



# Enter the Story

## ***The First King***

A narrative about the choice between God's way and our way.

## ***THE BIBLE***

1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 7:15, 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 8-13, 15

*Prepare for the Story*

## **ICEBREAKER**

What is something you've done that you regret? What do you wish you would have done differently?

*Rewind the Story*

Can someone highlight what has happened in the story so far ...

- Conquest – Joshua & Jericho
- Judges – When Israel had no King
- Ruth – A story of redemption

*Hear the Story*

### **Scene One: The Will of the People**

The last judge in Israel's history was Samuel. He led the people in successfully subduing the Philistines. But he was more than a judge; he was a prophet, and God had more in store for Samuel's role in the history of God's people.

When Samuel grew old, his sons acted wickedly, taking bribes and perverting justice. The elders of the people came to Samuel and said, *“You are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. So, we want you to appoint a king for us, like all the other nations.”* This request did not sit well with Samuel, so he spoke with the LORD about it.

Then Samuel told the elders all the words the LORD had said regarding their request for a king. He explained to them in detail that a king would take advantage of them; he would take their sons, daughters, and their property. They would eventually become slaves to the king. Then he said, *“When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, but the LORD will not answer you on that day.”*

The people refused to listen to Samuel, and they still demanded a king. They said, *“We want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles.”* At their insistence, God relented and told Samuel to give them a king.

But God gave Samuel conditions for the kings who would rule over Israel. They were not to build up a standing army or enter into covenant treaties with other nations through marriage. They were not to amass great wealth. This would make them rely on God to provide for their needs, and to protect them, which would serve as an example and witness to other nations that God was indeed present in their midst. This way, God’s reign would continue through the king. So, Samuel obeyed God and started the task of finding the first king of Israel.

### **Scene Two: Israel’s First King**

It was around this time that a young man was out searching for his father’s donkeys. The young man’s name was Saul, and his father had sent him and his servant on a mission to recover the lost animals. They had traveled many days and had been looking for them for quite some time but couldn’t find them anywhere. So, they decided to seek out the man of God who could tell them where to search.

So, they entered the town, and as they passed through the gates, Samuel, the man of God, was coming out toward them to climb the hill. Now the LORD had told Samuel that on that day, he would meet the new king, the one who would deliver the people from the Philistines.

When Samuel met Saul, he immediately sent him up the hill to the place of sacrifice, saying, *"In the morning, I will tell you what you want to know and send you on your way. As for your donkeys, do not worry; they have been found; I am here to tell you that you and your family are the future of all Israel's hopes."* So, on the hill of sacrifice, Samuel anointed Saul and gave him instructions about where he would go and what would happen next.

After Samuel anointed Saul, he sent word out to all of Israel to gather at Mizpah. Once they were gathered, he said to them, *"This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I brought you out of Egypt and delivered you from that oppressive kingdom, but you have rejected me as your God, as the one who saves you, and you have demanded a king over you."*

Each tribe, clan, and family was brought forward so that the new king could be selected. Eventually, Saul was selected, but he was nowhere to be found. So, Samuel asked the LORD if Saul had come to the gathering. And the LORD said, *"Yes, he has hidden himself among the supplies."* So, they ran and brought him out, and as he stood among the people, he was a head taller than any of the others.

Samuel said to the people, *"Do you see the man the LORD has chosen? There is no one like him among all the people."* Then the people shouted, *"Long live the king!"*

### **Scene Three: A Warrior King**

Saul's first test as king came about a month later when the Ammonites put the Israelite city under siege. Saul summoned all those who would fight with him, and the Spirit of the LORD came on him in power. In this battle, he utterly defeated the Ammonites, confirming his reign.

With this huge victory, Saul began his legacy as a warrior king. Saul reigned successfully for a while, but many times he seemed to be one step behind common sense. Many times, Saul impulsively took matters into his own hands; this would prove to be a serious flaw for the first king of Israel. During his reign, his main focus was defeating the Philistines and driving them out of the land God had given the Israelites.

He had all the trumpets blown throughout the land proclaiming the news, *"Let the Israelites hear! Saul has attacked the Philistine outpost, and now Israel has become obnoxious to the Philistines! Come join Saul at Gilgal."*

The Philistines assembled to fight Israel with 3,000 chariots, 6,000 charioteers, and soldiers as numerous as the sand on the shore. They went out and camped near Gilgal. When the Israelites saw that the situation was critical and that their army was trapped, they started to run and hide in caves, thickets, among the rocks, and in the pits and cisterns. Some of them deserted then and there, fleeing into Philistine territory.

Saul kept his remaining men in place, but all of them were quaking with fear. He waited seven days, the time that Samuel had told him to wait, but Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and Saul's men began to scatter even more. So, Saul said, "Bring me the burnt offerings!" He prepared and made the burnt offerings and made the sacrifice himself.

Just as he was finishing doing this, Samuel arrived, and Saul went out to greet him. *"What have you done?"* Samuel asked. Saul replied, *"When I saw that the men were scattering, and that you had not shown up, and that the Philistines were assembling nearby, I thought that the Philistines would come and attack us before I had time to seek the LORD's favor. So, I felt compelled to make the burnt offering."*

*"You have done a very foolish thing,"* Samuel said. *"You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you; if you had, He would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. But now your kingdom will not endure; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him ruler of his people because you have not kept the LORD's command."*

At this, Samuel left and went on his way. As he did, he noticed that Saul's army was now down to 600 men. That day God delivered Saul and the Israelite people, but this would not be the only time Saul failed to follow God's commands.

After this victory, Saul had secured his grasp on Israel's throne, so he fought against his enemies in every direction – against Moab, Ammon, Edom, the kings of Zobah, and the Philistines. Wherever he turned, he was victorious. He did great deeds saving Israel from all those who oppressed them.

## **Scene Four: Attacking the Amalekites**

Later, Samuel came to Saul and said, "I anointed you, king of Israel because the LORD told me to. Now, listen to what he is telling you: This is what the LORD God says: 'I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they ambushed them as they came up from Egypt. Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys. Destroy everything.

Saul mobilized all his men. There were 210,000 soldiers. He took his army and attacked the city of Amalek, slaughtering the Amalekites.

He captured Agag, the Amalekite king, but completely destroyed everyone else. Saul and his men spared Agag's life and kept the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves, and lambs – everything, in fact, that appealed to them. They destroyed only what was worthless.

Then the LORD said to Samuel, *"I am sorry that I ever made Saul king, for he has not been loyal to me, and he still refuses to obey me."* Samuel was so upset by this that he cried out to God all night long. Early the next morning, Samuel went to find Saul, and when he finally found him, Saul greeted him cheerfully, *"May the LORD bless you"* he said, *"I have carried out the LORD's command!"*

*"Then what is all this bleating of sheep and lowing of cattle I hear?"* Samuel demanded. *"It's true that my men spared the best of the sheep and cattle,"* Saul admitted. *"But they are going to sacrifice them to the LORD your God. We have destroyed everything else. Then Samuel said to Saul, "Stop it! Listen to what the LORD told me last night!"*

As Samuel told Saul, the king slowly started to admit his disobedience. Saul asked for forgiveness, but Samuel replied, *"I will not return with you! Since you have rejected the LORD's command, he has rejected you from being the king of Israel."*

As Samuel tried to leave, Saul grabbed at him to try to hold him back, and Samuel's robe tore. *"See what you've done!"* Samuel said, *"The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to someone else, someone who is better than you."*

It was in this moment that God was preparing Israel for another king, and although Saul would remain on the throne as the first king of Israel, the true king, the LORD God, was working to establish a leader for his people who would follow after his heart.

### *Retell the Story*

- Who was the last judge of Israel's history?
- What did the people want from Samuel?
- How did Samuel & Saul meet?
- What did Samuel tell Saul?
- How did God select a king?
- What kind of king was Saul?
- What big mistake did Saul make at Gilgal?
- What mistakes did Saul make concerning the Amalekites?
- How did God respond to Saul as king?

### *Discuss the Story*

- What is your first reaction to this story? How did this story make you feel?
- What stood out to you from this story? What did you notice for the first time?
- What from this story made you wonder?
- What was God's response to Israel's desire for a king? What was their motivation?
- What were God's instructions for the kings? How should they rule?
- What were Saul's qualifications? How was Saul chosen?

- What did Saul do to nullify his kingship?
- Do you think Saul's punishment fit the crime?
- What does God confess to Samuel about Saul and about a future king?
- Did you hear anything that reminded you of *other* stories?
- From this story, what did you notice about humans?
- From this story, what do you notice about God's character or His qualities?

### *Join the Story*

#### **1) YOU GET WHAT YOU ASK FOR**

The Israelites begged Samuel to give them a king. The problem with this was that God was supposed to be their King. God gave them what they asked for even though it wasn't the best thing for them. Why do you think God would do this? Do you think God still does this today?

#### **2) THE SPIRIT OF GOD**

Multiple times scripture says the Spirit of the LORD came on Saul; in these situations, God used Saul for good. Later Saul was disobedient and was removed as God's chosen king. How can someone have God's Spirit at one moment but not the other?

### 3) THE SIN OF SELF-IDOLATRY

At one point in Saul's story, he is caught building a monument to himself (1 Samuel 15). Some would call this the sin of self-idolatry. As Christians how can we guard our heart and life against this same sin – of making our desires and our will more important than what God desires?

*Pray*

*God,*

*Keep us from the folly of following what the world clamors for. May we trust You enough to treasure Your promises most. We ask that as we place our trust in You, that You would develop godly character to inform and empower our daily choices and that, in doing so, our lives would bring glory and honor to You and You alone. Amen*