

## Summary for Session 11: Royal Kingdom—Part 1

Prep work: 1 Samuel

DVD: Jeff opens this session by reviewing the Story of Salvation so far and the key events that have brought us to this point. He highlights the three promises God makes to Abraham: a land for Abraham's family (fulfilled when the Israelites take possession of Canaan); a royal kingdom (fulfilled when Saul and David set up the throne); and worldwide blessing (to be fulfilled in the redemptive acts of Jesus). It is the creation of the Royal Kingdom that we explore this session, as God attempts to reestablish His rule with the Israelites through a king—a king who will carry out God's command instead of rule by his own power.

First we examine the life of the last and greatest of the judges, Samuel. Hannah is the beloved wife of Elkanah, but is barren. In her misery, she prays out to God with such intensity that even Eli, the priest, is moved by her longing and tells her her prayers will be answered. She consecrates Samuel to God even before he is born, and once he is weaned, she takes him to Eli and leaves him there to become a priest of God under Eli's tutelage. Jeff interjects a personal aside relating to Hannah's longing for a child and notes that the desire for children is a reflection of God, in whose image and likeness we are made. Jeff also notes that Hannah is a model mother who gives her son to God, as every parent should do. Both Hannah and Samuel have, in the words of the Catechism, “cultivated sensitivity” (CCC 2578) to God's voice in their lives, and are able to listen and respond to His Word. Samuel becomes both priest and prophet, and will soon be called to anoint kings.

The Philistines enter the story again, as they capture the Ark of the Covenant, which has been foolishly paraded about by the Israelites. The Philistines take the Ark to their pagan temple to Dagon. Once they find Dagon smashed in front of the Ark, they offer the Ark around to other cities, but it brings plagues and destruction wherever it goes, so the Philistines send it back to the Israelites at the city of Kiriath-jearim. Today a statue of the Ark of the Covenant with Mary, the new Ark of the Covenant, stands at that place.

The Israelites, tired of having no leader, request a king. This in itself is not wrong, but they want one “like the other nations” instead of recognizing God as their king. God accommodates them by condescending or bringing Himself down to the level of the Israelites. He will give them the earthly king they so desire, but this king shall follow His rule. As Jeff notes, God gives the Israelites what they *need* wrapped in what they *want*—a classic parenting tactic. It is also an example of typology: this earthly king will be as a type of the heavenly king. Another example we will soon run into will be the great Temple in Jerusalem as a type of the true temple of God: our very bodies when we receive Jesus in the Eucharist. Even though God allows the Israelites a king, He has Samuel warn them well about the costs of a throne: a king will take the best of everything they have, including their children. The Israelites would also do well to heed Moses' warning way back in Deuteronomy: a king should not multiply his wives, horses, silver, or gold (Deut 17:14)—a reference to making alliances with the other nations.

Samuel goes out, following God's will, and appoints Saul, from the tribe of Benjamin, as the first king. This is a strategic move, as it turns out, because the tribe of Benjamin is situated between two contentious tribes, and Saul, as a Benjamite, is able to unite them and the other tribes.

Unfortunately, Saul chooses to pander to the people rather than obey God. Saul takes on the role of priest rather than wait for Samuel (and God) because of his fear of the people. God orders a ban placed on the Amalekite cities that Saul wages war against. Instead of destroying everything, Saul takes the king hostage and keeps the best of the livestock, then lies to Samuel

about it! When Samuel calls Saul's bluff, Saul admits his sins, but requests that Samuel still honor him publicly—he is more afraid to lose face than to lose the throne. Samuel admonishes him severely: “Obedience is better than sacrifice” and tells Saul that his lack of obedience has cost him the throne. God was willing to establish a royal lineage through Saul, but since he has been found unworthy, God will end his line and anoint a new king, one “after His own heart.” God leads Samuel to Bethlehem in search of this new king, and points out David, the youngest of Jesse's sons, as His choice. David and Saul's lives become entwined, as Saul becomes a tortured soul whose suffering is soothed only by David's harp-playing. David also comes forward as the only Israelite willing to face Goliath, and he does so in his own way; he refuses Saul's armor and weapons, choosing his own simple sling, river rocks, and a steadfast faith in God. As David grows in prominence, Saul's jealousy also grows and he becomes fixated on killing David. David flees, helped by his best friend and Saul's son, Jonathan. It is this time of hiding in the desert of En-gedi from Saul's pursuit that inspires many of David's psalms. Twice, is in within David's power to kill Saul, but he refuses to do so out of respect for the office of the king. God has anointed Saul, and David will not disobey God. Jeff notes that there are many times today where we can show respect for the office of authority even while not agreeing with that specific leader. He also points out that we can see David's thoughts on the matter reflected in the Psalms—being a leader doesn't mean perfection, it means following God. Jeff mentions two more books of the Bible connected with the time of the Royal Kingdom: 1 and 2 Chronicles. Chronicles tells the story of this time from the perspective of Judah, the Davidic throne. 1 Chronicles parallels 2 Samuel, while 2 Chronicles parallels 1 and 2 Kings. The session closes at the end of Saul's life. Saul and Jonathan die in battle with the Philistines on Mount Gilboa, above a valley known most famously as Armageddon. On hearing of Saul's death, David is not happy, as one might expect, but mourns greatly. Whether he will be the leader God wishes and Israel needs will be examined in the next session.