be the king. I’m of the smallest tribe of Israel. My father is a poor man and I’m just his youngest son. I’m not important at all. Why should I be king?”

But God had decided it, and it was so. Samuel anointed Saul’s head with oil. That means that he poured oil on his head as a symbol that Saul was chosen by God.

A short time later Samuel called all the people together in the city of Mizpah.

“You have rejected God as your king,” Samuel told them. “You wanted a king so today we will show you the king God has given you.”

He looked for Saul, but no one could find him. Where could he be? At last the Lord told Samuel where Saul was. He was hiding behind some baggage.

“Here is your king,” Samuel cried.

What a king! He was too scared to come out and be crowned.

When he stood up, everyone gasped. He was so tall!

“Surely he’ll be able to protect us from our enemies,” they said. “God save the king.”

Saul was off to a weak start, but he improved as he trusted God and led the Israelites into battle against the wicked Ammonites. When they won, all the people were excited that they had a king to lead them.

The people thought that Saul could help them because he was big. They forgot that God was much bigger than Saul. The Lord didn’t need Saul’s help. He could have easily delivered the Israelites from the Ammonites by Himself.

The people were happy with their king -- for a while. We will see in the coming lessons how Samuel's warnings came true.

The Life Lesson

The Israelites were foolish to insist on a king instead of trusting God to send a leader in His own good time. Yet, we often do the same things. God has the best plan for us. If we obey Him and trust Him, we will have the things that make us truly happy. But we think we know best. We insist on things God has put away from us because He knows it will harm us. Sometimes God gives us what we want, and then how sorry we are because we didn't wait for God's best!

Review Questions

Did Samuel's sons love God?

No, they were bad judges and took bribes.

What did the people want?

A king.

Was Samuel happy about this?

No

Was God happy about this?

No

What did God tell Samuel to say to them about what a king would be like?

He would take their sons to be soldiers, their daughters to work in the palace, and would take their lands away to give to their friends.

Did the people still insist on a king?

Yes

Who was the first king?

Saul

Why did Saul come to see Samuel?

To ask Samuel to help him find some lost donkeys.

Where was Saul when Samuel was ready to declare him publicly to be the king?

He was hiding in the baggage.

What did Saul look like?

He was tall and good looking.