

1st Samuel Chapter 10 Saul chosen as King

*[Please note : sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Hello! So as I've just mentioned, today we are picking up an earlier series about the Old Testament period between Samuel and King David, and today's talk will look at how Saul was chosen as the first king of Israel. Before we dive into our chapter, let's remind ourselves about the context to this story, so we can see where it fits into the message of the Bible. As you know, the story of the nation of Israel as an independent people starts with their remarkable redemption from slavery in Egypt, with Moses leading the people out after that memorable first Passover, and the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea. Under Moses, the Israelites had then spent forty years crossing the wilderness before they entered into the Promised Land under the direction of their new leader, Joshua, after Moses had died. From the time of Joshua until the events that we will consider today, the Israelites had been ruled by a series of judges. This had been a difficult time - if you read through the book of Judges in the Old Testament, you will see how there was the repeated pattern of the nation forgetting God and sinning against Him, and then ending up in servitude to surrounding gentile nations. When the people of Israel repented and turned back to the Lord, He raised up judges and deliverers who brought them back into freedom. Eventually we come to the wonderful story of Samuel, the last judge. Even as a little boy he had heard the word of the Lord, and Samuel was a good and faithful judge throughout all his lifetime. But sadly, his sons did not follow in his ways, and took bribes. The people of Israel decided that they wanted a king.

If you have been listening to earlier programmes in this series, you may remember that at the end of March, David Hughes spoke about that time when the nation of Israel wanted a king. After that, on the 2nd of April Stephen Thomson explained how Saul the son of Kish had been sent on an errand to find his father's lost donkeys, and how this seemingly random event had been used by God to bring Saul in contact with Samuel. Samuel then told Saul that he was the one who would become Israel's king. This is where we pick up the story today. In 1 Samuel chapter 10 Saul is chosen as king before all the people of Israel.

I don't know how familiar you are with the story of King Saul, but on the whole, it is rather a sad one. You can read about it in the first book of Samuel, and God willing we will be considering some further aspects of Saul's life in the next few weeks. From a potentially bright start in today's chapter, all too soon as we go through 1st Samuel, we learn about how Saul disobeyed God and eventually ended up in tragedy. So it's worth thinking a little about the kind of person Saul was, and how he is presented to us in the Bible. This will help us better understand him and his history, and what we can learn from it for our benefit.

To be honest, Saul is somewhat of an enigma. There are some good points about him, and we have one such example right at the end of our chapter today, where Saul held his peace and did not retaliate regarding the rebels who despised him and did not want to accept him as king. We also read in verses 9 and 10 of our chapter that the Spirit of God came upon him, and in a certain

sense he became a changed man. Yet later on in Saul's reign, the Spirit departed from Saul due to his unfaithfulness and disobedience. Saul then persecuted David, who had recently been used by God to deliver the Israelites from the terrifying Philistine champion, Goliath. Towards the end of his life, Saul consulted a medium, which was forbidden by God, and he died in a tragic way. How are we to understand all this?

There was a great preacher in France in the 19th century called Adolphe Monod. In one of his writings, he commented that only God sees the heart, and yet quite often — though not always — the Scripture, which is God's word, simply describes what people did, without disclosing their exact motive, even though God knew what that was. On the other hand, Monod went on to say, we cannot see the heart, yet we often like to imagine that we do know what motivated someone to do some particular thing. So we have to be careful when we evaluate someone's life.

In a different sermon, Monod made another point which I have also found very helpful, which is that we must always interpret Scripture with Scripture. Scripture does not contradict itself, nor does it teach two incompatible things. That is the best way to understand a subject such as Saul.

Bearing these things in mind, if we read the whole of Saul's story as recorded to us in the Bible, we get the impression that Saul does not seem to have been someone who was generally characterised by faith. I think that is an important point in helping us to understand Saul's story. Both in those times and today, faith was and is the way in which we can be made right with God, and how we can please God. Indeed, as we read in Hebrews chapter 11 verse 6,

“But without faith it is impossible to please Him.”

Another thing which struck me when reading about Saul's life in 1st Samuel was how often Saul took the Lord's Name in vain. He often swore in God's Name that he would do, or not do, some particular thing, and yet he did not follow through. This also indicates a lack of true faith in the Living God. In the chapter that we will consider today, Saul comes across as a rather passive kind of person, as opposed to being a man of active faith. Only God knows what his true relationship with God was, but based on what we read, it certainly was not deep, and as I say, he does not come across as a man characterised by faith.

Now that we've thought about some of the context to Saul's life, let's get going with 1 Samuel chapter 10. I will read the first seven verses. Listen out for the very specific predictions that Samuel made — the people he would meet, the places where he would meet them, and what would happen.

“Then Samuel took a flask of oil and poured it on his head, and kissed him and said: “Is it not because the LORD has anointed you commander over His inheritance? When you have departed from me today, you will find two men by Rachel's tomb in the territory of Benjamin at Zelzah; and they will say to you, 'The donkeys which you went to look for have been found. And now your father has ceased caring about the donkeys and is worrying about you, saying, "What shall I do about my son?"' Then you shall go on forward from there and come to the terebinth tree of Tabor. There three men going up to God at Bethel will meet you, one carrying three young goats, another carrying three loaves of bread, and another carrying a skin of wine. And they will greet you and give you two loaves of bread, which you shall receive from their hands. After that you shall come to the hill of God where the Philistine garrison is. And it will happen, when you have come there to the city, that you will meet a group of prophets coming down from the high place with a stringed instrument, a tambourine, a flute, and a harp before them; and they will

be prophesying. Then the Spirit of the LORD will come upon you, and you will prophesy with them and be turned into another man. And let it be, when these signs come to you, that you do as the occasion demands; for God is with you.”

As I said, here were some very specific predictions indeed! This was no vague, slightly ambiguous kind of fortune-telling, but clear descriptions of places and circumstances that Saul was to look out for. It was designed to convince Saul that what was happening was truly from God. In verses 9 and 10 we read,

“So it was, when he had turned his back to go from Samuel, that God gave him another heart; and all those signs came to pass that day. When they came there to the hill, there was a group of prophets to meet him; then the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied among them.”

So what God had said would happen, did happen, and it happened exactly as predicted. [Evidently this caused quite a surprise and a stir among the onlookers, as we see in verses 11 and 12:](#)

[“And it happened, when all who knew him formerly saw that he indeed prophesied among the prophets, that the people said to one another, “What is this that has come upon the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?” Then a man from there answered and said, “But who is their father?” Therefore it became a proverb: “Is Saul also among the prophets?””](#)

[This rather suggests that Saul’s acquaintances did not expect to see Saul among the prophets! This proverb, “Is Saul also among the prophets?”, is not very encouraging because when we next come across it in 1 Samuel chapter 19 verse 24, that is a chapter where we read about how Saul tried to kill David, and the prophesying that took place there seemed to be designed to stop Saul in his tracks.](#)

What are we to make of the Spirit of God coming upon Saul, especially as we find out later in 1st Samuel that the Spirit eventually departed from Saul? In the New Testament dispensation of grace which we live in, when we truly believe in Jesus and accept Him as our Lord and Saviour, we receive the wonderful gift of the indwelling Spirit. Ephesians chapter 1 verse 13 teaches us,

“In Him [that is, in the Lord Jesus Christ] you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.”

The Lord Jesus Himself, when speaking to His disciples shortly before the cross about the Holy Spirit who would come, said in John chapter 14 verses 16 – 17,

“And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever — the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.”

We receive the Holy Spirit on the basis of what Christ has done for us at the cross and through His resurrection and ascension. And because of that wonderful basis, the Lord Jesus assures us that Holy Spirit will “abide with you forever.” A true Christian, who has been saved by the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross, can never lose the Holy Spirit. It is possible to grieve or quench the Holy Spirit by our sinful attitudes, as we read in the New Testament epistles, and so lose the present,

practical enjoyment of His comfort, but He does not depart from anyone who has been redeemed by the blood of Jesus.

It was different in Saul's case. We read that the Spirit of God came upon him, not to dwell in him. Saul was, for a time, empowered by the Spirit of God, but as I mentioned earlier, there came a time when the Spirit departed from him, which we read about in a later chapter in Samuel. This cannot happen to one who has true faith in the Lord Jesus. It again suggests that Saul did not seem to have a personal faith in the Living God. God gave him every advantage and opportunity, but sadly Saul does not seem to have truly trusted in God.

Going back to our chapter in 1st Samuel, we read that shortly afterwards, Samuel called all the people together at Mizpah, to announce God's choice of king. We read about this in verses 17 – 19:

“Then Samuel called the people together to the LORD at Mizpah, and said to the children of Israel, ‘Thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘I brought up Israel out of Egypt, and delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of all kingdoms and from those who oppressed you.’ But you have today rejected your God, who Himself saved you from all your adversities and your tribulations; and you have said to Him, ‘No, set a king over us!’ Now therefore, present yourselves before the LORD by your tribes and by your clans.’”

This was not a very encouraging speech for the people to hear! Samuel let the people know that their demand for a king was really a rejection of God. God was going to answer their request, but it was not really God's desire for them at that time. Perhaps a number of them felt somewhat uncomfortable hearing this, and indeed perhaps Saul did too. It certainly would have been a bit awkward for him. Maybe that partly explains why Saul hid himself rather than present himself before all the people. Let's read on in verses 20 – 24:

“And when Samuel had caused all the tribes of Israel to come near, the tribe of Benjamin was chosen. When he had caused the tribe of Benjamin to come near by their families, the family of Matri was chosen. And Saul the son of Kish was chosen. But when they sought him, he could not be found. Therefore they inquired of the LORD further, ‘Has the man come here yet?’ And the LORD answered, ‘There he is, hidden among the equipment.’ So they ran and brought him from there; and when he stood among the people, he was taller than any of the people from his shoulders upward. And Samuel said to all the people, ‘Do you see him whom the LORD has chosen, that there is no one like him among all the people?’ So all the people shouted and said, ‘Long live the king!’”

It was a bit of a strange situation! Gradually the selection of the Lord was becoming clearer and clearer as things were narrowed down, first at the tribal level (Benjamin), then a family clan (Matri), and then finally the individual himself, Saul the son of Kish. But Saul was nowhere to be seen!

God however knew where he was, and pointed him out, hidden among the baggage! It was not really a very auspicious start, with Saul having to be dragged out of his hiding place and presented to the people.

Why did Saul hide himself like that? Well, I need to be mindful of Adolphe Monod's comments that I mentioned earlier, and not to pretend that I can read Saul's inner motives! Nevertheless, one

can't help thinking that it does not show much faith. God had made it very plain to Saul through the signs that this was His doing, whereas Saul does not seem very keen to follow through.

Verse 25 of our chapter is important:

“Then Samuel explained to the people the behaviour of royalty, and wrote it in a book and laid it up before the LORD. And Samuel sent all the people away, every man to his house.”

Saul has been chosen as king, but Samuel seems very much still in charge at this point. Evidently there were clear instructions given about how the royalty was to function under God. It was written in a book and laid before the Lord, showing that this was God's word. It is interesting to see how God has communicated with men and women throughout the centuries by giving them His word. Like that, it was not dependent on people's memories or how well they had paid attention. It was written down and could always be referred to.

Interestingly, back in Deuteronomy, God had already indicated that the King himself should be familiar with God's law. In Deuteronomy chapter 17 verses 18 – 20 we read,

“Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites. And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel.”

Having read 1 Samuel chapter 10 and learnt about how Saul was chosen to be king, we need to ask ourselves, what can we learn from this chapter? How can it help us in our Christian faith? How does it fit into 2 Timothy chapter 3 verses 16 – 17, which assure us that,

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work?”

It's not just a piece of ancient history, but it has been selected by the Holy Spirit to be in God's Word for our benefit.

I will propose a number of lessons that we can gain from Saul's history, that we can think about. When preparing this talk, I read a comment by Samuel Ridout who highlighted the trivial nature of the original issue that had led Saul to Samuel. It was the loss of Saul's father's donkeys, and Saul setting out to find them. Why would we be concerned with a story about some donkeys that were lost over three thousand years ago? Well, this account shows us that all affairs, even those that seem trivial or just annoying, such as having to recover lost property, are under God's control. This does not mean that we should expect something supernatural from every occurrence in our lives! But it does remind us that God has a plan and a purpose, that our lives and all their circumstances are known to Him, and that He can use even seemingly pointless frustrations for blessing. Of course, God could have chosen another way for Saul to be anointed king by Samuel, but He chose to do it via Saul searching for his father's lost donkeys. I can often get frustrated with certain things, but God may very well have a purpose in them.

Another lesson we can learn is about God's kindly disposition and desire to bless. The people had rejected God, as Samuel said, yet God would have blessed them through Saul, if Saul had remained faithful to God. God gave Saul clear evidence and reassurance that he had been chosen by all the detailed predictions that came to pass. Even if the people had done wrong in demanding a king, nevertheless God was with Saul, and so Saul could count on Him. God's Spirit came upon him to enable him for the task ahead. Furthermore, God publicly demonstrated His choice of King Saul at the gathering at Mizpah, so that there would be no mistake about it, and so that all the people would know that Saul had been selected by God. Towards the end of the chapter, in verse 26, we read that God also gave Saul godly and helpful companions who could have been a real help to him:

“And Saul also went home to Gibeah; and valiant men went with him, whose hearts God had touched.”

God's kindness to Saul was 100% genuine. Later on, in 1 Samuel chapter 13 verses 13 – 14, Samuel rebuked Saul and said to him,

“You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you. For now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you.”

If Saul had kept the commandment, then his kingdom would have been established. But this is where he, and all of us, fall down. None of us have kept God's commandments. How thankful we can be that God has given us the Lord Jesus as our Saviour!

As I have said, Saul's later history showed a departure from God. There does not seem to have been a firm faith. Another Saul, Saul of Tarsus who became the Apostle Paul, said in Acts chapter 13 verses 21 – 22,

“And afterward they asked for a king; so God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. And when He had removed him, He raised up for them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, ‘I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will.’”

David was called “a man after God's heart.” And yet, as we know, David also committed some terrible sins in the matter of Uriah and Bathsheba. But David had a real and living faith and relationship with the living God. God forgave David's sin, although He did not excuse it. But God was severe with Saul's disobediences. One wonders whether there really was true faith with Saul. Only God knows. But even in our chapter today, which has some good points and is a fairly happy start, it does seem that Saul is more characterised by a passive going along with the situation as contrasted with David's active and living faith. Imagine yourself in Saul's shoes for a moment. With all the wonderful predictions being fulfilled and God's Spirit coming upon Saul, where was his response to God? We don't read about any prayers, psalms, or praise to God, which is in sharp contrast to David.

All this highlights to us how grateful we must be that our relationship with God does not depend on our performance, but on our faith in the Lord Jesus who has done all things well. I know that I have often let God down, and I certainly don't want to stand on a self-constructed pedestal offering criticisms of Saul! But I can thank God that I am accepted by Him, not on the basis of what I have

done, but on the basis of what the Lord Jesus has done for me. My part is to have faith in Him and in His work. We really are in a place of amazing blessing, those of us who have trusted the Lord Jesus as Saviour! How good to know that, where we have failed, He has succeeded, and that we receive His salvation and the gift of the Holy Spirit on the basis of His death on the cross and resurrection, and that the Spirit will never depart from us. We have much cause to be grateful!

Thank you for listening to this Truth for Today message on 'Saul chosen as King', talk number T1311. I hope it has encouraged you!

Please Note:

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1.