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1 Samuel 1-15  
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## A KING CROWNED: FALSE KING

**SERIES: EPIC**

In this message we commence the fifth era of the *EPIC: The Astonishing Story of God and the World*.

We ended the last study with a vision of Naomi holding Obed, her grandson, on her lap. When the judges ruled, there was no king in Israel and moral chaos reigned—“everyone did as he saw fit.” But the birth of Obed, signals a change. He will become the grandfather of David, the king who will lead his people back to a right relationship with God.

We begin this message, turning to 1 Samuel, with the story of another baby’s birth. God worked a miracle (an occurrence we have seen before and will again) to begin Samuel’s life. He was born to once-barren Hannah and he served God by preparing Israel for a king.

Samuel was given various titles in his lifetime. He is called a judge, a prophet, a seer, and often found in the role of teacher. He was man to whom all of Israel turned for the administration of justice. God enabled him to reconnect the twelve tribes which had become isolated from one another during the time of the judges.

1 Samuel 3:19-21:

**<sup>19</sup>The LORD was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of his words fall to the ground. <sup>20</sup>And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the LORD. <sup>21</sup>The LORD continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word.**

The entire nation recognized that Samuel was God’s spokesman—“none of his words fell to the ground.” Samuel never fought a battle. He never led an army. Yet he had greater and longer-lasting authority than any of the ‘military’ judges who preceded him and Samuel was called upon to anoint the first two kings of Israel.

First, a word about monarchy in general terms. Why is it important that Israel be given a king and how does this king fit into the *EPIC* story?

Looking back to creation, we recall that God established the first human pair to rule “over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” And by his rebellion Adam infected the unsullied creation with sin and darkness. Since then we have been waiting for a son of Adam to put things right. Israel is the people chosen by God as those through whom blessing will come to all nations. The righteous king for whom the world has been waiting will enter history as ruler of Israel.

The dominion of the Messiah, the second Adam, will elevate every one of the human children to royal status—men and women who reign in life. So, in the course of history when Israel is given “a man after God’s heart” as their king, the next step (though not the final step) in the story of salvation has been taken.

Returning to our text, Samuel’s leadership had called Israel back to unity among the tribes, but not yet to trust in God. Because the people insisted on having their own way Samuel would first anoint a failed king, Saul, before identifying and anointing the man God chose, David.

1 Samuel 8:4-20:

**<sup>4</sup>So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. <sup>5</sup>They said to him, “You are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have.”**

**<sup>6</sup>But when they said, “Give us a king to lead us,” this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the LORD. <sup>7</sup>And the LORD told him: “Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. <sup>8</sup>As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. <sup>9</sup>Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will do . . .**

**<sup>11</sup>“ . . . He will take your sons . . . <sup>13</sup>He will take your daughters . . . <sup>14</sup>He will take the best**

**of your fields and vineyards and olive groves. . .<sup>17</sup>and you yourselves will become his slaves.<sup>18</sup>When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, and the LORD will not answer you in that day.”**

**<sup>19</sup>But the people refused to listen to Samuel. “No!” they said. “We want a king over us.<sup>20</sup>Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles.”**

Samuel, you must give us a king! What is wrong with this demand and why does it lead to a failure like Saul as Israel’s first ruler? First, the elders of Israel speak to Samuel as if he were master of events. They speak as if a man can shape history—perhaps the man who leads the army, perhaps the rich man, perhaps a man like Samuel with ‘religious’ authority. In any case it is the man with power, not God, who is called on to change the world.

Surely there is a warning here to spiritual leaders who enjoy being put on a pedestal, being put in the place of God. But there is no prophet or priest or pastor or pope in the world who can create a king. God alone directs history. The elders of Israel dishonored the Lord when they spoke as if Samuel were a kingmaker.

Second, we observe that Israel wanted a king like the other nations. Why does that seem like a good idea? Because, however harsh and chaotic the kings around them proved to be, their actions were predictable. Tyrants are all the same.

But a king of God’s choosing might call for the nation to choose righteousness and bravery. He might direct the nation on a path of sacrifice to achieve a greater future. The elders of Israel wanted a king like other nations because they wanted the living God kept at a distance.

In Philippians 3:19 we read of phonies who are religious but are not faithful to the Lord, living as enemies of the cross of Christ—‘their god is their belly.’ Similarly, the surrounding nations in Samuel’s day had belly-gods and tyrant kings. The elders of Israel wanted a king like that for themselves; one who offered false security, temporary benefits, no call to great or lasting faith. These people wanted a king just like the nations. What a foolish demand.

And finally, they wanted a king “to fight our battles” (1 Sam. 8:20). A righteous king would teach his people to fight important battles for themselves. These elders of Israel wanted security without any cost.

God directed Samuel to warn the people and if they rejected the warning to give them what they demand, complete with consequences. As a result, Saul becomes the nation’s first king—their temporary hero and their lasting regret.

I want to conclude this message with a consideration of the man, Saul. May his life choices give us insight into ourselves.

1 Samuel 9:1-2

**<sup>1</sup>There was a Benjamite, a man of standing, whose name was Kish son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Becorath, the son of Aphiah of Benjamin. <sup>2</sup>He had a son named Saul, an impressive young man without equal among the Israelites—a head taller than any of the others.**

Take note—the only reason that Saul was impressive was because he was tall. And not just tall but let’s assume good-looking, well muscled, twinkle in his eye, etc. He looked good and for that reason, he drew attention to himself as good-looking people often do. Then we see him in action.

1 Samuel 9:3-27 introduces Saul with a story of lost donkeys. Saul set off with his servant to find some missing animals (they never find them) and in the course of events is introduced to Samuel. The story highlights Saul’s inadequacies. We discover that Saul was unaware of both Samuel’s existence and his role as a prophet in Israel. Saul’s much-more-capable servant produces an introductory gift and arranges a meeting between the two men.

As the scale of concerns grows greater—the needs of the nation, a new work of God—Saul remains focused on lost animals. His impressive stature belies the small scale of his interests and capabilities.

Consider Samuel, the prophet, speaking to Saul, the donkey seeker:

1 Samuel 9:20-21:

**<sup>20</sup>And to whom is all the desire of Israel turned, if not to you and all your father’s family?”**

**<sup>21</sup>Saul answered, “But am I not a Benjamite, from the smallest tribe of Israel, and is not my clan the least of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin? Why do you say such a thing to me?”**

'I'm a nobody from nowhere; you must have the wrong guy. What in the world are you talking about?' Saul is later the guest of honor at a feast, is privately anointed as king and is overcome with the gift of prophecy—yet never seems to grasp what is happening to him. Finally, Samuel gathers Israel to present them with the man who will be their king.

1 Samuel 10:21-22:

**<sup>21</sup>Then he brought forward the tribe of Benjamin, clan by clan, and Matri's clan was chosen. Finally Saul son of Kish was chosen. But when they looked for him, he was not to be found. <sup>22</sup>So they inquired further of the LORD, "Has the man come here yet?"**

**And the LORD said, "Yes, he has hidden himself among the baggage."**

He hid because he knew he was not king material.

1 Samuel 10:23-24:

**<sup>23</sup>They ran and brought him out, and as he stood among the people he was a head taller than any of the others. <sup>24</sup>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!"**

So Saul becomes the ruinous king that was predicted when Israel called for a ruler like those the other nations had. He tried his best but his judgment was terrible, his policies foolish, his attempts at spiritual leadership misguided.

Saul couldn't deal with his own growing jealousy and madness. He couldn't rule himself; he couldn't rule his nation; and finally he died at his own hand, without honor.

Saul's failures are familiar. What he was on the inside never matched what he looked like on the outside. He couldn't live up to the expectations created by his appearance. And Saul knew he was a nobody. He did not have either political or spiritual ambitions, an ordinary

farmer who happened to be tall and good-looking.

We might well say that Saul's dilemma was God's fault and I suggest that that is the condition of many of us as well. God has the right to put us in a place we don't want to be. It is his prerogative to give us responsibility we would rather avoid. He may well put us in a family that we don't know how to love well and place burdens on our shoulders that we wish we didn't have.

So what should we do when God gives us an assignment we're no match for? We must acknowledge our need and seek the Lord.

Saul never fell to his knees, never asked for help. He never admitted that he was not the man he appeared to be. His mistakes as king didn't lead to humility but to further brazenness. God provided Saul a remarkable mentor in Samuel and a remarkable son in Jonathan and a remarkable friend in David. These men could have helped Saul rule well but he refused to admit his inadequacies.

When I was a young Christian I was given a book. The title has always stuck with me—*Farewell to the Fake ID*. Trying to defend a false image, maintaining a spiritual fiction, is deadly. Saul was not who he appeared to be. He brought ruin to himself and others because he could not admit it.

We have now commenced the fifth era in the *EPIC*. The era of Israel's kings begins badly: a nation which rejects God by its demands and a king whose pride is his undoing. But stay tuned. The king who comes next is nothing like Saul.

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