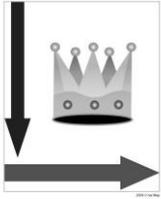


Week Fifteen: The King Israel Wants - Deuteronomy 17:14-20; 25:17-19; 1 Samuel 15



Overview

Several months prior to Israel's entrance into the land of Canaan, Moses gives Israel a number of instructions regarding their future. One of those instructions has to do with where Israel finds herself now, nearly four hundred years later. After the death of Joshua, Israel's elders, and a succession of judges, the people of Israel begin demanding a king to lead them, like all the nations around them. Even after three years under the brutal reign of one of their own, the murderer Abimelech (Judges 9), Israel still longs for a king to rule over them.

Israel approaches the aging judge and prophet, Samuel (whose sons are wicked), and demands a king. Samuel warns Israel of the cost of their request: the king will take the top ten percent of all that they produce (crops and herds) and conscript their sons and daughters into his service. Samuel explains further that they will cry out to God against the king of their own choosing. Determined to become like the peoples around them, they refuse his warning and demand a king (1 Sam. 8:10-22). God thus gives Israel the king they think they want.

Saul hails from a prominent and wealthy, "Kennedy-like" family. His appearance and connections would have placed him on the cover of *Time* magazine regularly. He is described as "taller than any of the people"; the text declares that, "there was not a more handsome person than he among the children of Israel" (9:1-2). This is the man, untested and untried, that Israel happily embraces as her king.

Lesson Objective:

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be able to recognize that many spiritual leaders today are chosen based solely on external characteristics (tall, handsome, have the 'right' education from the 'right' institution, or the 'right' socioeconomic group) instead of a heart and passion for God, His Word, and obedience to Him.

Key Truths

God establishes guidelines for leaders.

God sometimes grants people what they demand to teach them lessons they would not have learned otherwise.

Bible literacy, an obedient heart, and the fear of God over the fear of man fashion godly leadership.

Lesson Outline

1. The regulations for enlisting a king - Deuteronomy 17:14-20

God, who foresees all things, includes in Moses' final instructions to Israel before they enter the Land of Promise a set of regulations that address Israel's current situation—the nation now wants a king like the nations around them. Moses gives them six rules for the enlistment of a king:

- He cannot be a foreigner but must come from within Israel (17:15). This regulation protects Israel from being led by one who would put the needs of his own people above those of Israel.
- He cannot return to Egypt to build his army (17:16). He must rely on the Lord to empower His people.
- He cannot multiply wives for himself (17:3). He cannot be an undisciplined man given over to his fleshly appetites.
- He cannot amass great wealth for himself (17:4). He must not be a greedy man who would take advantage of his own people for personal gain.
- He must commit himself to Bible literacy (17:18-20). He must know the promises of God, the ways of God, and the history of his people.
- He must not allow his position of leadership over others to lead to pride or to the belief that he is above the law (17:20).

2. The reality of having a king - Deuteronomy 25:17-19; 1 Samuel 15

God gives Samuel the responsibility of rehearsing to Israel the demands of having a king and then presenting to them the king they desire (1 Sam. 12:13). Between Saul's anointing and coronation, God gives him victory over the Ammonites. During the first year of his reign Saul demonstrates great impatience and offers a burnt offering to the LORD—something only permitted by the priest. Samuel informs Saul that his kingdom will not endure (12:13-4). Saul follows that act of disobedience with another in 1 Samuel 15. Saul fails in several areas:

- He does not consider the present in light of the past - Deuteronomy 25:17-19

If Saul had taken the time to read the Book of the Law and write his own copy, he would have understood the importance of Samuel's instruction regarding the destruction of the Amalekites. The Amalekites attacked Israel within weeks of their leaving Egypt while they camped at Rephidim. These warriors ruthlessly attacked a band of unarmed former slaves with no fighting experience. Had the LORD not given Israel victory over the Amalekites through the leadership of Joshua and the prayers of Moses, Amalek and company would have destroyed them. The LORD told Moses to record this event along with the promise that he would "utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven" (Ex. 17:14). Before his death Moses reminds the people of this promise, "Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you were coming out of Egypt . . . Therefore it shall be, when the LORD your God has given you rest from your enemies from all around, in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to possess as an

inheritance, that you will blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. You shall not forget” (Deut. 25:17-19).

- He uses his position as king to build a monument for himself instead of attributing his success to the Lord. Samuel looks for Saul, to confront him concerning his disobedience, and finds the monument he has set up for himself instead (1 Sam. 15:12). Samuel travels on to Gilgal where he is greeted by the smug king who has become big in his own eyes (1 Sam. 15:17).
- He does not fear the Lord but lives to please the people. Instead of utterly destroying the Amalekites and all that they possess, Saul allows the people to keep the best for themselves. When confronted by Samuel, he justifies his disobedience and blames the people, “For the people spared the best . . . to sacrifice to the Lord” (1 Sam. 15:15, 21, 24, 30). He is a people-pleaser instead of a God-fearer.

Though God allows Saul for reign over Israel for forty years, his descendants are prohibited from succeeding him to the throne. That place instead is filled by another who does destroy the Amalekites during his reign (1 Sam. 30). Genuine success in leadership is not measured by longevity of service, but by God’s assessment of that service.

Application - What does this lesson teach us about God? Man? Sin? Redemption?

- Sometimes God gives people the leaders they think that they want to highlight the difference between those who fear God and those who do not.
- Sometimes getting our request may be the worst thing that could happen to us (Ps. 106:15).
- People often choose leaders based solely on external trappings (family, education, height, etc.).
- Men who fear and please man more than God fool themselves into thinking they are successful.
- How a man responds to confrontation regarding his foolish actions reveals his character. Saul becomes defensive when confronted by Samuel and blames others for his disobedience.

Summary

God speaks by informing His people about what lies ahead and by urging them to know what He said or has done in the past.

God acts and gives Israel the king they think they want so that they recognize the difference between His rule and man’s rule, and His man and their man.

God reveals both His sovereignty in the affairs of man and man’s freedom to choose. Neither contradicts the other.

Discussion Questions

Give an example of a political or religious leader whom people wanted but later regretted.

How can churches and organizations discern God's choice of the right leader? What should they look for?

Discuss the "insignificant" choices Saul made that reaped great consequences; what can we today learn about "little" choices?