

SAMUEL AND THE QUESTION OF A KING

by Dan Baker

KEY VERSE:

1 Samuel 12:22

"For the Lord will not cast away his people, for his great name's sake, because it has pleased him to make you a people for himself."

FAITH STORY:

1 Samuel 8 -12

FAITH FOCUS:

Samuel is judge over the Israelites, the people of God, in Canaan. During Samuel's term as judge, the Israelites ask to have a king appointed over them. Samuel is troubled by this request and so he prays to God and the Lord tells him to fulfill their wish. So Samuel sought out Saul and anointed him king over the Israelites. Saul established himself as king, and Samuel gave his farewell speech to the people. He revealed to them the evil they had done by asking for a king to govern them instead of trusting in the Lord. The people realized then that they had sinned against the Lord and they repented. Samuel urged them to be faithful to the Lord from then on, and he warned them not to keep sinning as they had or the Lord would sweep them away.

SESSION GOAL:

To teach students about God's Remedial Will as a sign of God's love and persistence for us.

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this session students will be able to:

- 1 Define Remedial and Ultimate Will of God.
- 2 Define Theocracy and Monarchy.
- 3 Name the last Judge.
- 4 Name the first King.
- 5 Answer the question: "Why did the Israelites want a king over them even after they heard all of the awful things that would happen?"
- 6 Answer the question: "Why does the Lord say that he will give the people a king?"
- 7 Answer the question: "Who is the only character in the Bible who lives up to God's ultimate will?"

MATERIALS NEEDED AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- 1 A blindfold
- 2 basket of candy
- 3 Bibles for all of the students
- 4 several large sheets of poster board or newsprint, markers.

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS: (3–5 minutes)

Ask for a volunteer or pick a student for this activity. Send that student out of the room while you give instructions to the class. Divide the class into two groups and tell one group that if the student finds a basket of candy in 45 seconds, they get to have it. Tell the other group that if the student does NOT find it, they will get the candy. Bring the student in and blindfold him/her, then spin him or her around so they don't know which way they're facing. Place a basket of candy somewhere in the room, as far away as possible from the blindfolded student, and tell the student to follow the voices to find the basket of candy. Then tell the students to cheer the blindfolded student on, toward or away from the candy while you time it. Whether or not the student finds the candy, don't distribute it yet.

CONNECT: (10–15 minutes)

Discuss with the class and the blindfolded student: *“What happened? What made it so hard to reach the goal?”*

Ask the Blindfolded Student: *Did you know whom to trust? How did you know? Who did you trust?*

After the discussion, blindfold another student and hide the candy in a different location. This time ask for one volunteer to guide the student to the candy while everyone else is completely silent. After the student finds it, divide it up between all of the students. Discuss while they munch on their candy: What was it like this time? What made the difference?

Transition Statement: *“We’ve seen an example of someone having trouble knowing who to trust—whose voice to listen to. There was a time in the biblical story when the Israelites, the people of God, put their faith in the wrong people and things. They lost their faith in God and so they asked instead to have a human king put over them, like other nations had.”*

EXPLORE THE BIBLE: (15–20 minutes)

Have the students open their Bibles to 1 Samuel 8, select several students and have them read aloud to the class:

1 1 Samuel 8:1-9

Explain the Theocracy that the people had and the Monarchy that they wanted:
Theocracy—a system of government in which God is king. Monarchy—a system of government in which a human ruler is king.

2 1 Samuel 8:10-22

Question: *“What did God say would happen if they got a king?”*

Answer: 1 Samuel 8:10-18: The Lord said that a king would take their sons and make them soldiers, and take their daughters and make them “perfumers and cooks and bakers.” Also a king would take the best of their fields and give the yields of their labor to his officials and attendants. Basically, God says that a king will take everything they possess if it benefits him in any way.

Question: *"Why did the Israelites want a king over them even after they heard all of the awful things that would happen?"*

Answer: 1 Samuel 8:20: "... so that we also may be like other nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles." They lost their faith in God. They didn't trust him anymore to do these things, which he had so graciously done for them in the past.

3 1 Samuel 9:15-20

Question: *"Who was the last judge and who is the first king?"*

Answer: Samuel is the last judge and Saul is the first king.

Question: *"Why does the Lord say that he will give the people a king?"*

Answer: 1 Samuel 9:16: "... for I have seen the suffering of my people, because their outcry has come to me." The Lord gives the Israelites a king simply because his people were suffering and they cried out to him. This is a great example of the Lord's faithfulness even when we are unfaithful to him. Also this is a good example of the Lord working through his remedial will. Although he doesn't want a king, he gives his less than perfect people what they need.

4 1 Samuel 12:1-5, 13-25

Question: *"Why does the Lord still love and pursue us even when we sin?"*

Answer: 1 Samuel 12:20-22: "And Samuel said to the people, 'Do not be afraid; you have done all this evil, yet do not turn aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart; and do not turn aside after useless things that cannot profit or save, for they are useless. For the Lord will not cast away his people, for his great name's sake, because it has pleased the Lord to make you a people for himself.' Though we are less than perfect people, the Lord still works with us and through us. This is his remedial will. The Lord has an ultimate will that all of us are called to, but thankfully he meets us where we are with all of our sin and takes our hands and guides us if we stay faithful to him.

Question: *"What is the main reason for the Israelites to stay faithful to God?"*

Answer: 1 Samuel 12:24-25: "Only fear the Lord, and serve him faithfully with all your heart; for consider what great things he has done for you." Our main reason for staying faithful to God is remembrance of all the miracles and blessings he has performed upon our account in the past. An example of this is the Exodus, in which the Lord delivered the Israelites from their bondage and made them a free people in the land of Canaan.

Question: *"Who is the only character in the Bible who lives up to God's ultimate will?"*

Answer: Jesus Christ

Question: *"How does he do so?"*

Answer: By being completely obedient and faithful to God.

Summary:

God's remedial will is God working through less than perfect people. It is God giving these people the things they want even if it is not exactly what God has in mind for them in the future. A great example of remedial will can be found in this passage where God gives the people a king. God does not want a king, but if God does not give the people a king he may lose them completely. We can see the Lord's ultimate will carried out by the prophet Samuel in the story. He remains faithful to God throughout the entire ordeal. Our best example of the Lord's ultimate will, however, is Jesus Christ, who is completely obedient to the Lord even when it means humiliation and death.

APPLY: (10–15 minutes)

Divide the class into groups of 3-4. Ask each group to write Ultimate Will in the upper right hand corner of the sheet, and then to imagine what they think God's ultimate will is for this class as a whole. Write that under the words Ultimate Will. Then ask them to write "Today" in the bottom left corner of the paper, and to trace the journey between Today and Ultimate Will, which will be a trip through Remedial Will. Encourage them to struggle with this a bit before you give them ideas.

Ideas for Ultimate Will might be: That we grow closer to God and each other. That we learn more about God's Word. That we look forward to coming to this class because it is an inspiring time for us.

Ideas for the journey through Remedial Will: Anything that shows how we are less than perfect people, but God still works with us and through us. God meets us where we are with all of our sin and guides us as we stay faithful. Examples: not paying attention in class because we are tired, talking about each other in negative ways, being "good" in class but not during the week; not taking time to read the Bible, not coming to class, etc.

Ask groups to share their sheets with the class.

RESPOND: (3–5 minutes)

Relate what the students just did in groups to the story they learned about and focus mainly on God's remedial will (allowing us to have things and go through situations that aren't always the best for us) and God's ultimate will (being completely obedient to God and Jesus). Discuss what they might do in the class and in their personal lives to strive for God's Ultimate Will.

Close with a prayer.

INSIGHTS FROM THE SCRIPTURE:

After fleeing from Egypt and enduring the trials of the wilderness, the Israelites became a settled people in the land of Canaan, thanks to the grace and power of their God, Yahweh, who performed many miraculous acts to bring them to their new home. During this time period God placed over his people judges who kept social justice alive within the lives of the Israelites. The judges would lead the people in the will of God, but when a judge died, the people relapsed and became even worse than before, worshipping other gods and practicing all kinds of sin. Because of this sin, God allowed the enemies of his people to oppress them

and when they became oppressed, they cried out to the Lord and he graciously raised a judge up over them to lead them out of persecution. Unfortunately, when that judge died, the people would relapse again and the cycle would start all over again. This cycle is known as the Deuteronomistic Cycle.

Samuel was the last judge, and he was a kind of prophet, priest, and judge. During his time as judge there came the cry from the Israelites that they might have a king placed over them. At this time the Israelites were practicing a theocracy, which is a system of government where their God was their king, and they needed no human ruler. But the people wished to have a monarchy—they wanted a human king to lead them like all the other nations had.

Although it was not God's first desire for his people to have a human king, through his remedial will, he granted them their wish. He gave the Israelites what they wanted and made the best out of a bad situation by working with, and through, less than perfect people. The character in the story that carries out God's ultimate will is Samuel. Our best example, however, of God's ultimate will is Jesus Christ, who never turned away from God.