

Week 1: *God's Design for a King*

Hook



Main Point: Godly leaders are servant leaders who point to God as king.

Today's lesson explores the significance of godly leadership. Choose whom you think would make an ideal leader in the following environments. These leaders could be characters from the Bible, history or fiction.

- Your boss:
- Cruise ship director:
- Governor of Texas:
- President of the United States:
- Principal of the local elementary school:
- Manager of your favorite restaurant:
- Military general:
- Captain of a commercial airplane:
- Chief Justice of the Supreme Court:
- National Football League Coach:
- U.S. Secretary of the Treasury:

Week 1: God's Design for a King

Book

Main Point: Godly leaders are servant leaders who point to God as king.

Deuteronomy 17:14–20 [Read]

Talking Point 1: Unlike the kings of this world, God's kings are servant leaders.

Q: How does God's description of a king differ from the typical king of this world?

Q: What does verse 20 tell us about the heart attitude of a godly king?

Before we get into David's journey, we will spend the first two lessons looking at the background leading up to God's choosing David as king. This week, we will discuss kingship and how God's idea of a good king is different from the world's. Next week, we will see some of Saul's shortcomings as a leader and the contrast between David and Saul.¹ This week's lesson begins in Deuteronomy when God told Moses what would happen when His people asked for a king.

At this point in biblical history (Deuteronomy), Moses was renewing the covenant with the second generation of Israelites who came out of Egypt. In Exodus, God rescued the people from slavery and brought them out to be His people. He made a covenant with them at Sinai, laying out what it would look like for them to live as His people in His kingdom (Exodus–Leviticus). God's kingdom had no human king. God Himself was their king; their human leaders (prophets, priests, and judges) were only mediators between Him and His people. It was a theocracy, not a monarchy.

In Numbers, God started preparing His people to take over the Promised Land, but they did not trust that God could conquer the land for them, even though He had already conquered the Amalekites for them and conquered Pharaoh's army by parting the Red Sea (Numbers 13:26–29). So the Lord said that generation would die off in the wilderness, and 40 years later, their children would be the ones to conquer the land (Numbers 14:20–25). Deuteronomy is God's renewal of the covenant with that second generation, telling them what it would look like for them to live in His kingdom as His people with Him as their king.²

In this chapter, God told them that one day, when they were settled in the Promised Land, they would ask God for a human king so they could be like the nations around them (v. 14). This is a prophecy we will see fulfilled in 1 Samuel 8:4–9. Though God didn't want them to have a king, He would give them one. But He was very specific about what this king should be like. He must:

- Be an Israelite chosen by the Lord (v. 15)
- Not accumulate wealth, wives or military power (horses) for himself (vv. 16–17)

- Write and keep a copy of the law with him and read it every day (vv. 18–19)
- Revere the Lord, carefully follow all His ways, and not turn from the law (vv. 19–20)
- Not consider himself better than his people (v. 20)

This is the picture of a humble, servant leader. One who is not in leadership for what he can gain for himself, but his priority is serving his people. One who does not lead out of his own wisdom but follows God’s wisdom. One who does not consider himself better than his people but a servant of God just as he is. This kind of king is a mediator of God’s kingship, not the ultimate ruler himself. Though he is a king, he is really just a representative of God, ruling in His stead. With this type of leader, even though it’s a monarchy, God is still the king.

Q: Describe the differences between a leader who looks for whatever wealth, power, or honor he or she can get out of the position and one whose goal is to be a servant. How will that person lead differently? How will those leadership styles affect the people?

Q: How did Jesus show Himself to be a servant leader during His ministry on earth?

Judges 17:6 and 21:25 [Read]

Talking Point 2: When there is no strong godly leadership, there is chaos.

Q: What happened in Israel when there was no king? Why?

In Deuteronomy, God was preparing the Israelites to enter the Promised Land and live as His people under His kingship. Then, in the period referred to as The Conquest (Joshua), they conquered most of the land. At the end of his life, Joshua reminded them how God had driven out great nations before them (Joshua 23:9). He reminded them to stay faithful to God, and not let those from other nations who worshipped other gods pull them away from Him. He used the same words Moses used in his commands to the king that we just read in Deuteronomy: “... do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, turning aside from it neither to the right nor to the left” (Joshua 23:6).

But in the next period of Israel’s history (Judges), they didn’t do that. The book of Judges takes place over the course of about 400 years, during which they settled in the Promised Land as God’s people and were supposed to be closely following His Law as Joshua had instructed. During this period, Israel was a theocracy; God was her king. There was no human king, but there was leadership. Priests led the people in following God’s covenant and atoning for sin, prophets rose up to speak hard truths to the people when they were disobedient to the covenant, and judges arose as military leaders when needed because the people were being oppressed by other nations.³

Judges tells us that over this period, the people lived a repeating cycle of disobedience and its consequences. They did well in following God for a while, then fell into idolatry and sin with the nations living among them. Then those nations began to oppress them. They cried out to the Lord to rescue them, so God would raise up a judge, deliver Israel, and they would recommit to following Him. But after a time, they fell into idolatry and sin again, and the whole cycle started all over, repeating itself throughout the book of Judges. It created a downward spiral, with each cycle progressively worse.⁴

A pattern emerged so that when they had a godly leader, they stayed faithful to God and lived in peace. Judges says of Othniel, “The Spirit of the Lord was upon him, and he judged Israel ... his hand prevailed ... so the land had rest forty years” (Judges 3:10–11). The pattern of peace in the land continued with every successful judge – 80 years with Ehud (3:30), 40 years with Deborah (5:31), 40 years with Gideon (8:28), and so on. When the nation had a godly leader who was led by God’s Spirit and followed His law, the people also followed God and the result was peace. When they didn’t, things fell apart. Generally speaking, when the leadership is idolatrous and ungodly, the people follow suit.

How often do we see that happen today – not just in the secular world, but also in the Church? We live in a culture similar to that of the Israelites during Judges. We are followers of Jesus, but those who live all around us don’t worship our God. We aren’t separated into our own kingdom away from the secular world. We are citizens of God’s kingdom living *in* this world. Will we let the world around us pull us away from God or will we stay faithful to Him in a secular world?

Judges points to godly leadership as being crucial to the people’s faithfulness. When there was a judge led by the Spirit and committed to God’s law, things were good. When there wasn’t, there was utter chaos. People did whatever they wanted, and it led to such a mess that the people cried out to God to deliver them. We don’t have human kings in Christ’s kingdom (the Church) today, but we do have church leaders, and the same can be true of the way their leadership affects their people. When there is godly leadership, a church is more likely to stay faithful to God. When there isn’t, people are more likely to do whatever “feels right” to them. We need godly leadership in our churches. We need people led by the Spirit who know God’s Word and are committed to following it.

Q: Describe what makes a godly leader, not just a “strong” leader.

Q: Describe the kind of impact godly leadership makes in a church.

1 Samuel 8:6–21 [Read]

Talking Point 3: Godly human leadership always points to God as the true king.

Q: Why did the Israelites ask for a human king? Why did it make logical sense to them after their experience during the period of the judges?

Q: Why did God warn them that they didn't really want a king?

After the Israelites' experience during the period of the judges, we can understand why they would want a strong human king to lead them. For the more than 400 years they had been in the land, things had gone well for them when they had godly leadership. But there was chaos and oppression when they didn't. The logical answer would be "We need a king! A strong leader!" But humanity's idea of a strong leader isn't the same as God's. They didn't just need a *strong* leader; they needed a *godly* leader – one who would lead them in following God as their king. That is what made those judges successful, not their own strength, power or wisdom.⁵

1 Samuel begins with the story of the last judge, Samuel, who was also a prophet and a priest. He held all three leadership roles in the time of the judges. Samuel was a godly leader, but in his old age, he appointed his sons as judges, and they did not walk in God's ways, so the elders asked for a king instead. Samuel was upset, but when he prayed, God told him they weren't rejecting him; they were rejecting *God* as their king, just as they had been doing over and over for hundreds of years since the Exodus, almost from day 1 when they built the golden calf at Sinai.

Samuel warned them that if they went from theocracy to monarchy, the human king would take the best of their produce, flocks, herds, servants and even their sons and daughters to be in his army and work in his court. They would be his slaves – exactly what God had rescued them from in Egypt (vv. 10–17). God told them that they would regret their choice and cry out to Him to save them, but He would not answer. Like a parent who says, "You made your bed, now lie in it," He would let them suffer the natural consequences of their choice (v. 18). They chose to ask for a king anyway (vv. 19–20).⁶

This is exactly what God had said they would do back in Deuteronomy, more than 400 years before. God had told them they didn't really want a king, but if they had to have one, they should have a particular kind of king – a servant leader who followed Him, who was not in leadership for what he could get out of it, but who would serve the people and lead them in following God. God's solution to this problem would be to

choose a human king who acted as His vice-regent, not an all-powerful and domineering ruler. Someone who would lead the people to live with God as their true king.

Q: Describe the differences between a Christian leader who leads out of his or her own strength and wisdom, and one who leads as a vice-regent of God as king. In what ways do you see the difference played out in their churches/ministries?

Q: If we think of our leaders as vice-regents of God and God as our true king, how will that change the way we relate to our leaders? How does that connect to the command for the king not to put himself above the people?

Week 1: *God's Design for a King*

Took

Main Point: Godly leaders are servant leaders who point to God as king.

In a sermon preached in 1873, Charles Spurgeon said, "Every Christian here is either a missionary or an imposter."⁷ God might not have called you to be the monarch of a nation or to serve as a pastor in the church, but odds are, you fill some leadership role in your job, community or home. These are opportunities for you to point others to God. Consider your leadership traits and answer the following questions:

Q: Would those you lead describe you as a servant? In what ways have you served them recently?

Q: Do you pray for those you lead? What do you pray for them consistently?

Q: Have those you lead asked about your faith? Why do you think they have or haven't?

Teacher, guide your group in a time of prayer. Challenge members to pray that the Lord would help them to view the arenas in which they lead as mission fields.

CHALLENGES

THINK: Think about the nature of godly leaders as mediators of God as the true king. How do we find the balance between knowing we need godly leaders but also knowing it is God who is the true king? What does that balance look like when it comes to submitting to the authority of our church leadership? What responsibility do our church leaders have to us as their people?

PRAY: Thank God for the godly leaders you have seen in the past and today. Ask the Lord to search your heart and bring to mind areas of needed growth in your leadership. Repent of failures in your leadership and pray that this week, those under your leadership would see Christ in you and be pointed to Him.

ACT: Encourage your spiritual leaders. Write letters, texts or e-mails of encouragement to your pastors, your small-group leader, or anyone else who is or has been in a position of authority over you in the church and impacted you in a positive way. Thank them for ways they have led you to follow Jesus, encourage them using Scripture, and tell them

you are praying for them. You could even send them a small gift as a thank you if you feel led.

NEXT TIME in *The Life of David*: This week we saw the Bible's description of what God is looking for in a human king for His kingdom. Next week, we'll see why Saul failed as a leader – because he operated out of fear, not faith in the Lord.

¹ John Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *The Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

² Paul R. House and Eric Mitchell, *Old Testament Survey* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007).

³ Paul R. House and Eric Mitchell, *Old Testament Survey* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007).

⁴ Paul R. House and Eric Mitchell, *Old Testament Survey* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007).

⁵ Paul R. House and Eric Mitchell, *Old Testament Survey* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007).

⁶ Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (London: W.W. Norton & Co, 1999).

⁷ <https://jdgrear.com/every-christian-is-either-a-missionary-or-an-impostor/>