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THE LOOKOUT

MAY 2021

UNIT: History of Israel (1 Samuel & 1 Chronicles)

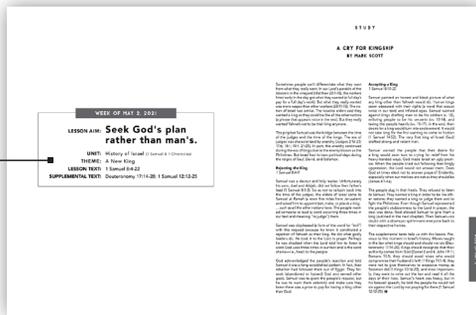
THEME: A New King

OVERVIEW:

William Shakespeare wrote, “What’s past is prologue.” We often must look backward to move forward. This month, students will learn from Israel’s past about the people’s desire for a king, what happens when that king goes AWOL, the need for a new king, and the establishment of his throne in Jerusalem.

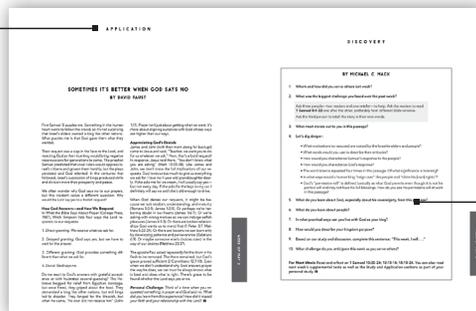
HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF MAY 9, 2021

LESSON AIM: **Take care not to fall
into disobedience.**

UNIT: History of Israel (1 Samuel & 1 Chronicles)

THEME: A New King

LESSON TEXT: 1 Samuel 10:20-24; 13:13-14; 15:10-24

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: 1 Samuel 13:1-12; Hosea 6:6;
Psalm 119:29-36; Luke 11:28

A KINGSHIP OF DISOBEDIENCE

BY MARK SCOTT

Retired Lincoln Christian University professor Tom Ewald said, “Hell is truth known too late.” Israel’s first king learned that lesson the hard way. And we learn a good lesson from his bad example. While Saul ruled Israel for 40 years and had many military successes, his reign was checkered with disobedience and neuroses.

Samuel acquiesced to the people’s desire for a king (1 Samuel 8). Saul’s mission to find his father’s donkeys was the means for Samuel to meet up with Saul and anoint him as king (1 Samuel 9). Saul did prophesy (1 Samuel 10:1-19) and (in his impatience) played the role of priest, but he did not fulfill his role as king nobly.

Tall King

1 Samuel 10:20-24

When the Old Testament mentions physical features (e.g., Judges 3:15), there is usually a reason. Saul was tall. But he was “small in [his] own eyes” (1 Samuel 15:17). It may be like the people of Babel—they had to climb so high because they felt so low (from *What the Bible Says About Self-Esteem*, by Bruce Parmenter).

Samuel had already anointed Saul king. When the time came to formally introduce him to the nation, a ceremony involving the casting of lots was conducted. To us it might look like a game of chance, but the Lord guided the process (Proverbs 16:33). First the tribes came forward one by one. Then the tribe of Benjamin was chosen. (Was not the king to come from the line of Judah—Genesis 49:10?) Next the clans (kinds or families) came forward one by one. Next Matri’s family was chosen. Finally Kish’s son Saul was chosen.

But would the king miss his inauguration? Saul could not be found. The Lord himself ruined Saul’s game of hide-and-seek by revealing to the people that Saul was *among the supplies* (baggage or receptacles). Saul’s height may have made it hard for him to hide. When Samuel identified him, the people shouted, “Long live the king!”

Foolish King

1 Samuel 13:13-14

Not everyone was exuberant about the new king (1 Samuel 10:27). But Saul’s first military victory over the Ammonites delivered the city of Jabesh Gilead and solidified his reign. Saul’s reign was renewed in Gilgal (1 Samuel 11:14-15). Things were looking good for the tall king until Samuel

gave his farewell speech (1 Samuel 12). From that moment, things went south for Saul.

Saul and his son Jonathan engaged the Philistines in battle in central Israel. But at Michmash (east of Bethel), the Philistines began to prevail. The Israelites ran scared into the caves, and Saul panicked. In Samuel’s absence, Saul presumptuously played the role of priest by offering a burnt offering. Whatever his motives, Saul was out of line. Samuel greeted him by saying, “*You have done a foolish thing* [i.e., played the fool].” Saul had disobeyed the Lord’s *command* (*mitsvah*, i.e., law). Saul’s kingship would now be compromised. He would be replaced by a *man after God’s own heart* and the next ruler of *his people* (prince, captain, or overseer). Disobedience to God is not only wrong; it is foolish.

Lying King

1 Samuel 15:10-24

Saul would sink deeper into this disobedience with the Amalekites, but that saga was interrupted by Jonathan’s battles with the Philistines (1 Samuel 14). The army got out of sorts by eating meat with blood still in it, and then Jonathan ate honey without knowing his father’s decree of a fast and incurred his father’s wrath. Saul opted for killing Jonathan, but the soldiers would not do it. Saul’s prayers for God’s help went unanswered.

The nation of Amalek had been very evil. God commanded that the Amalekites be destroyed. Saul thought he had a better way—spare the king (Agag) and save the livestock. God was grieved (cf. Genesis 6:6), and Samuel was mad—in fact, Samuel cried about it all night. Saul went to Carmel (not Mt. Carmel) and *set up a monument in his own honor*.

When Samuel arrived at Saul’s camp (in Gilgal) the next morning, Saul lied, “*I have carried out the Lord’s instructions*” (*dabar*, i.e., word). But Samuel heard the sheep *bleating* and the cattle *lowing*. Saul had been caught with his hand in the cookie jar. Even after Samuel confronted him, Saul tried to justify himself: “We were going to devote these things to God.” Sometimes disobedience can sound so rational.

Samuel reminded Saul (and us) in poetic language that jumping through religious hoops does not appease God. “*To obey is better than sacrifice*.” Saul recognized his sin, but also blamed the men to whom he gave in (compare this with Genesis 3:12). Saul learned truth too late. ■

APPLICATION

UNDERCOVER LEADERS

BY DAVID FAUST

Do you ever watch the TV show *Undercover Boss*? In each episode, high-level executives interact anonymously with their rank-and-file employees while disguised as ordinary workers trying to learn the ropes of the job. I wonder, *Why don't the employees recognize it's their boss wearing a wig and glasses? Isn't it a giveaway when TV cameras follow them around all day?*

In the “reveal” at the end of each episode, the workers discover that without realizing it, they were rubbing shoulders with the boss. Often the boss gives them generous gifts like promotions, vacations, or funds to pay for college costs. *Undercover Boss* touches a nerve because something in the human heart wants assurance that our leaders empathize with our plight. For over a decade the show has reminded bosses to get in touch with the real-life struggles faced by the ordinary people who work for them.

On a far grander scale, something similar happened in the incarnation of Christ. God went undercover when the King of kings and Lord of lords came to earth in human form—divinity disguised as a baby in a manger. The one who possesses all authority in heaven and earth looked helpless, wrapped in swaddling clothes. In the years that followed, he grew through adolescence, walked on dusty roads, wrestled with temptation, ate at peasant tables, and camped out with rough-edged disciples. Instead of using his position as God's Son to shield himself from responsibility, “he learned obedience from what he suffered” (Hebrews 5:8). He revealed himself to his disciples, and they were stunned to realize they had been rubbing shoulders with the Word who became flesh. He bestowed gracious gifts they used for years to come.

Above the Rules?

It's inspiring when leaders make the effort to understand the real-world challenges their followers face. And it's demoralizing when leaders refuse to do so—or worse, when leaders consider themselves above the rules.

In some ways, King Saul appeared to be a natural leader. When God gave the Israelites the green light to appoint a king, Saul seemed the obvious choice. Tall and strong, Saul towered head and shoulders above his peers. Remember, this was a time in history when kings led soldiers into battle in hand-to-hand combat. Unfortunately, Saul struggled with character flaws that have brought down many leaders—a toxic mix of impatience, insecurity, and emotional instability. Worse, Saul was arrogant and sloppy about obeying God—as if he knew better than the Lord.

Saul's failures as Israel's first king overshadow his successes. He serves as a cautionary example about leadership, reminding us that

- character matters more than appearance;
- self-will must yield to God's will;
- obedience to God matters more than religious rituals: “To obey is better than sacrifice” (1 Samuel 15:22);
- a self-assured, swaggering leader who insists “I'll do it my way” might look impressive at first, but that leadership style doesn't receive God's blessing: “For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry” (v. 23); and
- eventually God will unseat unjust leaders: “Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you as king” (v. 23).

Leaders aren't above the rules, and the best leaders don't see themselves as exceptions. Instead, they are examples of obedience to God and service to others.

Personal Challenge: On a piece of paper or in your personal journal, write a list of qualities you respect and admire in those who lead in the church, government, and the marketplace. Then go back over the list and circle the areas where you personally need to improve. ■

DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. In what practical ways did you live with God as your king over the past week?
2. What was the biggest challenge you faced last week?

Ask two people to read **1 Samuel 10:20-24** aloud, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask the same two people to each read **1 Samuel 13:13-14**. Repeat the process with **1 Samuel 15:10-24**.

Ask a third person to retell the entire story in their own words. (Remind them to keep the retelling simple, in about a minute or less.)

3. What traits of Saul demonstrate his potential to be a good leader?
 - What character traits expose him as a poor, or foolish, leader?
(For both of these questions, think in terms of both worldly and godly attributes.)
4. Let's dig deeper:
 - What do you see in these passages that makes someone a godly leader?
 - How would you characterize both God and Samuel's responses and feelings toward Saul's foolish choices?
 - Look through the passage and identify instances of Saul's
 - arrogance
 - lying
 - blaming others

Then discuss how each of these behaviors are forms of rebellion and rejection of God's word.

- What connections do you see between foolishness, disobedience, and evil?
5. What do you learn about God from these passages?
 6. What do you learn about people?
 7. Let's examine how we can apply Samuel's response in 1 Samuel 15:22: "To obey is better than sacrifice." Look up and read each of the following verses and discuss what they reveal to you about the significance of obedience: Proverbs 21:3; Micah 6:8; Matthew 5:20; 12:7; John 14:15; 1 John 2:4.
 8. In what specific way will you commit to obeying God in fulfilling the mission on which he has sent you?
 9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
 10. What challenge do you anticipate this week as you obey God?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **1 Samuel 16:7; 17:32-50**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■