

# Saul, First King of Israel

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## 1 Samuel 13-18

### - Introduction

- I think we misunderstand the kind of sacrifice God asks of us when we think of it as a kind of new year's resolution—giving up chocolate, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, or cutting back on Netflix. The problem with that kind of sacrifice is that it depends on you. I can sacrifice for a little while out of strength of will, but what I'm realizing lately is that true sacrifice looks more like consistent, daily obedience to the word and leading of God, and that's only brought about by love. It's also usually harder and slower than we'd like. It's the opposite of a resolution in some ways, starting always now, and taking a lifetime. Obedience shows more love and faithfulness from a believer than artificial sacrifice.

### - Leader Prep Help

- Saul is selected to be king by Samuel, a prophet who was the final judge over Israel, seeing the land delivered from the Philistines. He appoints his sons to be judges over Israel, but his sons quickly begin to fall short, so Israel decides that a king is needed—and the Lord meets this request with anger. Why? Much like churches today, God was the head of Israel, and Israel is replacing the Lord with a king to conform to “the rest of the nations.” They abandon their unique role of bringing greatness to God so that they might be able to bring greatness to Israel as a nation.
- Samuel realizes Israel's sin; however, God asks Samuel to give Israel a king regardless. Samuel warns the nation of Israel what would happen once they had a king and then anoints Saul. Saul, throughout his life, can be seen doing things for his own glory rather than the glory of God, just like Israel. Two incidents in particular move God to remove Saul as king over Israel: he builds altars to God and offers sacrifices himself, and he fails to devote the spoils of war to the Lord, keeping it for himself. Both incidents contribute to the greater sin of Israel—Saul is not worshipping God in the way he desires to be worshipped, ignoring the law of God and conforming to the ways of the people around them. This is in stark contrast to the kings who follow him, David and Solomon, who build—not high places, but—the temple of God. Instead of keeping the spoils of war for themselves, they complete the conquest and offer the spoils of war to God.
- Saul's role in the broader story of Scripture is to show the people of God their need for a “king like David.” He represents the best efforts of God's people to save themselves, which should leave us with a deep yearning for the ways and salvation of the Lord.

- Discussion Questions
  - The Call for a King
    - Read 1 Samuel 8:4-9. Why is God so upset that Israel is asking for a king? How was God's plan for Israel different from what Israel desired?
    - In 9:15, we see that God will use Israel's mistakes for their own good and to fulfill his plan for them. Does God work every mistake we make to our good? Is there anything we can do to stop or inhibit the will and work of God? What mistakes have we made that God uses for glory?
    - As we see in our passage with Israel demanding a king, do we ever ask for things that are against God's will or outside of his plan? How does this affect the way we pray—can we know that we are praying for things within the will of God?
  - King Saul
    - Why is God so upset about Saul building an altar in 1 Samuel 14:35, or about what he devotes to destruction in 15:9? How might this apply to us today?
    - In 15:35, the text says God regretted picking Saul. Does this mean that God makes mistakes? How can we make sense of God regretting something he has done, if he did it knowing exactly what would happen?
    - Do we do things that would make God experience regret? How do we move forward from that as a community?
  - God Wants Godly Leaders Who Have a Heart for Him
    - In 13:14, Samuel tells Saul the kind of king God is raising up. What does the phrase "after God's own heart" mean? What kinds of things do people "after God's own heart" do?
    - How do we rightly respond to broken people who are in authority over us? Do we submit? Do we push against unjust authority?
    - How can we as individuals seek to be godly leaders in our areas of influence, like our families, neighborhoods, or workplaces?