

Lesson 21: Kings for Israel

Previously...

Yahweh created Adam and Eve to have a mutually loving relationship with Him. However, instead of relying on Him to teach them what was good and what was evil, Adam and Eve decided that they wanted to learn about good and evil without God's interference. They chose to be their own ultimate authority.

Their offspring followed in their rebelliousness. The Tower of Babel was a picture of mankind building the Kingdom of Man and totally ignoring God. Mankind as a whole was on a path of self-destruction.

So Yahweh intervened in history to save mankind. He elected one man, Abraham and then one nation, Israel. Through them, God's plan was to offer salvation to the world. God kept His restraining hand on the evil of the Kingdom of Man while He built the nation of Israel.

Pagan Kingdom of Man Based on WORKS Man would save himself through his own ideas	Kingdom of God Based on GRACE God would save man
 Babel  Egypt  Canaan	Election
	 God chose Abraham
	 God saved Israel
	 God built Israel: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Law ▪ National anthem ▪ Temple worship ▪ Feasts & festivals
 God taught Israel about spiritual life: Period of the Conquest	

Grey shows paganisation

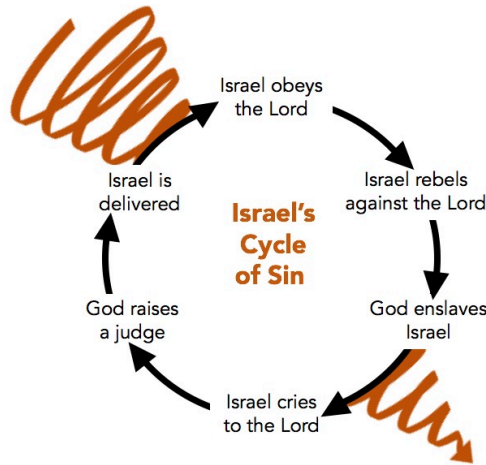
After that, under the leadership of Joshua, God led Israel to settle into Canaan. Things were quite good for them at this point. They were no longer slaves to any other people group. They had freedom. They had a good law code that God gave them at Mount Sinai. They had a good education system filled with God's wisdom. And they had good land and good food. The Israelites should have thrived! But they did not.

They chose to ignore God and His law. Their personal “rights” and wants were more important than unity and the shared values and morals that Yahweh had given to them as a people.

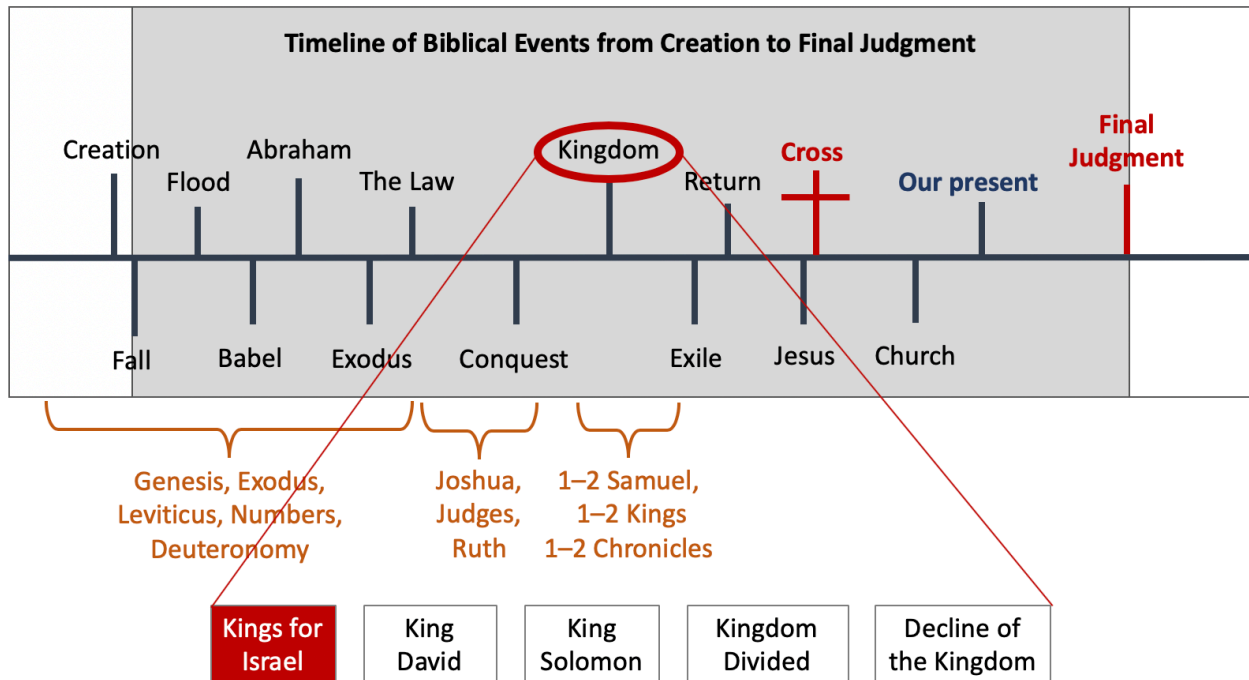
Judges 21:25

In those days Israel had no king; all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes.

With everyone doing whatever they wanted, the Israelites lived for years in chaos. The book of Judges shows how they lost wars, were taken captive and how the whole society fell apart. While there were some godly people, as a whole, the nation collapsed!



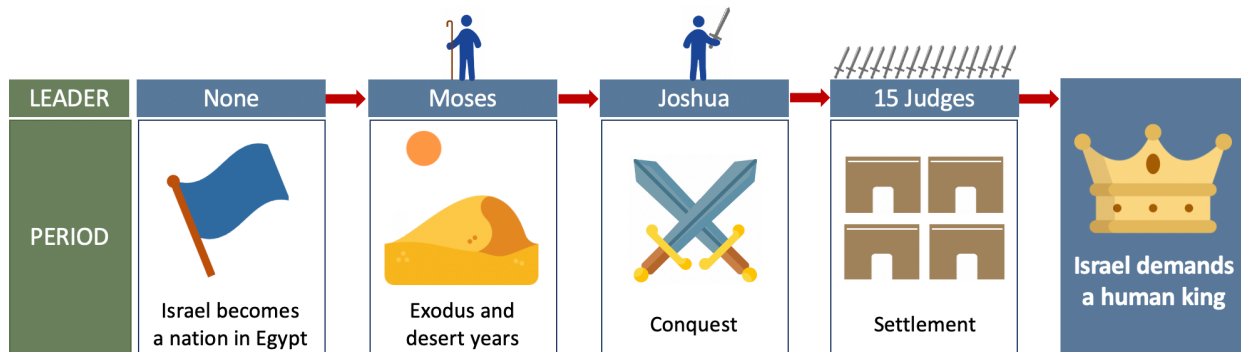
In this next section of history, we will see what happened in the inner life of God’s chosen nation. We will watch how God’s people became paganised and how this eventually led to their exile and the end of the visible Kingdom of God on earth.



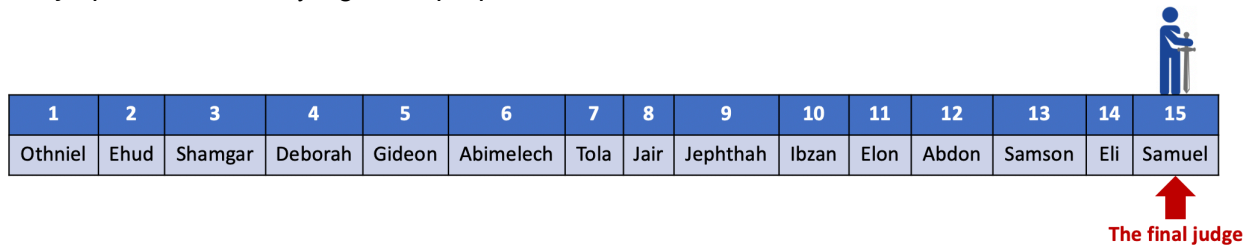
Israel Demands a Human King

Israel had first grown into a nation while enslaved within Egypt. Then Yahweh appointed Moses to lead the people out. When he died, Joshua became their military leader during the period of the Conquest. God then appointed a series of judges to lead the nation while they were settling into the Promised Land.

After 400 years in the Promised Land, the people were tired of the chaotic lives they had created for themselves. They craved order and justice and a unified nation. But instead of turning to Yahweh for help, they tackled the problem their own way. They demanded a human king, just like the other nations around them.



They spoke to the last judge, the prophet Samuel.



Samuel was the first great prophet after Moses.

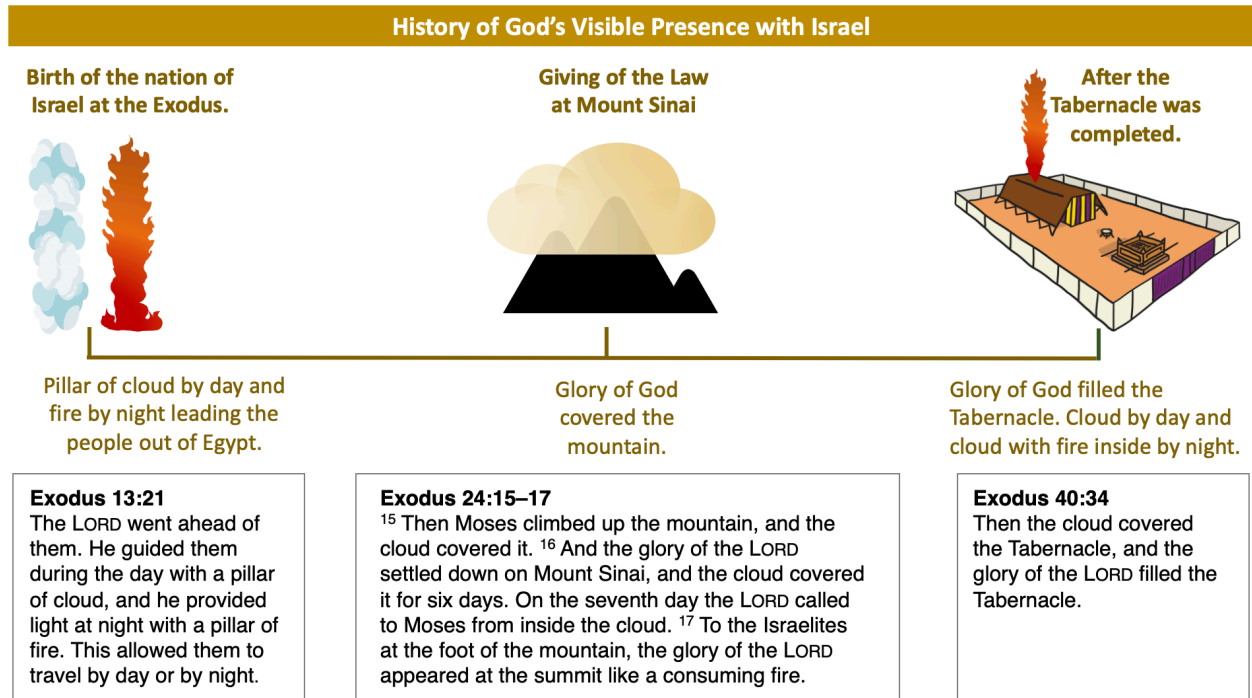
1 Samuel 8:1-5

¹ As Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons to be judges over Israel.

² Joel and Abijah, his oldest sons, held court in Beersheba. ³ But they were not like their father, for they were greedy for money. They accepted bribes and perverted justice. ⁴ Finally, all the elders of Israel met at Ramah to discuss the matter with Samuel. ⁵ “Look,” they told him, “you are now old, and your sons are not like you. Give us a king to judge us like all the other nations have.”



The other nations had human kings over them. Israel had no human king because Yahweh Himself was their leader and King. In fact, Yahweh’s visible presence appeared publicly at the birth of the nation of Israel, at Sinai and at the Tabernacle.



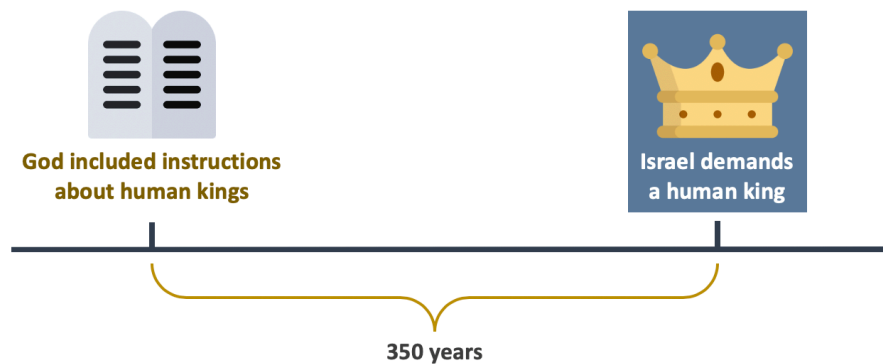
Yet, despite all that Yahweh had done for Israel and His visible presence with them, the people were not satisfied with Him. They rejected Him.

1 Samuel 8:6-7

⁶ Samuel was displeased with their request and went to the LORD for guidance. ⁷ “Do everything they say to you,” the LORD replied, “for they are rejecting me, not you. They don’t want me to be their king any longer.”

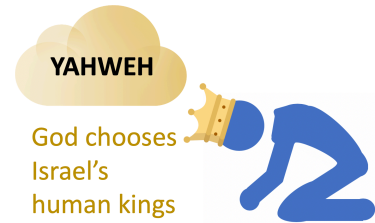


A human king was not God’s original plan, but He knew the Israelites would one day ask for one. So, about 350 years earlier, while giving Israel the Law at Mount Sinai, God included instructions about human kings.



Deuteronomy 17:14–15

¹⁴ “You are about to enter the land the LORD your God is giving you. When you take it over and settle there, you may think, ‘We should select a king to rule over us like the other nations around us.’ ¹⁵ If this happens, be sure to select as king the man the LORD your God chooses. You must appoint a fellow Israelite; he may not be a foreigner.



God said that He would choose the king. The people must not choose a king for themselves. This wasn't a democratic process.

God also gave the rules and instructions for the king. There were four “must-nots” and two “musts”.

Deuteronomy 17:16–20

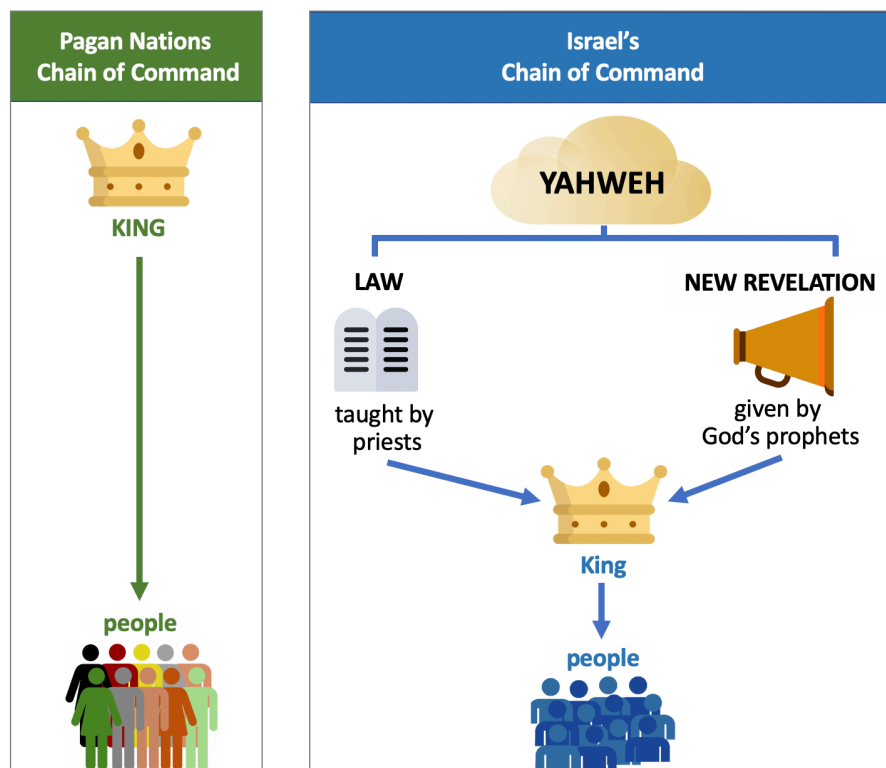
¹⁶ “The king must not build up a large stable of horses for himself or send his people to Egypt to buy horses, for the LORD has told you, ‘You must never return to Egypt.’ ¹⁷ The king must not take many wives for himself, because they will turn his heart away from the LORD. And he must not accumulate large amounts of wealth in silver and gold for himself.

¹⁸ “When he sits on the throne as king, he must copy for himself this body of instruction on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. ¹⁹ He must always keep that copy with him and read it daily as long as he lives. That way he will learn to fear the LORD his God by obeying all the terms of these instructions and decrees. ²⁰ This regular reading will prevent him from becoming proud and acting as if he is above his fellow citizens. It will also prevent him from turning away from these commands in the smallest way. And it will ensure that he and his descendants will reign for many generations in Israel.



God's instructions were very important and also very different from all the other nations.

- Horses were for war and Israel's king was not allowed to build a large military. Instead, Israel was supposed to rely on Yahweh, the only One who can ensure victory in battle.
- Israel must never have any relationship or alliance with Egypt, the country that enslaved them for hundreds of years. God already freed them from that pagan kingdom and they were not to go back.
- Kings from the pagan nations would typically build up large amounts of wealth and have many wives. But God forbade Israel's king from amassing wealth or wives.
- Pagan kings had the final say in everything. But God said Israel's king would not be the final authority. The king had to submit to the law of God. This meant the king had to listen to the priest! God was limiting the king's power and political authority.



In addition, God told Samuel to warn the people what their lives would be like under a king.

1 Samuel 8:10–22

¹⁰ So Samuel passed on the LORD'S warning to the people who were asking him for a king.

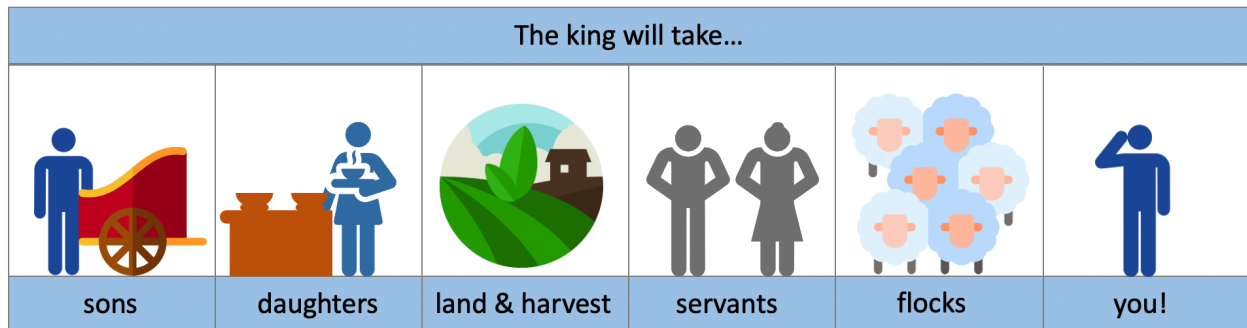
¹¹ "This is how a king will reign over you," Samuel said. "The king will draft your sons and assign them to his chariots and his charioteers, making them run before his chariots.

¹² Some will be generals and captains in his army, some will be forced to plow in his fields and harvest his crops, and some will make his weapons and chariot equipment. ¹³ The king will take your daughters from you and force them to cook and bake and make perfumes for him.

¹⁴ He will take away the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his own officials. ¹⁵ He will take a tenth of your grain and your grape harvest and distribute it among his officers and attendants. ¹⁶ He will take your male and female slaves and demand the finest of your cattle and donkeys for his own use. ¹⁷ He will demand a tenth of your flocks, and you will be his slaves.

¹⁸ When that day comes, you will beg for relief from this king you are demanding, but then the LORD will not help you.”

¹⁹ But the people refused to listen to Samuel’s warning. “Even so, we still want a king,” they said. ²⁰ “We want to be like the nations around us. Our king will judge us and lead us into battle.” ²¹ So Samuel repeated to the LORD what the people had said, ²² and the LORD replied, “Do as they say, and give them a king.” Then Samuel agreed and sent the people home.



Life under a human king would be like having a dictator! They would be heavily controlled, and they would be forced to work to support the king and the kingdom physically and financially!

This was totally different from having God as their King. With God as King, they had great personal freedom and very little taxes to pay.

- Every Israelite male 20 years and older had to pay a flat amount of half a shekel (approximately US\$5 today) once a year (Exodus 30:11–16).
- Every Israelite was to tithe 10% of everything they earned (Leviticus 27:30; Numbers 18:26).

God’s requirements were not burdensome at all! They were simple and easy. Yet, they would rather have a human king.

God warned them that after they suffered, they would regret asking for a king and cry out to Him for help but He would not listen to them.

However, even this stern warning from God didn’t change their minds. They still insisted on having a human king.

Why Israel Wanted a King

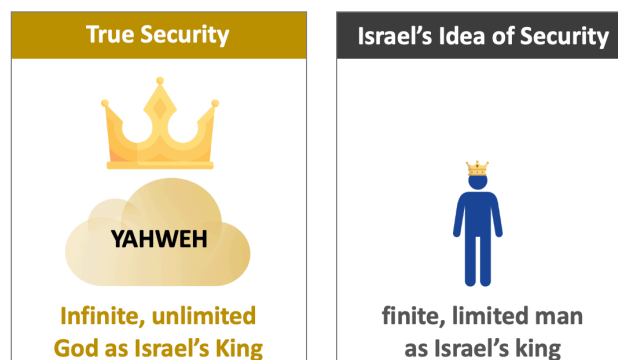
The question is, why did the people suddenly demand a king?

- **First, it was because they wanted to be like the nations around them (1 Samuel 8:20)!** The entire reason why Yahweh called Abraham out of the evil culture he was living in was so that God could create a counterculture to preserve His history and truth through the Israelites. They were not supposed to be like the other nations. They were supposed to carry God's truth to all the nations. But these Israelites wanted to be exactly like the other pagan nations!



- **Second, they wanted security.** The Israelites wanted a human king to lead them into battle (1 Samuel 8:20). The irony is that when they obeyed God, He had led them into battles and had given them great victories!

Yahweh could guarantee victory and security because He is the unlimited, infinite Creator-God of the universe. Yet, they preferred security from a limited, finite human king who was nowhere as powerful as their God-King!



God told Samuel to agree to the people's request.

But why? Why did God allow the people to have a human king when they were rebelling against Him?

God's Purpose in Allowing Israel a Human King

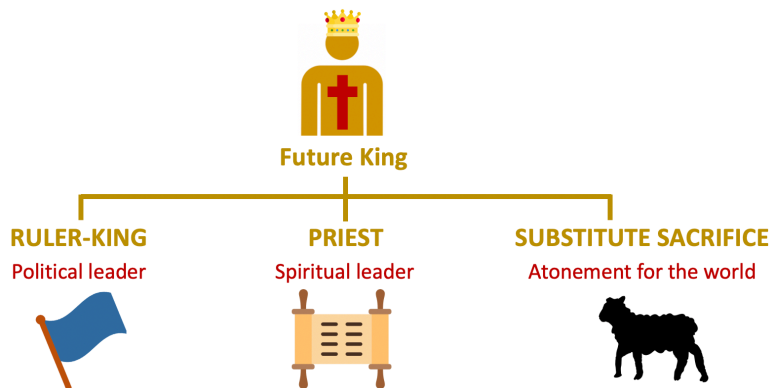
God allowed a human king because He was once again going to interrupt history. He was going to use the human kingship as a picture of what would happen in the future. Yahweh's plan was to appoint a human king who would be the ruler of the entire world, in this way fulfilling the first divine institution of responsible dominion.



The human kingship... **...is a picture of...** ...the future ruler of the world

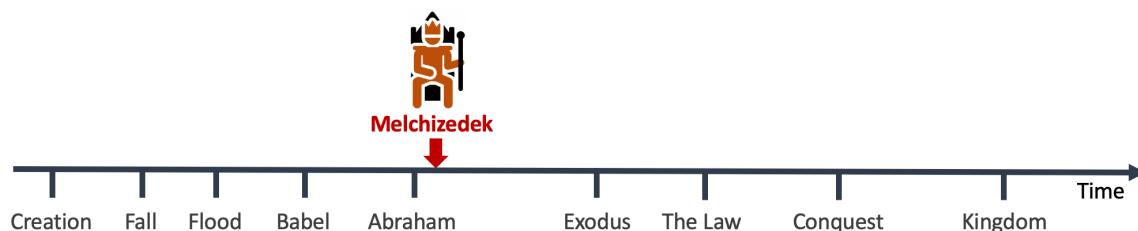
This future king would fulfil three roles and hold three offices. He would be:

1. The political leader (Ruler-King)
2. The spiritual leader (Priest) and
3. The atonement for the whole world, reconciling man to God (Substitute Sacrifice).



Only one person would be able to fulfil the requirements of all these three roles—Jesus. Jesus is this special king. He will be King Jesus, Priest Jesus and Sacrificial Substitute Jesus. He is the only Messiah, God's Anointed or Chosen One.

But even before this point in Israel's history, God had given hints about this plan through two different people. The first one was King Melchizedek.



Melchizedek

Yahweh used King Melchizedek as the first picture of what Jesus would be like as the final king. Melchizedek lived during the time of Abraham. Both of them met after Abraham rescued his nephew Lot from being captured by some evil kings led by King Kedorlaomar.

Genesis 14:17–20

¹⁷ After Abram returned from his victory over Kedorlaomer and all his allies, the king of Sodom went out to meet him in the valley of Shaveh (that is, the King’s Valley). ¹⁸ And Melchizedek, the king of Salem and a priest of God Most High, brought Abram some bread and wine. ¹⁹ Melchizedek blessed Abram with this blessing:

“Blessed be Abram by God Most High,
Creator of heaven and earth.

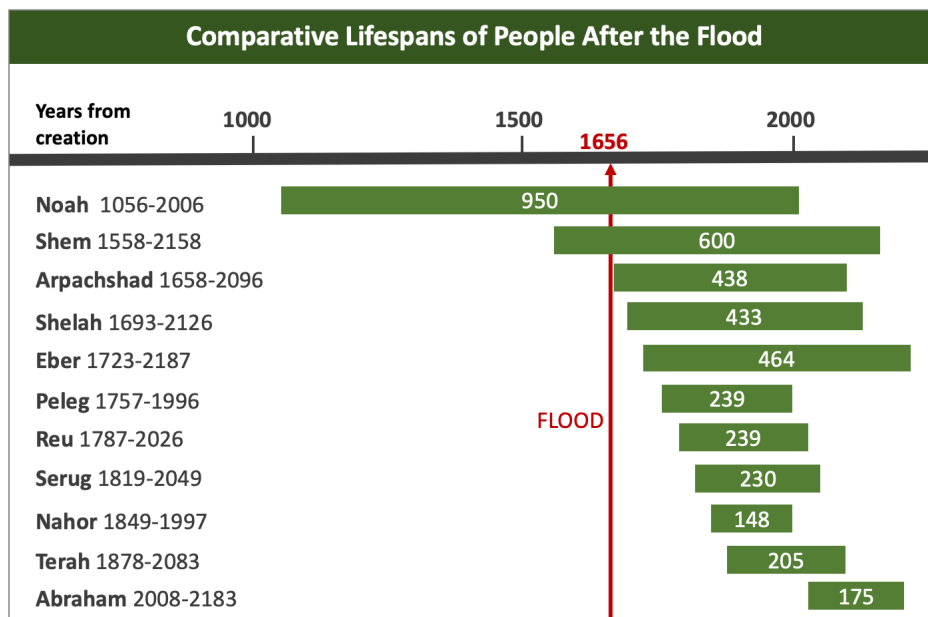
²⁰ And blessed be God Most High,
who has defeated your enemies for you.”

Then Abram gave Melchizedek a tenth of all the goods he had recovered.



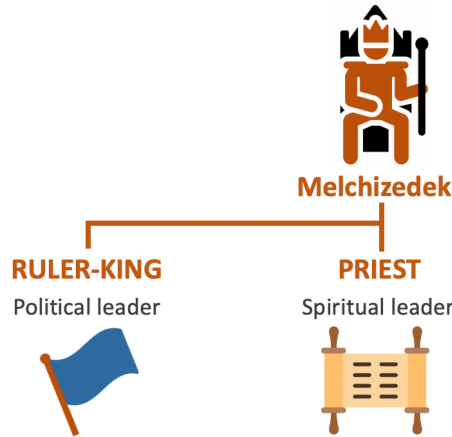
Bible scholars believe that Salem was located at Jerusalem. This king of Salem, Melchizedek, was a Gentile king. Yet he had faith in and worshipped the true God, Yahweh. But how did Melchizedek come to believe in the true God? How did He know Yahweh?

Remember, all of Noah’s immediate descendants would have known God. He lived a total of 950 years and died just before Abraham was born. Noah would have told his descendants about Yahweh. In fact, his son Shem was still alive during Abraham’s time!



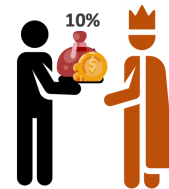
Everyone then had access to God’s real history and truth. Some, like Melchizedek, chose to worship and follow God. But the majority chose to rebel. It was precisely because most rebelled that God called Abraham and worked to build a counterculture with this one people group, the Israelites.

Interestingly, the Gentile King Melchizedek was the first good king that the Bible talks about. He had two roles. He is both a ruler-king and priest of Yahweh, God Most High. He would rule and administer justice (the fourth divine institution) and he would also teach the Word of God and be the link between God and man.



As king, Melchizedek blessed Abraham after he defeated the evil kings and brought about justice and order. Just as modern-day governments would recognise the bravery of soldiers and citizens, Melchizedek, as a political king, recognised and blessed Abraham for a job well done.

Abraham accepted Melchizedek’s blessing. And he offered Melchizedek ten percent of everything that he had recovered from the battle. Why did Abraham do this? He recognised Melchizedek as priest, a spiritual leader who is the go-between between the true God and man. In this case, offering Melchizedek the goods he won in battle was in effect, offering them to God.



The Bible tells us that this king, Melchizedek, is a picture of what King Jesus would be like.



**Priest-King
Melchizedek...**

...is the 1st picture of...





**...the True Global
Priest-King Jesus**

In referring to Jesus, God said Jesus is a priest just like Melchizedek.

Psalm 110:4

The LORD has taken an oath and will not break his vow:
“You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.”

What does Jesus being like Melchizedek mean?

 Melchizedek (Genesis 14:17; Hebrews 5–7)	 Jesus
<p>1. He is both king and priest.</p> <p>He oversees justice and also leads the people in worshipping God.</p>	<p>Jesus will be both king and priest.</p> <p>He will be the political leader (ruler-king) and the spiritual leader (priest).</p>
<p>2. He is a Gentile.</p> <p>He is not an Israelite Levitical priest.</p>	<p>Jesus will not be a Jewish priest-king meant only for the Jewish people. Jesus will be a priest-king for the Gentiles too, a universal priest-king meant for everyone in the whole world!</p>

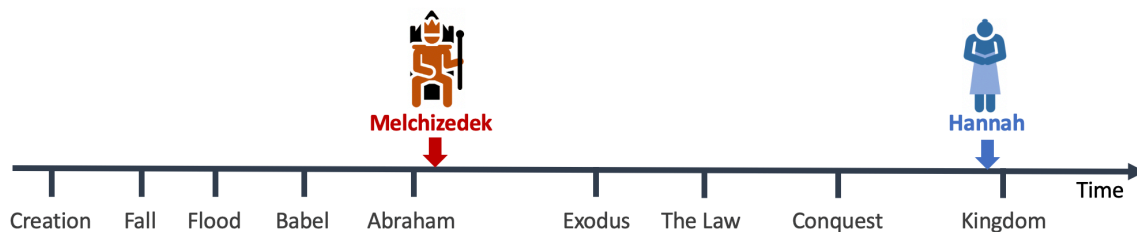
The book of Hebrews in the New Testament explains this in greater detail.

Hebrews 7:1–3

¹ This Melchizedek was king of the city of Salem and also a priest of God Most High. When Abraham was returning home after winning a great battle against the kings, Melchizedek met him and blessed him. ² Then Abraham took a tenth of all he had captured in battle and gave it to Melchizedek. The name Melchizedek means “king of justice,” and king of Salem means “king of peace.” ³ There is no record of his father or mother or any of his ancestors—no beginning or end to his life. He remains a priest forever, resembling the Son of God.

Melchizedek resembles, or is a picture of, Jesus, the Son of God. Melchizedek’s name means “king of justice” and “king of peace”. This is what Jesus would be for all people.

Melchizedek was one person who hinted about Messiah being king of the world. Another was Hannah.



Hannah

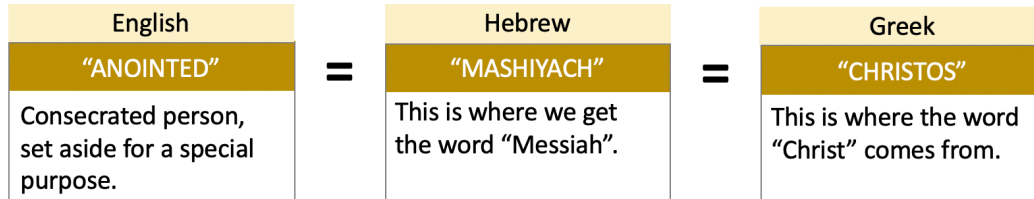
God again hinted at a coming king in the prayer of Hannah, the mother of prophet Samuel. Hannah was barren for many years, but God answered her prayer and gave her a son. In gratitude, Hannah dedicated Samuel to the work of God. When he was a young boy, she brought Samuel to Eli, the priest at the Tabernacle at the time.

As she left him there, she prayed, describing how God would separate good and evil, and she also mentioned a king. At that time, there was no king in Israel! Somehow, God put it in her heart to pray that prophetically. This is what she said about God.

1 Samuel 2:9–10

⁹ “He will protect his faithful ones,
but the wicked will disappear in darkness.
No one will succeed by strength alone.
¹⁰ Those who fight against the LORD will be shattered.
He thunders against them from heaven;
the LORD judges throughout the earth.
He gives power to his king;
he increases the strength of his anointed one.”

Amazingly, Hannah prayed about a king who is “anointed” by God. This word “anointed” had previously been used in the Bible to refer to priests, but this is the first time in the Bible that it is linked to a king or royalty. Anointed is the English word translated from Hebrew.



God inspired Hannah to pray a prophetic prayer. Some time in the future, there would be an anointed king who would be directly involved in separating good and evil. It would be Jesus the “anointed”, Jesus the “messiah”, Jesus the “Christ”. (“Christ” is not Jesus’s surname. It is His title. Hence, it is actually probably more appropriate to refer to Him as The Christ, The Christ King or The Christ Jesus, the “anointed” Jesus.)

As for Samuel, God had planned that he would be a prophet and the very first “king-maker”. He set up the monarchy or system of kings in Israel. And he anointed Saul as the first king and David as the second king of Israel.

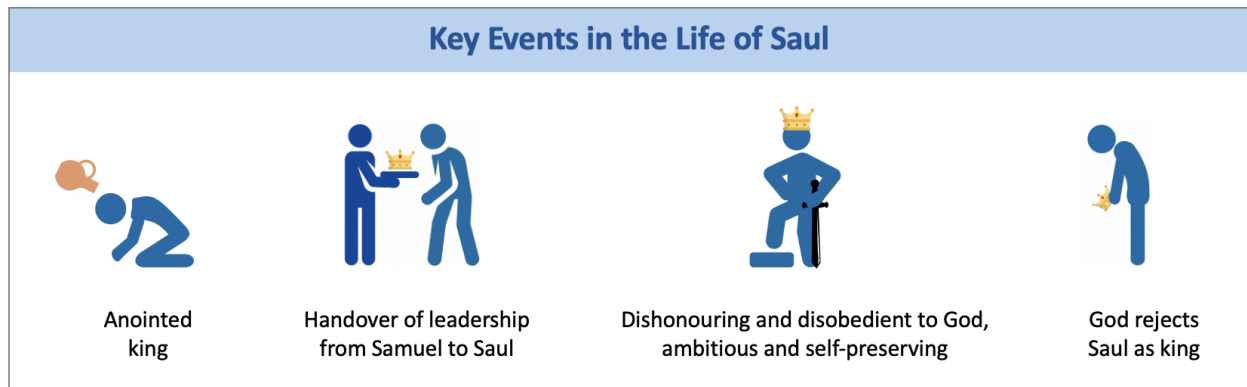
Though it was not God’s original plan for Israel to have a king, God allowed human kings in Israel to provide a picture of the future King Jesus. Melchizedek (and later on King David) was a picture of what the ultimate priest-king Jesus would be like when he is physically on earth to rule the whole world in the future.

God accommodated the request of the people. However, He told them that it would have to be operated under His laws.



The First King: Saul

1 Samuel 9–15 covers the account of Israel’s first king. These are the key events in his life.



A. Anointed king (1 Samuel 9–10)

God chose a man named Saul from the tribe of Benjamin to be the first king. He was a tall and handsome man, very impressive on the outside, someone the Israelites could follow. God sent Samuel to set him apart, or anoint him, by pouring oil over his head. This was a sign to show that God had chosen him and set him aside for this job.

1 Samuel 10:1

Then Samuel took a flask of olive oil and poured it over Saul’s head. He kissed Saul and said, “I am doing this because the LORD has appointed you to be the ruler over Israel, his special possession.

In the Bible, we see that God always has the prophet precede or introduce the king. God sends an “anointing” prophet to confirm whom God has appointed as king. Samuel anointed Saul and David, then the prophet Nathan took over from Samuel and from there a whole series of prophets were involved in king-making. This was why even in the New Testament, John the Baptist came before Jesus. John, the final prophet, was Jesus’ anointing prophet.





B. Handover of leadership from Samuel to Saul (1 Samuel 12)

A little while after anointing Saul, Samuel gave his farewell speech to the people. It was like a “change of command” ceremony where he handed the leadership of Israel over to King Saul. As God’s prophet, Samuel had guided Israel. He had reminded the people of Yahweh’s covenant with them, encouraged them to keep their part of the agreement just as God was faithful to keep His side of the contract.

Samuel began his speech by asking the people for evidence of whether he did his job well or if he had been a wicked prophet. The people agreed he had been a good prophet.

1 Samuel 12:1–5

¹ Then Samuel addressed all Israel: “I have done as you asked and given you a king.
² Your king is now your leader. I stand here before you—an old, gray-haired man—and my sons serve you. I have served as your leader from the time I was a boy to this very day.
³ Now testify against me in the presence of the LORD and before his anointed one. Whose ox or donkey have I stolen? Have I ever cheated any of you? Have I ever oppressed you? Have I ever taken a bribe and perverted justice? Tell me and I will make right whatever I have done wrong.”

⁴ “No,” they replied, “you have never cheated or oppressed us, and you have never taken even a single bribe.” ⁵ “The LORD and his anointed one are my witnesses today,” Samuel declared, “that my hands are clean.” “Yes, he is a witness,” they replied.

Then starting from when the Israelites were in Egypt, Samuel reminded them how Yahweh had rescued them as He had promised to Abraham. Samuel talked about the 400 years of the conquest and settlement period where God was faithful to them in their battles. He recalled the times when Yahweh kept His covenant and was faithful to them. He also recalled when the people broke the covenant and were wicked towards God.

What Samuel was doing was showing that God was faithful to the Israelites. And he, as God’s prophet to the people, had also acted faithfully in his job. It was not because God had failed or he was a bad prophet that the people had asked for a human king. But here he was handing over leadership of the people to the king that they had asked for.

Samuel told them this was a conditional kingship.

Just like the Sinaitic covenant, if the people obeyed, then they would be blessed. If they rebelled, then they would be cursed.



CONDITIONAL KINGSHIP	
IF people obey	IF people rebel
THEN blessed	THEN cursed

1 Samuel 12:12–19

¹² “But when you were afraid of Nahash, the king of Ammon, you came to me and said that you wanted a king to reign over you, even though the LORD your God was already your king. ¹³ All right, here is the king you have chosen. You asked for him, and the LORD has granted your request.

¹⁴ “Now if you fear and worship the LORD and listen to his voice, and if you do not rebel against the LORD’s commands, then both you and your king will show that you recognize the LORD as your God. ¹⁵ But if you rebel against the LORD’s commands and refuse to listen to him, then his hand will be as heavy upon you as it was upon your ancestors.

¹⁶ “Now stand here and see the great thing the LORD is about to do. ¹⁷ You know that it does not rain at this time of the year during the wheat harvest. I will ask the LORD to send thunder and rain today. Then you will realize how wicked you have been in asking the LORD for a king!” ¹⁸ So Samuel called to the LORD, and the LORD sent thunder and rain that day. And all the people were terrified of the LORD and of Samuel. ¹⁹ “Pray to the LORD your God for us, or we will die!” they all said to Samuel. “For now we have added to our sins by asking for a king.”

Why did Samuel ask God to send thunder and rain? It was the time of the wheat harvest, the dry season, so it was very unlikely to rain. Yet God did send rain. Samuel was making the point that though the people wanted a human king for their security, it was God who is the One who can provide them real security. Their farms and crops depended on Him to send rain and good weather at the right times. So by sending rain, God was actually scolding the people. It is He and not some human king who can sustain and provide for them!



After the people saw the rain, they admitted they had been wicked to ask God for a human king, but now they were stuck with one. God wouldn't undo what they had asked for. They would have to live with the consequences of their choice for the rest of their lives.

But Yahweh was gracious to them. He lovingly gave them another chance to worship Him. He reminded them that He was faithful and would not abandon them, even when they were unfaithful. This is because He is a promise-keeping God. The Israelites could be secure in God. He would help them deal with the consequences of their sinful choice. Samuel ended his speech with another warning for them to obey God.

1 Samuel 12:20–25

²⁰ “Don't be afraid,” Samuel reassured them. “You have certainly done wrong, but make sure now that you worship the LORD with all your heart, and don't turn your back on him.

²¹ Don't go back to worshiping worthless idols that cannot help or rescue you—they are totally useless!

²² The LORD will not abandon his people, because that would dishonor his great name. For it has pleased the LORD to make you his very own people. ²³ “As for me, I will certainly not sin against the LORD by ending my prayers for you. And I will continue to teach you what is good and right. ²⁴ But be sure to fear the LORD and faithfully serve him. Think of all the wonderful things he has done for you. ²⁵ But if you continue to sin, you and your king will be swept away.”



C. Dishonouring and disobedient to God, ambitious and self-preserving (1 Samuel 13–15)

Saul was not a good first king. While he looked impressive on the outside, he was spiritually immature and his heart was not with God. He didn't want to obey the details of God's rules. He was not a wise king. He was more interested in doing whatever he wanted.

For example:

- **He dishonoured God:** Before battling the Philistines, Samuel was supposed to offer the burnt sacrifice. Saul became impatient while waiting for Samuel to arrive so he dishonoured and disobeyed God by sacrificing the burnt offering himself, something that only priests from the tribe of Levi were allowed to do (1 Samuel 13:1–12).
- **He placed his own ambition and self-preservation above the needs of others:** Saul put his own ambition over the needs of his soldiers for food. He ordered the death penalty on anyone if they ate before they won the battle. This silly vow resulted in the people breaking the Mosaic law and it almost resulted in him executing Jonathan, his own son (1 Samuel 14:24–46).
- **He rebelled against God’s instructions:** God told Saul to wage Holy War on the Amalekites. He was supposed to destroy everything but he didn’t. He didn’t kill Agag, the Amalekite king, and he kept all the best of sheep, oxen, calves and lambs instead of destroying them (1 Samuel 15:10–35).

God had set up the kingship in such a way that the kings had to obey His law. The king could not do whatever he wanted. The prophets would hold the king accountable for his actions. Unfortunately, Saul was not interested in obeying God’s laws. He did whatever he wanted and behaved as if he were the ultimate authority.



D. God rejects Saul as king

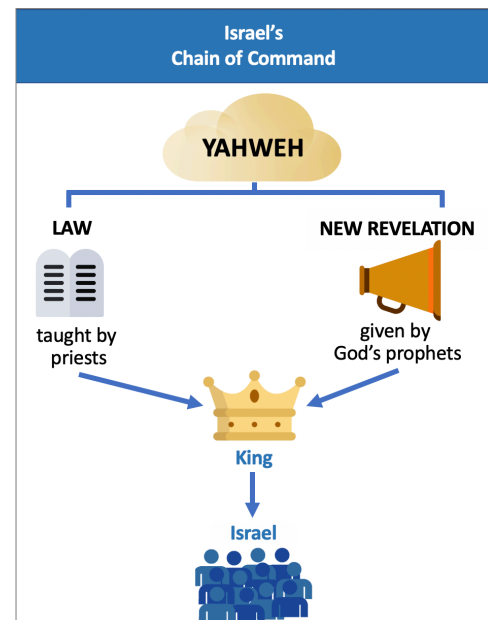
After Saul impatiently and illegally offered the burnt offering, Samuel scolded Saul. Only in Israel could non-royalty, in this case the prophet, confront the king. Nowhere else in the pagan world could a common person challenge the king.

God had given the prophet the role of a prosecuting attorney, to represent Him and His Word. God’s Word always has authority over the king. This is because God is the true leader of Israel.

This confrontation between Samuel and Saul is the first of many prophet-king confrontations to come, where the king is disobedient to God.

1 Samuel 13:13–14

¹³ “How foolish!” Samuel exclaimed. “You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you. Had you kept it, the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. ¹⁴ But now your kingdom must end, for the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart. The LORD has already appointed him to be the leader of his people, because you have not kept the LORD’s command.”



King Saul failed to obey Yahweh. If he had, God would have given him the kingdom forever. This was not a small promise that Yahweh made to Saul!

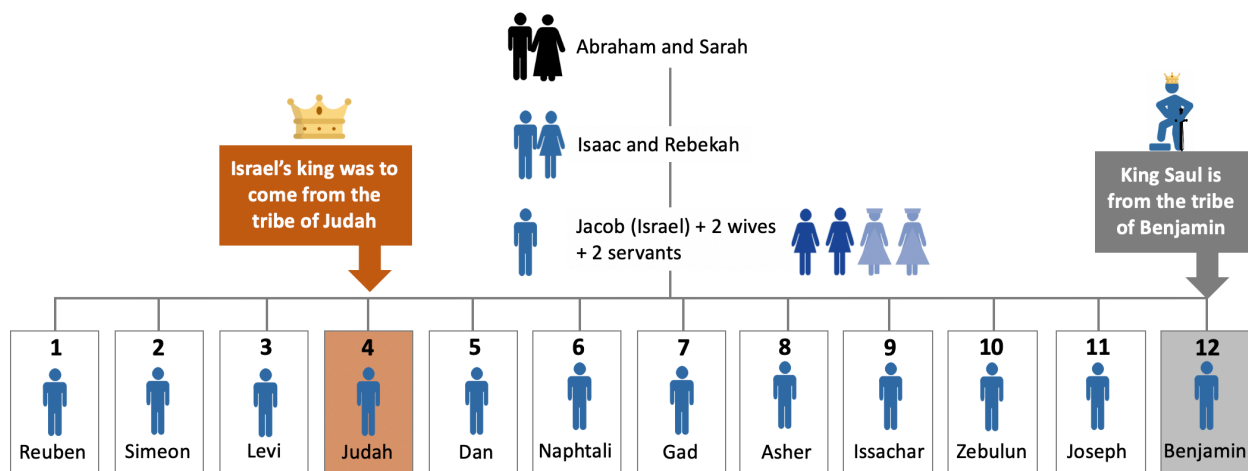
Years earlier, God had originally said through Jacob that Israel's king would come from the tribe of Judah.

Genesis 49:10

The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from his descendants, until the coming of the one to whom it belongs, the one whom all nations will honor.

(Note: The sceptre refers to a long decorated baton or stick carried by the king or ruler as a symbol of their power and authority.)

King Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin. Technically, it was the "wrong" tribe for the king to come from! But God was willing to give Saul the kingdom IF he had obeyed. It was a conditional leadership.



Just as mankind in their own effort could not keep the Mosaic law, in the same way, Saul as leader couldn't obey God with his own strength. To make things worse, Saul in his arrogance, refused to admit he had rebelled. He gave excuses and rationalised. This is what happened after Saul failed to destroy the Amalekites.

1 Samuel 15:10–15

¹⁰ Then the LORD said to Samuel, ¹¹ "I am sorry that I ever made Saul king, for he has not been loyal to me and has refused to obey my command." Samuel was so deeply moved when he heard this that he cried out to the LORD all night. ¹² Early the next morning Samuel went to find Saul. Someone told him, "Saul went to the town of Carmel to set up a monument to himself; then he went on to Gilgal."



¹³ When Samuel finally found him, Saul greeted him cheerfully. "May the LORD bless you," he said. "I have carried out the LORD's command!" ¹⁴ "Then what is all the bleating of sheep and goats and the lowing of cattle I hear?" Samuel demanded. ¹⁵ "It's true that the army spared the best of the sheep, goats, and cattle," Saul admitted. "But they are going to sacrifice them to the LORD your God. We have destroyed everything else."

Instead of taking responsibility for the animals that he had decided to keep alive, Saul pushed the blame on his army! Then he gave an excuse to make himself sound spiritual, that the

animals were for sacrificing to God! Holy War is God's war. Everything taken from the war belonged to God anyway and God had told Saul to destroy everything. But Saul wanted to do things his own way. So Samuel challenged Saul:

1 Samuel 15:22–23

²² But Samuel replied,

“What is more pleasing to the LORD:
your burnt offerings and sacrifices
or your obedience to his voice?”

Listen! Obedience is better than sacrifice,
and submission is better than offering the fat of rams.

²³ Rebellion is as sinful as witchcraft,
and stubbornness as bad as worshiping idols.

So because you have rejected the command of the LORD,
he has rejected you as king.”

Yahweh was more concerned about the hearts of the people than He was about mere actions. God wants hearts that are right with Him. Obedience was more important to God than rituals, even when the rituals are ones that He Himself commanded. In this way, God rejected Saul as king of Israel.



The first kingship was a disaster.

1 Samuel 15:35

Samuel never went to meet with Saul again, but he mourned constantly for him. And the LORD was sorry he had ever made Saul king of Israel.

God told Samuel to anoint David as the next king. David was a shepherd boy from the tribe of Judah and the youngest among his brothers. He was a handsome, red-headed boy, but God didn't choose him because of his outward appearance. God chose him because of his heart. Samuel thought God wanted to make Eliab, David's older brother king, but God explained why he chose David instead.

1 Samuel 16:7

But the LORD said to Samuel, “Don't judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected him. The LORD doesn't see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”



Even though Samuel anointed David as the next king, the change in kings didn't happen immediately. Saul continued as a poor, disobedient king until years later when he finally committed suicide and his sons died in battle (1 Samuel 31:1–6).

Lessons on Sanctification

Just as God taught the Israelites a lot about sanctification, growing spiritually and what it means to be His children during the time of the Conquest, God also taught many of these lessons during the kingdom period.



1. Only God can provide real security and assurance.

The Israelites wanted to solve their problem of chaos and need for security by taking God out of the picture. They thought a human king would be the solution. They didn't really understand the character of God. They didn't understand that Yahweh, as Creator-God of the universe, has full control over everything.

Creator-Creature Distinction					
1 st level CREATOR (Yahweh)	Infinite	All-loving	All-knowing	All-Powerful	Holy
2 nd level creature (man)	finite	limited in love	incomplete, imperfect knowledge and understanding	limited in ability	conscience must be tied to the Creator-God

Even though they were supposedly worshipping Yahweh as their God and king, in reality, they continued to ignore Him. They did things their own way.

At this point in time, they were an example of a nation who tried to live without God as their leader and guide. They behaved like those in the pagan Kingdom of Man, relying on themselves and believing they knew how to save themselves. The people in the Kingdom of God were becoming increasingly paganised.



Reflection

Do we understand the character of God? Do we believe that Yahweh truly has everything: the whole universe, governments, peoples, weather, laws, all situations and circumstances under His control? Or do we feel that there are many areas in our lives that He has no control over? Maybe we secretly believe that we have what it takes to solve our own problems. Or maybe we feel that God doesn't care, or doesn't want to care about certain areas in our lives.

But just as God was truly the divine King over Israel, He is also the divine King over our lives. Seeing what happened to Israel, when we face chaos and a need for security, will we go to Him for help or will we, like them, look for a human solution?

2. Though Israel rejected God by asking for a king, God remained faithful to them, assured them of His promises and again invited them to be obedient to Him.

God warned the people that they would one day regret asking for a king and then turn to Him for help. Even though God didn't help them by undoing the whole monarchy, He promised to be with them as they live out the consequences of their choice.



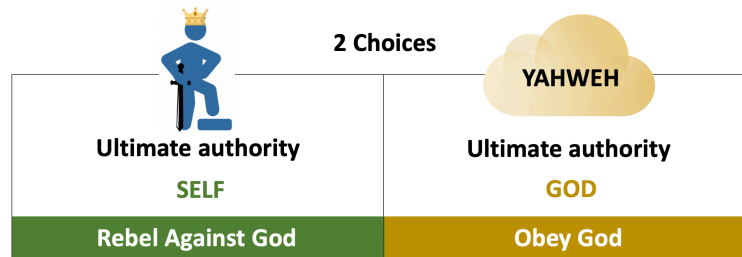
Reflection

When we make mistakes and disobey God, do we think He will abandon us? Just as with the Israelites, God is faithful and encourages us to turn in obedience towards Him. God will help us overcome the consequences of the mistakes and bad decisions that we make. God has a Plan B, C, D, etc., for our lives. He is never thwarted by our bad choices. Do we therefore trust God in our day-to-day lives? Do we believe that though our lives may make little sense right now, He is in control and is directing our lives for His purposes?

Was God unnecessarily harsh with Saul?

When we review the life of King Saul, we may come away with the sense that God was unnecessarily harsh with him. We can see his failings as a leader but when we compare him with other kings in the Bible, he doesn't seem as bad. Take David for example. He had "worse sins" than Saul, even committing adultery and murder. Saul's sins seem minor in comparison. So why did God treat him so severely?

This is because Saul is an example of trying to live life independently, without God.



Although Yahweh anointed him to be king, in the end, God rejected Saul because he was proud and had a spirit of dissatisfaction and impatience with God's leadership methods. He showed some degree of outward obedience to Yahweh but he was actually controlled and consumed by his own passion, anger, fears and jealousy. Saul's actions showed that his heart did not really belong to God. His heart was his own. Saul behaved as if he knew better and could do whatever he wanted. He ignored God's instructions and teachings.

In many people's eyes, Saul would have looked like a good king. He followed God's instructions superficially and didn't commit "major" sins like adultery and murder. Yet God was displeased with him. In his pride, Saul made excuses for himself and rationalised away his disobedience to God.

When a person's pride prevents them from an honest examination of their own motives and actions, and when a person's heart rejects God's leadership, no amount of "right actions" will be accepted by Yahweh. God is far more interested in the fact that our hearts are humble and loyal to Him.



Let's examine our own lives.

Are we similar to Saul in any way?

- Are we driven by our own desires and passions instead of by obedience to God?
- Are we personally ambitious for God's work but uninterested in His Word and in listening carefully to Him?
- Are our hearts truly obedient to God or are we just going through the motions of the right actions to look obedient in other people's eyes?

God doesn't care for superficial obedience. Let's strive to be genuine and authentic in our obedience to God. Let us heed the words of the prophet Samuel: "Obedience is better than sacrifice, and submission is better than offering the fat of rams" (1 Samuel 15:22).

Discussion Questions

Discuss the following questions as a group or use them for personal reflection.

1. Through the blunder of Israel asking for a human king instead of relying on Yahweh as their leader, what can we learn about our relationship with God when we make poor choices? What are some positive and negative lessons?
2. Samuel finished his life with a good testimony before God while Saul's life ended badly with his own suicide. What made the difference? How can we walk with God as Samuel did rather than follow in Saul's footsteps?
3. People crave security in life. Israel sought it in their own way through a human king. How do we seek security? Is security in life even possible?



Pre-reading for next lesson: 1 Samuel 16 to 2 Samuel 12

(Note: The reading is 27 chapters. The idea is not to go into an extensive study but to have a quick read to gain an overall familiarity with David's life.)