

# SAUL, THE FIRST KING OF ISRAEL

1 Samuel 10:1-11:15

Key Verse: 10:24

*Samuel said to all 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!"*

We may remember Saul as a small-minded king who was consumed with jealousy toward David and died in a battlefield by falling on his own sword. But his beginning wasn't like that. God chose him to be the first king of Israel. He was anointed by Samuel. He was tall and handsome. He was humble, even a little diffident, not confident about his worthiness to be a king. But God changed this man. The Spirit of God was upon him and he prophesied. He would rule Israel for 42 years (13:1).

## I. GOD CHANGES SAUL'S HEART (10:1-26)

Look at verse 1. *Then Samuel took a flask of oil and poured it on Saul's head and kissed him, saying, "Has not the Lord anointed you leader over his inheritance?"*

Samuel anointed Saul to be the first king of Israel in obedience to God's directions. He poured oil on Saul's head and kissed him. He told Saul that the Lord had anointed him leader over his inheritance. This was a privately held ceremony to anoint Saul before God. There would also be a public coronation in Mizpah later. Samuel knew that Saul wasn't sure about God's calling for him to be a leader for Israel. Saul needed assurance that this was indeed from God. So Samuel told Saul what would happen to him as he left Ramah that day. Two men near Rachel's tomb at Zelzah would tell him that his father's lost donkeys had been found and that his father was now worried about him (2). Three men at the great tree of Tabor (not Mt. Tabor) would greet him and offer him two loaves of bread (out of the three loaves they were carrying). Above all, Saul would meet a group of prophets in Gibeah and the Spirit of the Lord would come upon him in power and he would prophesy with them and he would be changed into a different person (6). God would change Saul into a man of the Spirit to use him for his purpose. The Spirit of God can change any man into a different person to make him a spiritual leader.



After the anointing ceremony, Samuel gave Saul some instructions. Look at verses 7-8. *"Once these signs are fulfilled, do whatever your hand finds to do, for God is with you. Go down ahead of me to Gilgal. I will surely come down to you to sacrifice burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, but you must wait seven days until I come to you and tell you what you are to do."* From that time on, God would be with Saul in

whatever he would do. But it was important for him to follow God's words, given by his spiritual advisor, Samuel.

So how were the signs fulfilled? Verse 9 says that *as Saul turned to leave Samuel, God changed Saul's heart, and all these signs were fulfilled that day*. God changed Saul's heart. All the signs that Samuel had told him were fulfilled that day. When he met a group of prophets in Gibeah, the Spirit of God came upon him in power and he joined in their prophesying. What does it mean Saul prophesied? A prophet in the Bible is not like Nostradamus (1503-66) who predicted many future world events. A prophet in a biblical sense is not a fortune teller. Rather, a prophet is a Bible teacher. A prophet teaches the word of God and inspires people to obey him. It is true that God used the prophets like Daniel, Ezekiel and Isaiah to predict future events, but more importantly they delivered the word of God to his people to encourage, admonish and warn them. This is what St. Paul said, "... everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church" (1Co 14:3-4).

When Saul joined them in prophesying, the prophets were surprised, knowing his family background. They didn't consider Kish and his son to be so spiritual and know the word of God. Kish and Saul were not known to be Bible scholars by any means. So the prophets said, "This man knows the word of God. That can't be Saul. We know the family of Kish." They did not realize that God had changed Saul's heart. The Spirit of God can change a person. God changed Chris Sherrill. If his old friends met him today, they would say, "That can't be Chris. He knows the word of God. He can't be the man we used to hang out with at the watering holes of Hagerstown."

*After Saul stopped prophesying, he went to the high place (13).*<sup>1</sup> Then his uncle came to meet him. Saul told him about meeting Samuel, but he did not mention his kingship. Saul wasn't 100% sure about God's plan for him yet. He wasn't willing to share with his uncle about what Samuel had said about the kingship.

Look at verse 17. Samuel summoned the people of Israel to the Lord at Mizpah. This was the place where they repented their sins and experienced a spiritual revival after their humiliating defeat by the Philistines. Samuel chose the historic place to publicly announce God's selection of their first king. But first, Samuel rebuked them for their rejection of God's rule over them. He reminded them how God brought them out of their slavery in Egypt (18). They had no king to rule over them. God was their king and he sent his servant Moses to be their shepherd. And God



<sup>1</sup> Saul would prophesy once again later when the Spirit of God came upon him (19:23-24). Meanwhile, however, Saul would become proud before God and disobey him. The Spirit of God would depart from Saul and an evil spirit from the Lord would torment him (16:14). His downfall was inevitable when the Spirit departed from him.

delivered them from the power of Egypt and all the kingdoms that oppressed them. But they rejected God who saved them out of all their calamities and distresses when they said, “No, set a king over us” (19).

This was the second time God reminded them of his delivery from their slavery in Egypt. This was a history lesson. He was asking them, “How have I failed you that you are asking for a king now?” Even as God allowed them to have a king, he was saying to them, “Don’t forget this even after you get a king.” Our God is a God of history. He has a track record. We must have a sense of history. We must remember how God delivered us from our own slavery to sin and death. As someone said, “Those who ignore history are doomed to repeat it.”

At Mizpah, Samuel conducted a formal selection process to choose a king. It wasn’t a democratic election process that we have today. Instead, the selection was done by lot (20-24). This was to show that the king would be chosen by God himself. And indeed, Saul was chosen by lot. This political process was for the people of Israel. Samuel had already anointed him as king in a private ceremony. Samuel wanted the people to know that God himself had chosen Saul as their king. But there was a problem. When the winner was announced, the chosen man was not found. The Lord had to tell them, “He has hidden himself among the baggage.” Saul wasn’t still sure if he was the one, despite the signs. (We have to ask ourselves, “Are we also reluctant to accept God’s calling, hiding behind some emotional and human baggage?”) When they brought him out, he stood among the people as he was a head taller than any of the others. *Samuel said to all 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!”* (24)

Samuel obeyed God, even though personally he did not like the idea of anointing a king over his people. He gave a 100% endorsement for Saul. But he also explained to the people the regulations of the kingship. He wrote them down on a scroll and deposited it before the Lord, before dismissing the people (25). God’s regulations of the kingship are outlined in Deuteronomy 17:14-20. There were nine requirements of the king. The first four dealt with human aspects of the kingship. He must be an Israelite who owned not too many horses, not too many wives and no large amounts of silver and gold. The last five were about the king’s spiritual life. He must keep the law with him, read it all the days of his life, learn to revere God’s word and follow it, and not consider himself better than his brothers. To summarize, the king of God’s people must be different from worldly kings. Worldly rulers exercise their power over their people. That’s why we have the Jasmine Revolution going on in Middle East today. But the king of God’s people had to answer to a higher authority—God. His role as king was not only political but was spiritual as well. That’s why Saul was anointed twice, once with oil and then with the Spirit. The king of Israel was not just a political leader. He was to be a shepherd king who served his people with grace and truth. He was not to lord over them, but to humble himself to care for them.

After the ceremony, Saul went to his home in Gibeah. He had some valiant men whose hearts God had touched. They were his supporters. But he also had some

detractors. *Some troublemakers said, "How can this fellow save us?" They despised him and brought him no gifts. But Saul kept silent (24).* These troublemakers despised Saul because they didn't see any leadership qualities in him. Leaders always have supporters and critics. As leaders, we should listen to our critics, especially when they have constructive criticism. But we should not waste our time and energy dealing with every detractor who opposes us for the sake of opposing. This is what Saul did at the beginning of his kingship.

## II. SAUL RESCUES JABESH GILEAD FROM THE AMMONITES (11:1-15)

What did Saul do when he returned to his home in Gibeah? Apparently, he went back to his family farming (5). There was no royal palace waiting for him there. There was no Air Force 1, not even a limo. The only thing that he drove was his family oxen. Soon, however, an opportunity came for him to prove himself as a king of Israel. There was a ruthless king named Nahash who was terrorizing the people in the east of Jordan. This king of the Ammonites had the habit of gouging out the right eyes of his captured enemies. Actually, the rise of this man was the main reason why the Israelites asked for a king (12:12).

Look at verse 1. *Nahash the Ammonite went up and besieged Jabesh Gilead. And all the men of Jabesh said to him, "Make a treaty with us, and we will be subject to you."* Jabesh Gilead was located in the east of Jordan among the mountains of Gilead. The Gadites occupied the vast mountainous territory and it was more vulnerable to defend than the main part of Israel. Nahash the Ammonite went up and besieged Jabesh Gilead (Remember the Ammonites? They were the descendants of Lot by his younger daughter (Ge 19:28).) The men of Jabesh were paralyzed by fear and were willing to surrender to the ruthless king. Nahash replied, *"I will make a treaty with you only on the condition that I gouge out the right eye of every one of you and so bring disgrace on all Israel."* What a humiliating condition for surrender! The elders of Jabesh then asked for a 7-day grace period so that they could ask help from their countrymen. Interestingly, Nahash granted this, probably because he didn't think the Israelites would come up with any plan to fight him and he wanted to take Jabesh Gilead without fighting. He probably said, "They haven't had a king. And the new king wouldn't know what to do."

When the messengers came to Gibeah and reported these terms to the people, they all wept aloud. *Just then Saul was returning from the fields, behind his oxen, and he asked, "What is wrong with the people? Why are they weeping?" Then they repeated to him what the men of Jabesh had said (5).* How did Saul react to the humiliating terms of surrender offered by Nahash? Look at verses 6-7. *When Saul heard their words, the Spirit of God came upon him in power, and he burned with anger. He took a pair of oxen, cut them into pieces, and sent the pieces by messengers throughout Israel, proclaiming, "This is what will be done to the*



*oxen of anyone who does not follow Saul and Samuel.” Then the terror of the Lord fell on the people, and they turned out as one man.*

The Spirit of God came upon Saul in power, and he burned with anger. Humanly speaking, Saul wasn't ready to deal with this national crisis. He had no war experience. He was a farmer by training. He was timid by nature (he hid himself among the baggage (10:22)). But the Spirit of God can give a weak man the power to overcome his weakness. Saul took a pair of oxen, cut them into pieces and sent them by messengers throughout Israel, proclaiming, “This is what will be done to the oxen of anyone who does not follow Saul and Samuel.” King Saul showed his leadership and courage. But the source of his power was the Spirit of God. The terror of the Lord fell on the people when they got Saul's message. They turned out as one man. When Saul mustered the army at Bezek (west of Jabesh Gilead across the Jordan), 300,000 men from Israel and 30,000 men from Judah joined the army. (Judah is often mentioned separately because it was the largest of the 12 tribes (Nu 1:20-46) and the Messiah would come from it (Mic 5:2).) His leadership style was that he was decisive. He told the people that he and Samuel were on the same team. Saul united the 12 tribes, using terror as the means. He was like one of our past presidents who said, “If you are not with us, you are against us.”



What was Saul's strategy in fighting Nahash? He sent two different messages to the men of Jabesh Gilead and the Ammonites. The first was a message of hope. He told them, “By the time the sun is hot tomorrow, you will be delivered.” The second was a message of surrender to Nahash to disguise his surprise attack. It was his military strategy. He divided his army of 330,000 into three divisions and attacked the enemy in the wee hours while the Ammonite soldiers were sleeping. It was a blitz attack and it was a complete victory for Israel. This victory assured the Israelites that it was indeed Saul that God chose for their first king. *The people then said to Samuel, “Who was it that*

*asked, 'Shall Saul reign over us?' Bring these men to us and we will put them to death" (12). But Saul said, "No one shall be put to death today, for this day the Lord has rescued Israel" (13). Saul said that it was the Lord that saved Israel. Then Samuel said to the people, "Come, let us go to Gilgal and there reaffirm the kingship." So all the people went to Gilgal and confirmed Saul as king in the presence of the Lord. There they sacrificed fellowship offerings before the Lord, and Saul and all the Israelites held a great celebration (14-15).*

In today's passage, we learn that God can change a man like Saul to use in his redemptive work. May the Lord send the Spirit of God on each of us and help us to prophesy! May God help us to have the courage to fight our enemies within and without by faith!