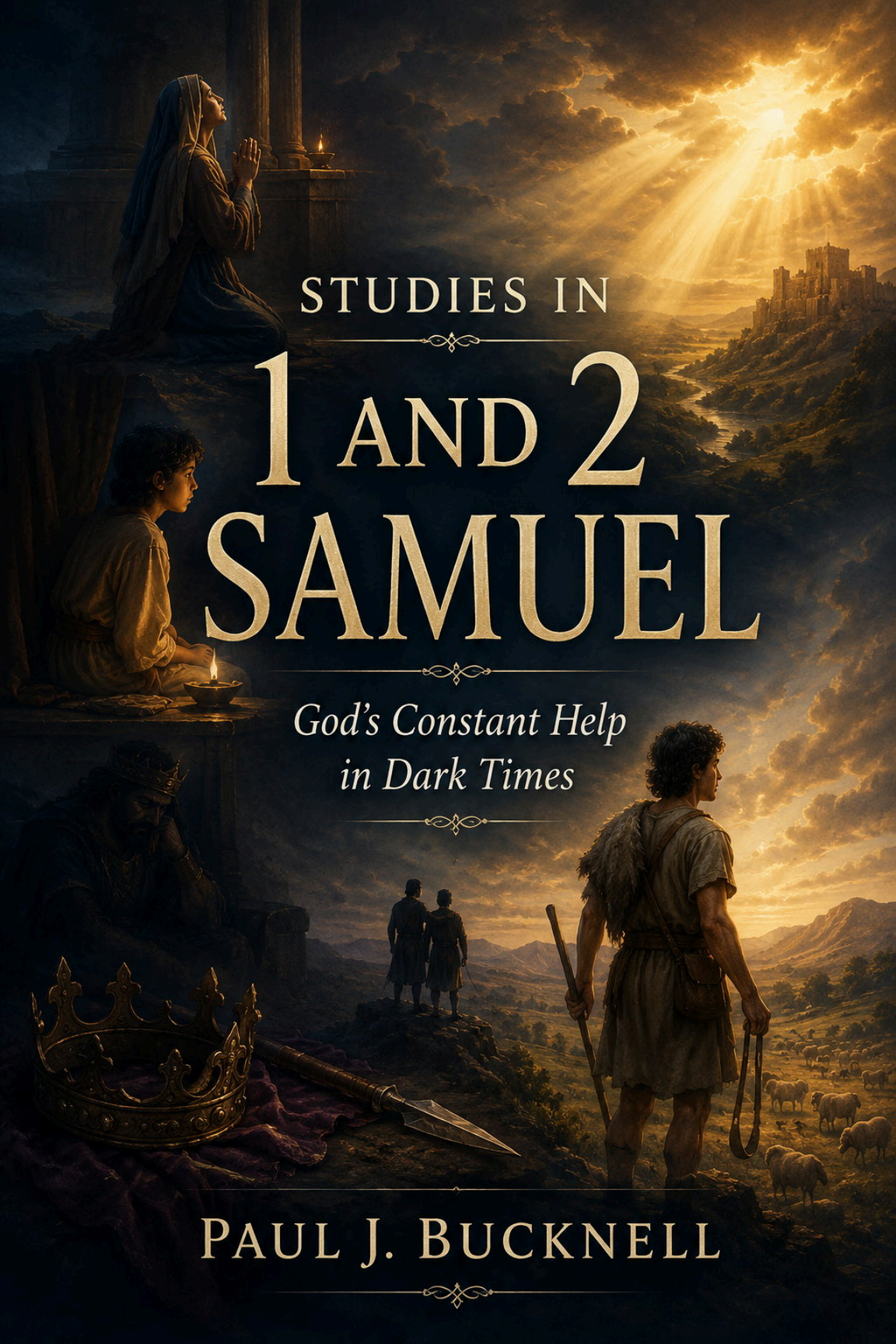




STUDIES IN

1 AND 2 SAMUEL

*God's Constant Help
in Dark Times*

PAUL J. BUCKNELL

Books by Paul J. Bucknell

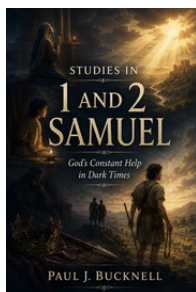
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Studies in 1 and 2 Samuel

God's Constant Help in Dark Times

Paul J. Bucknell



The Bible Teaching Commentary

BOOK INFORMATION

Studies in 1 and 2 Samuel: God's Constant Help in Dark Times

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ABOUT THIS COLLECTION

The books of Samuel portray dark circumstances, compromised leadership, deep friendship, persistent jealousy, moral testing, gracious recovery, and God's unfailing rule. Through the lives of Hannah, Samuel, Saul, Jonathan, David, and many others, we learn to recognize God's quiet work and respond wisely when life is confusing or difficult.

The studies gathered here are not intended to provide a verse-by-verse commentary on every chapter of 1 and 2 Samuel. Instead, they offer a collection of teaching articles, focused studies, and discussion questions that explore how God's Word from long ago gives clear direction for faith, character, leadership, relationships, obedience, failure, and hope in modern times.

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1 Samuel Preaching Themes

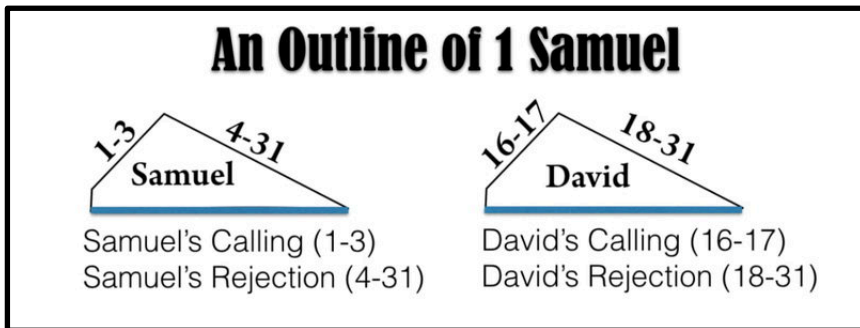
Preaching Descriptions in 1 Samuel

- Life is filled with traps, snares, and pitfalls, each possessing unique talents to undermine our faith in the Living God. The Book of 1 Samuel shows us God's subtle way of working through His faithful servants during crisis times, so that even as society crumbles, God's kingdom is being powerfully built.



- 1 Samuel highlights the need for a great King like Jesus Christ to lead His people and offers lessons on how to see life and make wise choices during tough times. We can trust God in our situations because He steps into our world and provides help.
- Hope and fulfillment are two main goals of people's lives. So what do we do when circumstances threaten these core aims? 1 Samuel strengthens our faith to better understand God's plans for us, and in that trust, reveals the wonderful ways He guides our lives for His glorious purpose.

- Moving from the Book of Judges to Samuel takes us from judges to prophets and from tribal rulers to kings. Through the priestly line of Eli and the royal house of Saul, we see that neither was adequate to lead the nation back to the Lord. The key difference between Saul and David was not that one sinned and the other did not, but that David recognized his sin and relied on God's mercy. David pursued the Lord because he loved Him. Our hope is not in David himself, but in the promise made to David—a descendant who would sit on his throne. David's altar stayed God's wrath against Jerusalem and pointed forward to Christ the Messiah, whose sacrifice would ultimately atone for sin.



Rejection or testing does not end one's service but begins it! Crises, although feared, are the very means God uses to prepare us for His specific work in our lives. While others might panic or turn away from their faith under intense societal pressure, we stand firm, even as those around us fall. By doing what is right, we affirm our hearts' allegiance to the Lord and demonstrate God's hope in this otherwise dark world.

Calling is the time when we become aware of God's purposes for our lives. This begins with salvation, but the

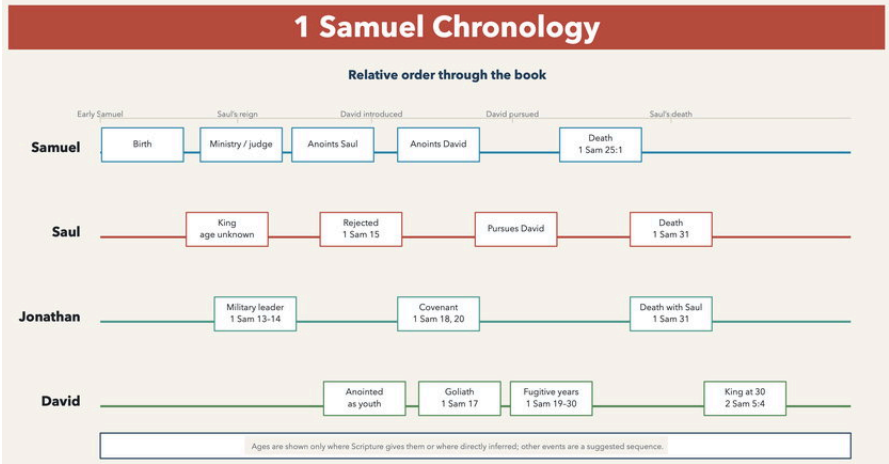
growing awareness and confirmation of God's particular purposes become an important test of faith.

Rejection is a time of testing our grasp of God's grace and our willingness to receive soul and character training. Through it, we learn to depend on God, trust His timing, accept life's conflicts, absorb the rejection of others, develop faithfulness, and value integrity above shortcuts.

1-2 Samuel Chronological Charts

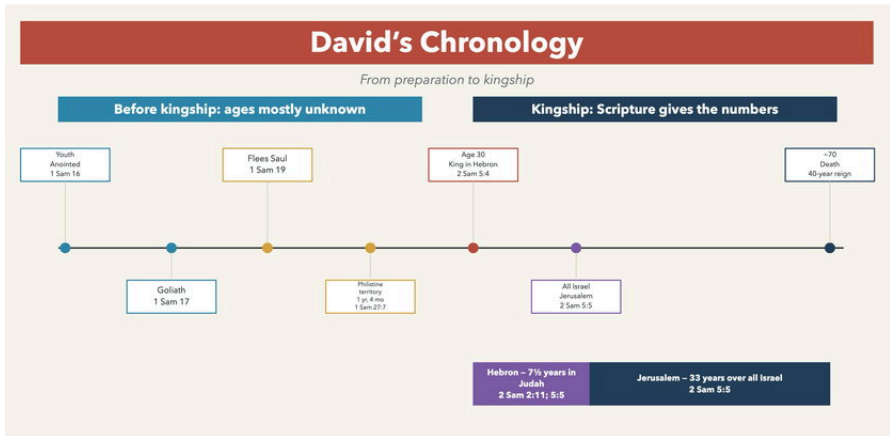
1 Samuel Chronological Charts

[Download](#) the full-size PDF of the 1 Samuel Chronology.



David's Chronology

[Download](#) the full-size PDF of David's Chronology.



Chronology of David Becomes King

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David Becomes King at Thirty

The clearest age anchor in the Samuel chronology

"David was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned forty years."

2 Samuel 5:4

Age 30

David becomes king
2 Sam 5:4

7½ years

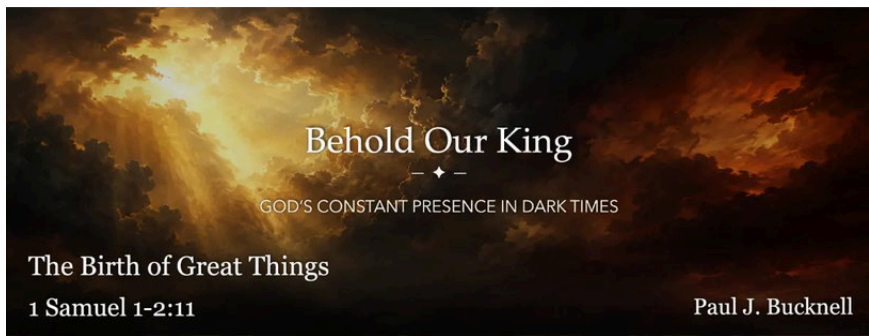
King in Judah at Hebron
2 Sam 2:11; 5:5

33 years

King over all Israel at Jerusalem
2 Sam 5:5

40 years • Total reign

2 Sam 5:4–5



1 Samuel 1:1-2:11

The Birth of Great Things

Introduction to 1 Samuel

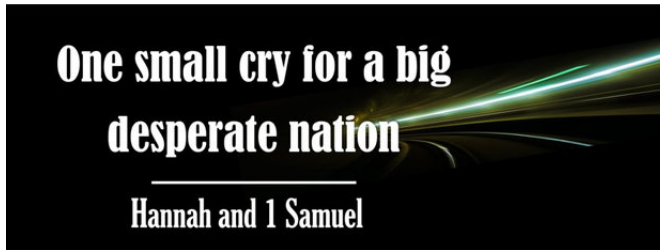
Although Israel did not cry out as in the days of the Judges, God used the sincere prayers that did exist to pour out His extraordinary grace on His people. Why are people not crying out to God for our society and the church, but instead seeking only their own desires? Hannah showed great maturity when she recognized God's higher purposes during her personal crisis and later dedicated Samuel to God.

We would expect the nation to cry out to God when the pain caused by its sin increased, but that cry seems to have been faint or absent—even in a country known for God. Sin, like hidden cancer, had infected the priesthood. In many cases, what we learn about Israel is happening in our own countries. The nation had become morally and financially bankrupt. Ridiculous debates and policies focused on issues that even five-year-olds could have resolved. People had become foolish because they no longer sought God and His revealed truth.

“(For the choir director. A Psalm of David.) The fool has said in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; There is no one who does good” (Ps 14:1).

“For a fool speaks nonsense, And his heart inclines toward wickedness” (Isa 32:6).

1 Samuel demonstrates that God’s patience is boundless. Even when stubborn people resist Him, God does not delight in anyone’s destruction. The books of 1 and 2 Samuel repeatedly emphasize this truth. They are not merely historical records, but a thoughtful portrayal of how God acts in desperate times—when His people have lost their true identity.



This is not merely a one-time event that reveals God’s specific actions during that period, but part of a long-term plan to bring about a profound transformation in God’s people. The new Jewish nation, which began so powerfully with the great Exodus, had fallen into spiritual decline. The impressive miracles experienced during the conquest of the land, along with the establishment of the priesthood, the Levites’ role, and the division of land among the twelve tribes, have mostly lost their impact.

This deadening syndrome also affects us. Even though we have inherited God’s words and works, a tragic forgetfulness—a dullness to God’s purposes—has blinded us. While God started many of the early churches, some are now best described as large museums. To understand the Book of 1 Samuel, or Christianity as

it is viewed around the world, one must recognize that every expression of God's people will be tested by compromise and corruption.

This simple introduction to 1 Samuel is not unlike what we see today with couples who cannot have children, no matter how hard they have tried. Something much more is happening behind the scenes. Look deeper and longer. God is still at work even when His people no longer seek Him. God embeds a ray of hope through the tears of a broken woman.

A Few Questions on 1 Samuel

A few questions come to mind: Why has God taken so long? Why do God's people fall into such moral decline? Is this the best God can do?

God's questions, however, take precedence over ours: Why do God's people seldom cry out? Shouldn't God's people obey the Lord? God's greatness is revealed in His magnificent redemptive plan.

What does it take to get a little pure maple syrup? We often take for granted what we treasure most. I remember my mom having me put taps and buckets on the maple trees around our property to gather sap. We collected several buckets, but after the water was evaporated by steam, we ended up with very little syrup. Experts say it can take about fifty gallons of sap to produce one gallon of syrup.

The point is that God will do a great work through His people, but what if His people do not care about His work? What if they are too involved in their daily affairs? The Lord sometimes has to burn off many distractions through difficult circumstances so that His

people focus on His work and discover that seed of faith to which they can respond. Hannah was one such person.

Israel, despite facing oppression and distress, did not cry out as in Judges. However, God uses even sincere prayers to fulfill His greater purposes. Why are people not crying out to God for spiritual renewal now, but instead only pursuing their own desires? Hannah showed great maturity by recognizing God's broader plans through her stressful situation when she later dedicated Samuel to God.

In 1 Samuel 1:1-2:11, Hannah's anguish sets the stage for a major turning point in Israel's history. She faces infertility, provocation, misunderstanding, and deep suffering, yet she takes her grief to the LORD. Through prayer, faith, a costly vow, and joyful praise, Hannah learns to trust God with what she holds dearest. The birth of Samuel demonstrates that God is present in dark times and uses personal trials to accomplish His larger redemptive plans.

This section explores four scenes in Hannah's story: a tough crisis, a desperate cry, a demanding sacrifice, and a joyful faith. The message urges believers to bring every trouble to the Lord, to trust Him with the unknown, to carefully fulfill vows, and to see how personal faith connects with God's mission over time.

Overview of 1 Samuel 1-2:11

A Dark Scene (1 Sam 1:1-5)

These were dark times, just as they are now. Israel had started well during the Exodus, but ended up distant from God. Greater knowledge did not keep the people from wandering. In fact, those with more knowledge can sometimes stray even faster.

Throughout history, God has acted in His own timing and for His own purposes.

2. A Difficult Crisis (1 Sam 1:6-8)

Hannah faced a personal crisis—common in nature, but always deeply painful for the person experiencing it. She felt rejected and isolated. God seemed distant. Others treated her meanly, and even those who cared for her couldn't fully comfort her.

3. A Desperate Cry (1 Sam 1:9-18)

While others ate, Hannah went to weep and pray at the Lord's house. Only God could truly help her. Hannah made a serious vow, dedicating her son and taking the Nazirite commitment. She regained faith in her identity as God's child and approached Him with that faith. Like sap boiled down into maple syrup, painful circumstances can strip away distractions, focus us, and bring a concentrated faith to the surface. Hannah's prayer ended with renewed peace and faith, even before her circumstances changed.

4. A Demanding Surrender (1 Sam 1:19-28)

Hannah did have a son. The Lord had not forgotten her; He had been working according to His own schedule. The name Samuel is connected with Hannah's testimony that God had heard her prayer. She found peace in her heart, but fulfilling her vow took time. She nursed and weaned Samuel before bringing him to the Lord. She also had to faithfully work this out with her husband, in accordance with the law's requirements.

1 Samuel 1:27-28 A mistake?

From our general perspective, dedicating her holy child to serve under a corrupt priest can seem like the worst decision. It was like sending Daniel into the Babylonian educational system. I doubt Hannah knew the full extent of the corruption in the priesthood, although it would later be revealed.

She could trust God to work even amid the moral decay; things worked out in an incredible way. Her faith went deeper than the circumstances. When we let fears and circumstances hold back our faith, they start to control us. Faith, along with believing prayer—even the prayer of a few special people—becomes crucial.

5. A Delighting Faith (1 Sam 2:1-11)

When did Hannah offer the prayer recorded in chapter 2? Was it at Samuel's birth, at his dedication, or after full surrender? The placement of the prayer connects it to her act of dedication. Hannah recognized that God was doing something greater, and she trusted Him with it. We can trust the sovereign Father even during the worst times.

God fulfills His purposes through our lives. Because of this, none of our lives is pointless. Of course, if we don't believe this, we will miss our life's purpose. If we do believe it, we will prepare ourselves for God's plans. In our small faith, the Almighty can carry out His mighty plans. We need to view our lives in the context of God's bigger redemptive plan to understand and interpret our existence.



1 Samuel 2:12-36

Perspectives on Good Fathering

Why did God call Samuel? Why did God cause Hannah's womb to close? We might be tempted to answer these questions superficially. We might think it was mainly about Samuel's mother's ability to bear children, but that's not the full story—although that is true. If we carefully read the first four chapters of 1 Samuel, we will be surprised to see that Samuel was the means through which God poured out His incredible grace on His people. Why Samuel? Because there was another man named Eli who was not being faithful in what God had appointed him to do on earth. What was supposed to happen wasn't happening, and what wasn't supposed to happen did occur. Man was trading the eternal for the temporary; what lasts forever was being replaced by things that last only a short time.

We must affirm and act on this decision to prioritize the eternal over the temporary. It's important to make such an impact on people that it results in eternal blessings. I want us to feel somewhat dissatisfied with the many good things we do that do not lead people to know Jesus Christ. If all our efforts do not ultimately lead to this crucial change, then our impact is minimal. I'm not saying those efforts are bad, but they are a poor investment. Any number, when compared to an infinite number, almost becomes insignificant.

Given the great need for fathers to catch the vision of their calling, allow me to get a bit more specific and address fathers and potential fathers. Please feel free to apply this message to your life as needed. Sometimes, we just need to be very particular.

A. A Quick Look At Life

I used to live in a place where each time I went to church, I would travel along Cemetery Road, which bypassed a large graveyard. Most of the tombs displayed three simple details as a summary of the person's life. They would first write their name, the name of the person buried under the stone. Then they would note the birth date, that is, when their life began. Lastly, they would record the day they died. Sometimes a fourth line is added, but more often than not, nothing else is said. I wonder if the epitaphs written by our names will be more than just our names and dates—when we were born and when we died.

Some people are famous. Some are not. But it doesn't matter because everyone will have a name, a birthdate, and a death date. They might have died from cancer or later on at a very old age in their sleep. They might have had a big family or not. They might have been world travelers or never left their community. Indeed, it is very difficult to measure the impact of one life on another. Today, we are going to start exploring this field. However, we must stay focused, or we might say nothing.

Let's start by taking a quick look at two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli. What challenges me the most when I think about them is that their names appear in the Bible only in three different passages, a total of five times. I guess that if we looked at their tombstones, we might never suspect anything was wrong with their lives. 1 Samuel 1:3 talks about their beginning:

“Now this man would go up from his city yearly to worship and to sacrifice to the LORD of hosts in Shiloh. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests to the LORD there.” Verse 2:34 mentions their death: “And this will be the sign to you which shall come concerning your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas: on the same day both of them shall die.” Chapter 4 continues, describing the day they died.

When we casually look at a person’s life, we focus on the most significant things about them. Interestingly, the most mentioned thing about these two sons was the day they died. Of course, this is a superficial view of their lives. They did many things; they said many more things. You can’t blame someone for living or dying, can you? But I still ask today’s question: “Did they impact anyone enough to gain value in the life to come?” They were priests. We would expect a yes answer to this question. But something seemed off. There was no fourth line on their epitaph. Still, we need to start asking another question. We know they lived on earth—they had a beginning and an end. But were they changed enough to live forever?

Let’s read the passage in full.

The Passage (1 Samuel 2:12-36)

12 Now the sons of Eli were worthless men; they did not know the Lord 13 and the custom of the priests with the people. When any man was offering a sacrifice, the priest’s servant would come while the meat was boiling, with a three-pronged fork in his hand. 14 Then he would thrust it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; all that the fork brought up the priest would take for himself. Thus they did in Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there. 15 Also, before they burned the fat, the priest’s servant would come and say to the man who was sacrificing, “Give the priest meat for

roasting, as he will not take boiled meat from you, only raw." 16 If the man said to him, "They must surely burn the fat first, and then take as much as you desire," then he would say, "No, but you shall give it to me now; and if not, I will take it by force." 17 Thus the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord, for the men despised the offering of the Lord.

18 Now Samuel was ministering before the Lord, as a boy wearing a linen ephod. 19 And his mother would make him a little robe and bring it to him from year to year when she would come up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. 20 Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife and say, "May the Lord give you children from this woman in place of the one she dedicated to the Lord." And they went to their own home. 21 The Lord visited Hannah; and she conceived and gave birth to three sons and two daughters. And the boy Samuel grew before the Lord.

22 Now Eli was very old; and he heard all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who served at the doorway of the tent of meeting. 23 He said to them, "Why do you do such things, the evil things that I hear from all these people? 24 No, my sons; for the report is not good which I hear the Lord's people circulating. 25 If one man sins against another, God will mediate for him; but if a man sins against the Lord, who can intercede for him?" But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for the Lord desired to put them to death.

26 Now the boy Samuel was growing in stature and in favor both with the Lord and with men. 27 Then a man of God came to Eli and said to him, "Thus says the Lord, 'Did I not indeed reveal Myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt in bondage to Pharaoh's house? 28 Did I not choose them from all the tribes of Israel to be My priests, to go up to My altar, to burn incense, to carry an ephod before Me; and did I not give to the house of your father all the fire offerings of the sons of Israel? 29 Why do you kick at My sacrifice and at My offering which I have commanded in My

dwelling, and honor your sons above Me, by making yourselves fat with the choicest of every offering of My people Israel?’ 30 Therefore the Lord God of Israel declares, ‘I did indeed say that your house and the house of your father should walk before Me forever’; but now the Lord declares, ‘Far be it from Me—for those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me will be lightly esteemed. 31 Behold, the days are coming when I will break your strength and the strength of your father’s house so that there will not be an old man in your house. 32 You will see the distress of My dwelling, in spite of all the good that I do for Israel; and an old man will not be in your house forever. 33 Yet I will not cut off every man of yours from My altar so that your eyes will fail from weeping and your soul grieve, and all the increase of your house will die in the prime of life. 34 This will be the sign to you which will come concerning your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas: on the same day both of them will die. 35 But I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest who will do according to what is in My heart and in My soul; and I will build him an enduring house, and he will walk before My anointed always. 36 Everyone who is left in your house will come and bow down to him for a piece of silver or a loaf of bread and say, “Please assign me to one of the priest’s offices so that I may eat a piece of bread.” (1 Samuel 2:12-36, NASB unless noted)

B. A Closer Look At Life

We need a closer look at their lives to understand this question. Some might think a funeral service is a good way to get a clear summary of a person. However, during funeral services, you usually only hear the good stuff. If you don’t hear much, it shows there’s a lot that’s wrong. The Bible isn’t concerned with what people think. Instead, it cares about truth because it also reminds us that on the last day, everything will be exposed – not for how it was presented, but for what it truly was. All the intentions of the heart will be revealed on that day.

We can learn more about Eli's two sons, but not by their names—rather through references to their father Eli. The first mention of them should give us reason for great hope. Two sons of a well-known priest were naturally priests themselves, as the priesthood was passed down through family lines. However, 2:12 destroys any hope we might have held for them or for Israel. It states, "Now the sons of Eli were worthless men; they did not know the LORD." The passage continues to explain how they stole sacrificial meat from God and ate what they should not have. While it might not seem like a serious offense, verse 17 states otherwise: "the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD." This shows that when one fleshly sin isn't addressed, others—similar or different—tend to grow. Verse 22 then mentions how Eli's sons were engaging in fornication. 1 John 2:15-17 provides an appropriate commentary for them.

"Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever." (1 John 2:15-17)

We might feel sorry for these two young men who made wrong decisions in life and for their country during such a critical time. However, the Bible didn't show such blind sympathy. Verse 2:12 states that they were 'worthless men' or literally "sons of Belial." Would any father write "worthless man" on a tomb? But when we consider the value of these men, we find it to be nothing at all. Worse still, they distracted people from gaining spiritual faith and hope. They lived against the holy principles of God through their perverted ways, ignoring self-control in areas like appetite or

sexual drive. These sons had no positive influence on others or on themselves. “They did not know the LORD.” What a frightening summary of a priest’s life, or anyone’s life. But we need to take a closer look at this scene to truly understand what the Scriptures are really trying to tell us.

C. A Detailed Look at Life

We are called not just to observe the sons’ behavior but also to examine the father’s role. When thinking about the great impact one person can have on another, it is often in the relationship between a father and his son. If a father, through intimacy and opportunity, lives well, he can influence his child’s life so that his child receives eternal rewards. Conversely, we must also consider the negative impact on the child if the father is unfaithful. Therefore, we are compelled to ask, “Were Eli’s sons individually reckless, or did their father fail to set a good example?”

In truth, the Bible emphasizes that a father is responsible for shaping his child’s life. This is not optional; we cannot choose whether to do it. We are responsible for it. It is often said, especially among men, that women do a better job raising children. But that is a misconception. In Deuteronomy 6, we see that the father, not the mother, bears the primary responsibility to live out their lives before their children.

“5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. 9 You shall write

them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."
(Deuteronomy 6:5-9)

We might excuse Eli for not knowing what his sons had been up to earlier in his life when we read verse 2:22, but don't be deceived; he knew. We also might excuse Eli for doing what he could in such a difficult situation; after all, he did rebuke them. He said, "No, my sons; for the report is not good..." But after all of our false excuses, God will break in with the truth. God got everything out in the open in verse 2:29.

"Why do you kick at My sacrifice and at My offering which I have commanded in My dwelling, and honor your sons above Me, by making yourselves fat with the choicest of every offering of My people Israel?" (1 Samuel 2:29).

Eli placed his sons before God. Essentially, he did this by accepting the finest portions of meat from those sacrifices, which his sons brought to him. At first, it's probable that he didn't realize what his sons were doing. He likely only noticed that the meat tasted better. When he discovered the truth, he was tempted by his desire to enjoy this favored food. So he chose to ignore their sin and his participation in it. His tolerance became permission.

Over the years, he likely made excuses for them: "They were young," "They didn't know better," "It didn't hurt anyone," "I will pray for them," "Isn't it cute?" "Aren't they clever?" All of these words seem empty when viewed from God's perspective. Eli was not a good man with good sons because he refused to discipline his children and failed to live a sin-free life. Because he didn't stand for godliness both in himself and in his sons, he offered little hope for the next generation. Churches often become breeding grounds for hypocrites—they know the truth and claim to follow it, yet they behave otherwise.

We might wonder why the book of Samuel begins this way. Samuel was willing to live by principle, even when the older priests disobeyed God's charge. More importantly, God was preparing someone else to do what Eli and his sons failed to do. We often pride ourselves on our plans to be good fathers, but we forget the core principle: "... Those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me will be lightly esteemed." When we spend our lives calculating material provisions for our children, sacrificing spiritual instruction and open love for God, we are caring for them only in this life. We tend their bodies but neglect their souls, handing them over to the devil. Could it be that we are familiar with God's truth like these priests, but do not obey it? Are we so caught up in our lives on earth that we think if our children go to college and get a good education, everything will be okay? What a faulty concept!

Fathers, we often excuse ourselves too quickly. We believe we do much better than we actually do. We are content when no major problems arise. If serious issues do occur, we try to pacify them without truly resolving the underlying problems. Let's focus specifically on some lessons about how an ungodly mindset can affect others in the future.

- Tolerating any sin is the same as approving it.
- Age, relationship, or sex do not justify anyone's sin.
- The sons were guilty, and their guilt was not forgiven, despite their father setting a bad example.
- The father was guilty of failing to train his children in righteousness.

- We are more likely to overlook sins that relate to our personal weaknesses, like Eli's love for food. Because he benefits from food, he compromised his discipline.
- We often mistakenly believe that this world and its pleasures are the most important because they are more immediate. We focus more on these things than on eternal matters.

Fathers must:

- We must love the truth enough to cheerfully model it.
- We must love our children enough to not let them do wrong.
- We must participate in the loving ministry of God's people.
- We must go beyond materially taking care of our children and develop a relationship with them.
- We must spiritually train them.
- We must discipline them so as to train them to do well.

God is interested in shaping people for the life to come. We see this so clearly in 1 Samuel, chapters 1-2. Will you join Him in His mission? If our children are not properly raised, they will be poor leaders not only at home but also in the church and society. This is exactly what we see today—men and women living contrary to principles taught by word and example. We have people who live for self-reputation rather than the Lord's reputation. We are surrounded by a tired and frustrated generation of young people who are fed up with hypocritical parents. Why depend on emergency room solutions: sending them to Christian camp, youth groups, piano lessons, advanced studies, and other activities? I must ask if you have fulfilled your primary responsibility as a parent, especially as a father. Do you dare

question why you face pressures at home when it is you who, for various reasons, have not properly embraced your Christian duty as a father?

Is it possible that all we will leave behind on this earth is just a few scratches on a tombstone? Let us renew our understanding of what is truly important in life. Let us reaffirm our commitment to live godly lives and raise our children to be godly. For life is meaningless without eternal life in Christ. Matthew 16:26 says, "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, but loses his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"



1 Samuel 4:1-22

Scenes from the Cosmic War

The tragedy of 1 Samuel 4 exposes one of the most dangerous mistakes among God's people: trusting religious symbols while ignoring God Himself.

Religion, including Christianity, often falls short because it lacks the Spirit, the Word of God, and the obedience owed by God's people. Still, do not be discouraged, for even in the darkest times, repentance brings us directly into God's glorious presence where we can renew our devotion to Him. God, in His great grace, is bringing about the destruction of what is old and condemned to prepare the way for what is new and life-giving.

What's remarkable is that a way back to God is always accessible. We can, if we choose, always repent. Consider the messages to the seven churches in Revelation. The Lord repeatedly urged His church members to repent. We may wonder whether they were truly Christians in their hearts, yet, as a church, they were given the chance to avoid the promised estrangement from the Holy Spirit and His protection. This illustrates the power behind 2 Chronicles 7:14, "If my people...". There are conditions to the

privilege of being close to God. They can take the first step. This powerful lesson is evident here in 1 Samuel 4, even with Israel's defeat and the final decline of the old priesthood.

Now, this chapter might seem distant and unrelated, but it is anything but. Religious decline always follows the same pattern, starting with the clergy—those who profess to know God the most—and spreading outward to the people of God. That is why the focus here is on the priests. They are responsible for guarding the Word of God and maintaining the understanding of God (Hos 4:6). There are many chances, marked by our first and second chances here, but remember, there is one last chance between life and death, heaven and hell. That is the third chance.

1. First Chance: God is ignored (1 Sam 4:1-2)

4:1 Thus the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out to meet the Philistines in battle and camped beside Ebenezer while the Philistines camped in Aphek. 2 And the Philistines drew up in battle array to meet Israel. When the battle spread, Israel was defeated before the Philistines who killed about four thousand men on the battlefield.

What God foretold eventually came true for Samuel. We had hoped that telling Eli, the priest, would make a difference, but he didn't seem to budge in his heart. This was the first chance. God told Samuel what would happen.

God repeatedly spoke to Eli. As a boy, Samuel divulged the warning to Eli. Later, a man of God warned Eli (2:27-36), and Samuel, as God's prophet, warned Eli (3:11-18).

God spoke again "to all Israel." By then, everyone knew Samuel was a prophet (3:20). Note the summary points of his message.

- Ignoring God always results in judgment.
- The first chance of ignoring God brings defeat.
- Wisdom comes from the fear of God and obedience.
- Foolishness is typified by a disobedience of God's Word.

Wisdom comes from fearing God, but a lack of wisdom is shown through disobedience. Foolishness is demonstrated by ignoring God's Word. Sin always returns and pulls everyone into a pit. Study Proverbs. What God told Samuel finally came true. Hannah's cry did not save Israel, although it could have if the false priests had repented. This was their first chance to oppose evil and trust in God.

<i>The Opportunity</i>	<i>The Resistance</i>	<i>The Judgment</i>
<i>"Thus the word of Samuel came to all Israel" (4:1).</i>	<i>Disobedience and unrepentance</i>	<i>"Israel was defeated" (4:2).</i>

Escapism

Escapism is the belief that, despite ignoring God's commands, things won't get so bad. It's an illusion—one that's especially dangerous. Fear of God offers wisdom, but if those warnings are ignored, only one outcome remains. Let me ask you a few questions:

- 1) Dare you bring the curse of fornication and adultery on others, your life, and your marriage?
- 2) When you come to church half-heartedly, do you think this false worship will stop you from making foolish life mistakes?
- 3) Do you believe lies will actually help you succeed, even though the Lord warned that you will fall into trouble?

And so the list goes on. The Israelites heard God's Word—"The word of Samuel came to all Israel"—but they didn't respond. Surely, this wave of deception is the same that will come upon the ends of the ages: "deception of wickedness" (2 Thes 2:10).

FEVER OF ESCAPISM

2. Second Chance: God is Misunderstood (1 Samuel 4:3-11)

3 When the people came into the camp, the elders of Israel said, "Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines? Let us take to ourselves from Shiloh the ark of the covenant of the LORD, that it may come among us and deliver us from the power of our enemies." 4 So the people sent to Shiloh, and from there they carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts who sits above the cherubim; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.

5 And it happened as the ark of the covenant of the LORD came into the camp, that all Israel shouted with a great shout, so that the earth resounded. 6 And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, "What does the noise of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews mean?" Then they understood that the ark of the LORD had come into the camp. 7 And the Philistines were afraid, for they said, "God has come into the camp." And they said, "Woe to us! For nothing like this has happened before. 8 "Woe to us! Who shall deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? These are the gods who smote the Egyptians with all kinds of plagues in the wilderness. 9 "Take courage and be men, O Philistines, lest you become slaves to the Hebrews, as they have been slaves to you; therefore, be men and fight." 10 So the

Philistines fought and Israel was defeated, and every man fled to his tent, and the slaughter was very great; for there fell of Israel thirty thousand foot soldiers. 11 And the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died.

12 Now a man of Benjamin ran from the battle line and came to Shiloh the same day with his clothes torn and dust on his head. 13 When he came, behold, Eli was sitting on his seat by the road eagerly watching, because his heart was trembling for the ark of God. So the man came to tell it in the city, and all the city cried out. 14 When Eli heard the noise of the outcry, he said, "What does the noise of this commotion mean?" Then the man came hurriedly and told Eli. 15 Now Eli was ninety-eight years old, and his eyes were set so that he could not see. (1 Samuel 4:3-11)

When defeat doesn't wake us up

Valiant attempts to do great things for God without relying on Him are foolishness. But this self-dependence is exactly what we see here.

- We look to our other resources.
- We "use" God as a lucky charm (ark).
- Our mistakes and good choices are often, if not always, influenced by our theological perspectives.

And so, what happens next is the exchange of what seem to be brilliant suggestions from God's people. They are worried but still move forward. They believe bravery matters, even if it looks like trusting in God. God told them they would be defeated. But what was their bright idea? Take the ark of God with them into battle. Now, this seemed to work, rallying the Israelites' confidence (as seen in their roar of victory). Their confidence even caused the enemies to lose theirs. But doesn't it seem that God was on the enemy's side, or at least, He was not with them? The enemy

regrouped and decided they had better fight for their lives. They did, and God granted them victory. The ark of God was captured, and the Israelites were defeated. Thirty thousand foot soldiers died. How significant this was!

The Lord will allow the core doctrines of grace and signs of His glory to temporarily fall into disrepute so that His people remain faithful in judgment. God didn't completely wipe out the Israelites; instead, in His faithfulness, He later sent Samuel to prevent their total destruction. If we are stubborn, the Lord remains faithful and will work despite us. Never get in God's way. Never be one of those unfaithful ones that God has called, yet you delay, put off, or ignore. Don't think your delay, even with all sorts of great excuses, will spare you from the harm that comes your way because of your ignorance.

Changing society's fundamentals

Our generation is chasing futility. To outsiders, we seem blind and foolish. We see this in the new trends affecting vital God-ordained institutions: marriage, sexual identity, and family. Can people redefine these core truths without facing harm? No. Yet, despite the pain shown by increased drug use, escapism, worship of false gods, and ignoring the statistics, they keep going in their foolishness.

3. Last Chance: God is lost (1 Samuel 4:12-22)

16 And the man said to Eli, "I am the one who came from the battle line. Indeed, I escaped from the battle line today." And he said, "How did things go, my son?" 17 Then the one who brought the news answered and said, "Israel has fled before the Philistines and

there has also been a great slaughter among the people, and your two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God has been taken.” 18 And it came about when he mentioned the ark of God that Eli fell off the seat backward beside the gate, and his neck was broken and he died, for he was old and heavy. Thus he judged Israel forty years.

19 Now his daughter-in-law, Phinehas’ wife, was pregnant and about to give birth; and when she heard the news that the ark of God was taken and that her father-in-law and her husband had died, she kneeled down and gave birth, for her pains came upon her. 20 And about the time of her death the women who stood by her said to her, “Do not be afraid, for you have given birth to a son.” But she did not answer or pay attention. 21 And she called the boy Ichabod, saying, “The glory has departed from Israel,” because the ark of God was taken and because of her father-in-law and her husband. 22 And she said, “The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God was taken.” (1 Samuel 4:12-22)

The last chance is here

Starting in verse 16, we see that the final judgment falls on the religious Jews. They claimed to have faith right up to the last day, but as earlier chapters show, they continued sinning until the very end. The father, Eli, refused to rebuke his sons strongly, and they kept sinning, defiling God’s people. From their perspective, “God’s glory has departed”—Ichabod. They never truly understood the right way, and instead of humbling himself, Eli was shocked and died.

- The last chance foretells God’s limited patience.
- God leaves an open door, until it’s closed
- Judgment closes all the doors.

Delusion, confusion, and despair are results of abandoning God. They could have repented and found clarity, but they chose not to. Unconfessed sin clouds priorities and continues until judgment if left unconfessed. Eli's sons were responsible for managing the ark of God. They were killed. When Eli heard of the defeat, the loss of his sons, and especially the capture of the ark of God, he fell over dead. Eli served as a judge for 40 years. He was a leading priest who was supposed to guide God's people to know Him, but he tolerated evil. When Christian leaders walk in darkness, the people's waywardness increases, and they become dismayed.

Now is a good time to reflect on some pastors, missionaries, or elders we've been disappointed in. You may have become bitter and dismayed, giving up on God. You might quietly think that God doesn't really care. But you are mistaken. Judgment will come to God's people—including every leader—just as it did to Eli.

The Closed Door and Opening of Another

- Eli, his family, the priesthood, and the people were decimated.
- But God intervened and planted Samuel there.
- Societies will crumble as they abandon the truth, but God's truth still advances rapidly across the globe.

Honestly, I don't understand why God delays, but He is the Judge. Never let your feelings of being 'better than God' lead to doubts about His righteousness. Judgment did come, and it will come to us if we don't repent. But God was doing more than just judging Eli and his sons here.

The Book of 1 Samuel, although it doesn't give us a complete picture, shows how God can work within the system. Through

Hannah's infertility, He raised Samuel in the priesthood to become the new Judge. (We see a similar pattern with King Saul, who failed to obey God.) Eli let down both God and His people. There will be times when we can't trust our current system. But don't turn away from God. Instead, focus on what God is doing new. For example, think about what it meant for Samuel to keep serving Eli for many years. It must have been very tempting to follow Eli and his sons' example or to become bitter. But again, Samuel overcame Satan's accusations and pride. Sadly, his sons did not. This remains another tough challenge.

But let us return to the judgment, and when it seemed that the glory of God had left Israel, every remaining hope appeared to have vanished, but it hadn't. God had His tested and proven judge, Samuel, the priest and prophet. (We will later read about this.) Samuel would serve as a reminder that those who trust in God will succeed. So let me describe what is happening to those who are being judged in our society.

Now, many churches have lost God's glory, even as they claim to preach His love. Still, they accept divorce, illegitimacy, infidelity, and various sexual deviations. They are deceived into thinking that this tolerance is the highest form of love. Like in Eli's last days, it's hard to believe a church would support such things. Yet, judgment has begun, although it's not finished. Wealth and buildings accompany these false prophets, seeming to uphold this foolishness, but everything will be swept away.

It's sad when death guides us to life, and repentance leads to salvation. There is no room for self-pride. Power is not in religious objects, charms, or rites but in obedience. The cross, where we die to ourselves, reminds us that we cannot do it alone; this is our

only hope of serving God. Our hope in a dark age comes from God's greater plans, sometimes, which we cannot see.

Let me summarize this third chance with a few statements.

The Lost World

- Disobedience of God's clear Word always brings eventual destruction.
- Be careful of worldly perversions of religious symbols.
- Repentance is accessible at any time, until the last chance.
- If repentance is neglected, delusion worsens.

New Beginning

- Hope comes with obedience to God's Word!
- Hope rests in God, not symbols of hope and religion.
- Hope exists because of God's greater redemptive plan.

Conclusion

Though chapter 4 ends on a despairing note, it also marks the collapse of a corrupt order. All corruption will ultimately fail. We must recognize God's judgment and avoid sharing in such a downfall. Although we cannot escape our culture, we can seek a faithful church that loves God's Word, pursues holiness, trains God's people, and carries the gospel outward.

Study Questions

1. Why did Israel lose the battle, and why was the ark captured?
2. What mistake did Israel make by treating the ark as a guarantee of God's help?
4. What does the name Ichabod teach about God's glory and persistent disobedience?

5. How does repentance reopen the way to hope after spiritual decline?
6. Where might believers or churches rely on symbols, programs, or reputation instead of obedient faith?

1 Samuel 5-6

The Ongoing Contest With God

1 Samuel 4 shows the Philistines celebrating what appeared to be a decisive victory over Israel. The cost was staggering: about four thousand Israelites died in the first battle and thirty thousand in the second. The priesthood collapsed, and the ark of the covenant—the sacred sign of God’s presence among His people—was captured. Defeat seemed to announce that there was no future and no hope, only surrender. Eli’s grandson, born on the day of the disaster, was named Ichabod: “The glory has departed.” Yet God’s kingdom runs deeper than visible events.

1 Samuel 5-6 presents a three-part challenge to the idea that the battle is over. Although the Israelites now stood beside the Philistines, many of their loved ones had been brutally killed, others taken captive, women mistreated, and the God of the Israelites was taken by Dagon, the god of the Philistines. The fight was far from over. The Philistines, who lacked God’s Word, couldn’t easily understand God’s ways, but they would soon learn that what they perceived as victory was not true victory, as deeper things were unfolding beneath the surface.

This traumatic situation can make God’s people question how powerful or caring He truly is. Some assume that God always shields and prospers His followers and would never allow His name to be dishonored. Yet believers can be shaken by political turmoil, death, sickness, job loss, marital trouble, and many other

events. A strong theological foundation steadies the mind because it addresses the whole of life. We should pray and cry out to God (1 Sam 7:2, 8), but we need not surrender our souls to fear.

This traumatic situation that befell God's people can cause people to question how powerful or caring God truly is. They assume God is great and always defends and prospers His followers. He would never let His Name be dishonored, right? I have met believers who are shaken in their faith. Some are questioning elections, but others are deeply troubled by life events: death, sickness, job loss, spouse issues, and more. A strong theological foundation protects the believer's mind during these times by addressing all of life's situations. Some people reduce the gospel only to spiritual salvation, unaware that God has influence over everything, both visible and invisible. We shouldn't be troubled in our souls by life's events. Pray? Yes. Cry out to God? Yes (1 Sam 7:2,8). But not troubled.



A biblical mindset is needed to answer life's difficult issues and instill a strong faith in us.

Perhaps this discussion is moving too quickly for you. You may still be wondering why we claim there is no contest, no battle, no victory when, in fact, there was. A good understanding of 1 Samuel 5 and 6 will give us a solid foundation to answer these troubling questions by first establishing the necessary theological framework—that is, a way to understand life events.

We'll see these two chapters as lessons for both the Philistines and God's people. The Philistines are learning that God is real through the events He brings into their lives. For God's people, we learn from God's Word—what He records here. Our Lord wants to show us that even when things seem to go badly, God has not forsaken His people. That's why He first placed Samuel in the priesthood, to serve as a prophet and judge.

1) Learning From Strangeness (1 Sam 5:1-5)

5:1 Now the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. 2 Then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it to the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon. 3 When the Ashdodites arose early the next morning, behold, **Dagon had fallen on his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD.** So they took Dagon and set him in his place again. 4 But when they arose early the next morning, behold, **Dagon had fallen on his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD. And the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off on the threshold; only the trunk of Dagon was left to him.** 5 Therefore neither the priests of Dagon nor all who enter Dagon's house tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day. (1 Samuel 5:1-5)

Suddenly, in the very next verse after their victory (5:1), we see that the Ark of God was taken to Ashdod. The Philistines, treating it like a trophy, placed the Ark of God beside Dagon, their patron god. However, the next morning, the fish-like god Dagon was found bowing with its face in the dirt before the Ark of the Covenant. As seen in verse 3, "Dagon had fallen on his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD." They lifted Dagon up and set him back in his place, but the same thing happened again. This time, when Dagon's idol fell, its head and palms were cut off from

the trunk, forming the idol's broken parts. All of this occurred right in front of the newly moved Ark of the Covenant, which was placed next to Dagon, causing him to bow in the dust before the Living God.

Two Conclusions

There are two conclusions from this, one explicit and one implied. First, the powerful insight in verse 5 helps us realize that although Dagon completely lost the fight, the Philistines did not abandon their idol. They had invested too much in their religion to toss it aside. They could remake the idol from another piece of wood without much difficulty. That would be easier than rejecting its power! So, even though Dagon had clearly lost the battle, the Philistines continued their worship, but they would simply avoid stepping on the spot where Dagon's head and hands had been cut off.

Application

- The God of Israel, though represented by no idol, is real.
- The Lord actively involves Himself in the affairs of this world, including theirs.
- This God has righteous expectations, and resisting Him brings consequences.

Another example of humans blindly searching is through their specific beliefs. Why are more and more people in the West believing in reincarnation? How do they know they are right about their future? In reality, they do not know. This is very different from Jesus, who came from heaven, spoke truth, and showed us the way of life, death, and resurrection, where people will be judged—either to hell or eternal life. Reincarnation is a

system of judgment, but most believers in reincarnation do not believe in a personal God who judges. So, who cares about human choices? What would make someone come back as an animal or plant? Without a personal, all-powerful God to judge and compare each person's actions against a moral standard, this doctrine of reincarnation becomes irrational.

“And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment” (Heb 9:27).

The second conclusion, though unspoken, was likely included to help God's people see that God is always great—even when it may seem like He is not. Although victory was claimed over God's people and the enemy celebrated conquering the God of the Israelites, things were not so simple. They could celebrate, but they had not truly won. They could no longer believe that Dagon, their idol god, was greater than the God of the Ark. Although they appeared to win, they were still the real losers.

Amazing Answers in God's Word

We have the truth of God's Word, which sheds amazing light on our understanding of the world, God, and even specific events—why they happen the way they do. Are powerful spirits operating in this world? Do they control us, or do we control them? Are gods like good luck charms, or do they have a greater purpose and a desire to be honored and served? What do these gods expect from us, if anything? What happens if we don't do what they want? Is one god more powerful than another? How do they relate to each other, or is there only one true God?

The truth of God's Word provides clear answers to these questions. It helps us understand why people seek many gods and goddesses, follow Eastern religions, or fear an impersonal

fate. They are searching for answers and trying not to offend unseen powers. The true God tells us what is real and what concerns us. The passage raises questions such as these:

- Are powerful spirits at work in this world?
- Are they in charge of us, or do we have control over them?
- Are gods like good luck charms, or do they serve a higher purpose and desire to be honored and worshipped? What do these gods expect from us, if anything?
- What happens if we don't do what they want?
- Is one god more powerful than another?
- How do they relate to each other, or is there only one true God?

Without God's Word, people are left guessing about religions and values. This is why one asks how many gods are in India, and one hears, "There are perhaps as many gods as people." There are no definitive answers. These questions are important and have clear answers that negate the need for gods and metaphysical philosophies. Any believer should know the answers to these questions because God's Word plainly teaches them. I will not spend time here answering these questions; instead, I will raise other, more relevant questions. Through God's Word, we can find these answers.

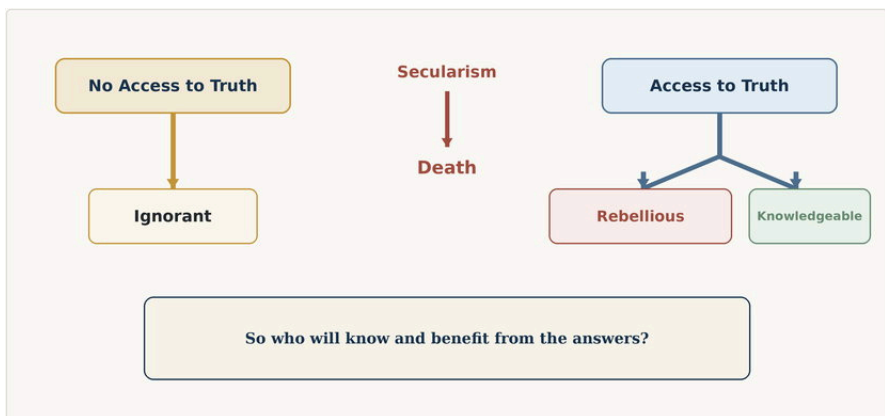
- Why did Dagon fall over?
- How can we be sure any of these gods actually have power or relevance?
- Were the gods competing in a contest of strength?
- Who are these gods, and what are their expectations of us?
- Why didn't the Ark of the Covenant fall over?

A Yet Larger Question

A bigger question emerges as we see Dagon bowing prostrate before Yahweh, the God of the Israelites. This passage challenges

our simple, defensive, or naturalistic answers to real-life problems and highlights the Israelites' defeat. How do you explain the Israelites' defeat in chapter 4? Except perhaps Samuel, they didn't truly understand what was happening. They could have known (4:1), but like the Philistines, they chose to ignore the facts. The Israelites, of course, believed in God, the one true God, but their belief was superficial and self-serving, blinding them to God's greater purpose. This was evident in how their culture had become deeply immoral within the priesthood. Why is it that today many pastors also seem to doubt the Word of God, focusing more on satisfying their own desires? Similarly, God's people have drifted away from Him, and cultural Christian values are being discarded as inconvenient.

This is why we encourage every Christian to be passionate about understanding and knowing God's Word. You cannot truly love God without His Word, for it reflects His very thoughts. It's like saying you love that girl but care little about what is on her mind or what she struggles with. These images of the fallen Dagon are powerful, but even greater truths are revealed in the following passages.



Our real problem as believers is that, even though we have access to the truth, we don't see its benefit to us. This reveals the deep-rooted nature of our rebellious hearts. Maybe we are like the Philistines, but worse, because even though we have God's Word's answers, we neglect to apply them to our lives.

GOD'S WORD PROVIDES ANSWERS FOR US, BUT WHY IS NO ONE SERIOUSLY LISTENING TO GOD?

Application

Are you facing problems? Do you know why? We often blame external factors, but are we honest enough to listen to what God says about our situation? Maybe it's our laziness, lustful thoughts, covetous hearts, or something similar. Our biggest issue, however, is having God's Word with the answers but not truly believing that God is wise and cares for us.

2) Learning From Desperation (1 Sam 5:6-12)

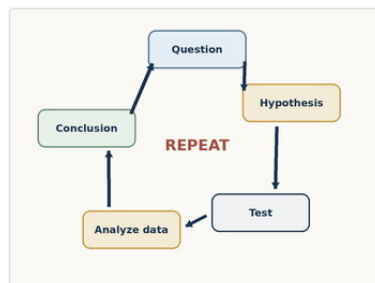
6 Now the hand of the LORD was heavy on the Ashdodites, and He ravaged them and smote them with tumors, both Ashdod and its territories. 7 When the men of Ashdod saw that it was so, they said, "The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us, for His hand is severe on us and on Dagon our god." 8 So they sent and gathered all the lords of the Philistines to them and said, "What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel?" And they said, "Let the ark of the God of Israel be brought around to Gath." And they brought the ark of the God of Israel around. 9 And it came about that after they had brought it around, the hand of the LORD was against the city with very great confusion; and He smote the men of the city, both young and old, so that tumors broke out on them. 10 So they sent the ark of God to Ekron. And it happened as the ark of God came to Ekron that the Ekronites cried out, saying,

“They have brought the ark of the God of Israel around to us, to kill us and our people.” 11 They sent therefore and gathered all the lords of the Philistines and said, “Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it return to its own place, that it may not kill us and our people.” For there was a deadly confusion throughout the city; the hand of God was very heavy there. 12 And the men who did not die were smitten with tumors and the cry of the city went up to heaven.

Lesson #1: Repeated Twice (1 Sam 5:1-5)

While in the first five verses we saw the contest between gods was over, Dagon ends up bowing before the Ark of the Covenant (which had no form or idol). If anyone has any questions about whether God is powerful enough to defend Himself, they find the answer there. It’s not just a single event, but the twice-repeated events that increase their growing fear of the Israelite God. In this, they are, at once, admitting:

- The God of Israel, even if there is no idol, is real.
- This Lord actively involves Himself in the affairs of this world, including its own.
- This God has expectations that are not being met, which is causing them harm.



Lesson #2: Repeated Three Times (1 Sam 5:6-12)

God clearly uses repetition to help the Philistines (and us) draw the right conclusions. It closely mirrors the scientific method of learning facts. What was the one common factor in all three of these 'experimental situations'? Clearly, it was the presence of the Ark of the Covenant. From the city of Ashdod to Gath, and then to Ekron, the Ark of the Covenant was sent. By the end, they had identified God's special presence as the only significant factor in each case. Each time the Ark of the Covenant was taken to a certain city, all kinds of terrible trouble broke out.

Ashdod: 6 Now the hand of the LORD was heavy on the Ashdodites, and He ravaged them and smote them with tumors, both Ashdod and its territories. 7 When the men of Ashdod saw that it was so, they said, "The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us, for His hand is severe on us and on Dagon our god."

Gath: And it came about that after they had brought it around, the hand of the LORD was against the city with very great confusion; and He smote the men of the city, both young and old, so that tumors broke out on them.

Ekron: "They have brought the ark of the God of Israel around to us, to kill us and our people." 11 They sent therefore and gathered all the lords of the Philistines and said, "Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it return to its own place, that it may not kill us and our people." For there was a deadly confusion throughout the city; the hand of God was very heavy there.



The Philistines are similar to everyone else; they do not know God and only understand Him as blind men groping. When things become unpleasant, they stop. This is clear when they are alarmed by disease, panic, or death, rightly suspecting God's involvement. However, we are often slow to learn. Despite all our knowledge today, we should adopt God's better ways and live better lives. Even many Christians lack reverence for God; they disbelieve His words and cheat, lust, lie, covet by living beyond their means, use drugs, steal, become jealous, pursue selfish money schemes, dishonor parents, and more. The main point here is to understand why God sometimes treats His people harshly. There is a big difference between being a child of God and of the world. However, sometimes that difference is less visible from the outside because both despise God's truth. We see the threat of judgment against the churches in Revelation 2-3. God created us for moral purity, both in heart, mind, and body. If single, we are to reserve intimacy for a future spouse, if indeed God wants you to marry. God says we are to control our sexual desires, trusting His plan is best.

Now, let us return to the statistics, research, and supposed knowledge of science. What does it teach us? It shows that sexual lust drives people to do things they shouldn't, by abusing others and themselves. It also teaches that if one engages in intimacy

with anyone other than one's spouse or intended spouse, one risks picking up one of these horrible diseases, some of which are deadly. Should God protect the Christian involved in such heinous activities? Protect is not the right word. God has protected us by providing counsel. He tells us what is best through His Word—quite contrary to those who think God's truth holds us back from the best. God protects us by giving us His Word. How foolish to blame God when we revile Him by turning away from His counsel and implying that He hasn't taken care of us! Do you see how both the world and the lukewarm church share in God's judgments? If someone continues to live in rebellion, then he or she should assume, no matter what you claim to believe, that you are to be judged with the world and are not truly His. This brings us to the next point.

God's judgment for His people differs greatly from that of the world, although there are similarities at certain points, as seen above.

"For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?" (1 Peter 4:17)

In other words, God has promised to judge His people more severely if necessary to preserve their faith. Practically, this means God will reveal your sin and pain to you and others to call you back to Himself through repentance, rather than just allowing you to keep falling into sin. God will draw His people back to Himself. I wonder if, right now, there are some among them whom God is calling back to Himself.

Judgment will come to all sinners. Do not test God on this. If you want a good marriage, follow God's teachings. The same applies to family, finances, and so on. Even though the world has seen

God's judgments against immorality and other sins, they still encourage people to commit them. This is foolish. If you can't believe God, look at the evidence! Even that could lead to a better life. The Philistines learned their lessons, but our supposed 'modern' world isn't very wise in this area. They don't want to link God with morals. What a pity! They care little for the poor, no matter what they say in speeches.

Here are some lies that even believers live by, but with dangerous results.

- Begrudgingly believe in God, but Jesus says to openly trust Him: "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me" (John 14:1).
- Open to redefining marriage: "For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh" (Gen 2:24).
- Birth control—"It's my duty": "As for you, be fruitful and multiply; populate the earth abundantly and multiply in it" (Gen 9:7).
- Believe wealth or education is a source of happiness: "A good name is to be more desired than great wealth, Favor is better than silver and gold." (Proverbs 22:1).
- Pay people without work in return: "We used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either" (2 Th 3:10). "Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God" (Ex 20:9).

- Be honest with your anger and feelings: “An angry man stirs up strife, And a hot-tempered man abounds in transgression” (Proverbs 29:4).

Let us remember that truth leads us to guidance, health, closeness with God, and victory, while disregarding His Word—no matter what you say you believe—brings troubles of all kinds. Verse 5:6 says that “Now the hand of the LORD was heavy on the...” God is not to be dismissed, and His words are to be treasured. The further from the truth we drift, and the longer it continues, the more serious the consequences.

3) Learning From Observation (1 Sam 6:1-13)

6:1 Now the ark of the LORD had been in the country of the Philistines seven months. 2 And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners, saying, “What shall we do with the ark of the LORD? Tell us how we shall send it to its place.” 3 And they said, “If you send away the ark of the God of Israel, do not send it empty; but you shall surely return to Him a guilt offering. Then you shall be healed and it shall be known to you why His hand is not removed from you.” 4 Then they said, “What shall be the guilt offering which we shall return to Him?” And they said, “Five golden tumors and five golden mice according to the number of the lords of the Philistines, for one plague was on all of you and on your lords.

5 “So you shall make likenesses of your tumors and likenesses of your mice that ravage the land, and you shall give glory to the God of Israel; perhaps He will ease His hand from you, your gods, and your land. 6 “Why then do you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? When He had severely dealt with them, did they not allow the people to go, and they departed? 7 And take the ark of the LORD and place it on the cart; and put the articles of gold which you return to Him as a guilt offering in a box by its side. Then send it away that it may go.

8 “And take the ark of the LORD and place it on the cart; and put the articles of gold which you return to Him as a guilt offering in a box by its side. Then send it away that it may go. 9 “And watch, if it goes up by the way of its own territory to Beth-shemesh, then He has done us this great evil. But if not, then we shall know that it was not His hand that struck us; it happened to us by chance.” 10 ¶ Then the men did so, and took two milch cows and hitched them to the cart, and shut up their calves at home. 11 And they put the ark of the LORD on the cart, and the box with the golden mice and the likenesses of their tumors. 12 And the cows took the straight way in the direction of Beth-shemesh; they went along the highway, lowing as they went, and did not turn aside to the right or to the left. And the lords of the Philistines followed them to the border of Beth-shemesh. 13 Now the people of Beth-shemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley, and they raised their eyes and saw the ark and were glad to see it.

Watch if

This lesson is learned through observation. The five lords of the Philistines had good reason to follow this process because the priests told each of them to contribute a significant amount of money in solid gold pieces shaped like tumors and mice, then send it away! They were conducting an important test for themselves. It is also crucial to understand God’s interaction in the world. He did not come down and speak to the Philistines directly, but He judged them patiently. He could have wiped them off the map instantly. Instead, God allowed their slow tests, which humans are often subject to. They learned from these tests, but it was a slow process. This test cost them their gold. You can be sure that the lords were watching closely to see if the diviners were right—that was their money at stake! Even at the last minute, you can see them doubting their conclusions, as if the earlier tests

were not conclusive enough. This is not necessarily a bad thing; it more likely reflects the difficulty of adapting to change.

9 "And watch, if it goes up by the way of its own territory to Beth-shemesh, then He has done us this great evil. But if not, then we shall know that it was not His hand that struck us; it happened to us by chance."



These scenes show how eager God is for people to believe and trust Him, while also highlighting our reluctance and difficulty in doing so. We have the evidence in front of us, yet we still don't believe! What will it take to truly believe?

1. It is most difficult to change the way we do things, our values.
2. To make it worse, we have a natural bent away from God (John 3:20)
3. This third lesson would seem to convince them.
4. Did it convince them? Does it convince you?
5. What would it take to convince you to seek God's truth and wisdom?

Tests are fine, but we often ignore them. Ultimately, we tend to be lazy and irresponsible. The Gospel has shown the power of God's love over the hatred and bitterness of the world. Don't judge a professing Christian's life, but a practicing Christian's. We see the power of Christian faith when people truly live it. Do you? Why or why not?

Conclusion

So we understand that God judged and disciplined His people. This practically meant that evil had gone so far that God allowed pain and suffering to come upon His people. God's patience with them—and with the whole world—demonstrates that He does not want to judge anyone. The Lord always uses these situations strategically for His purposes. However, there is no real contest between God and man. Man challenges God's control and questions His wisdom, but in the end, he is either destroyed—like many of the Philistines and Israelites—or slowly and painfully learns. Men don't see the whole picture and are convinced that their ways are better. They believe they will win, but as we learn in the Bible, what seems like a contest is really just a display of God's glorious grace and wrath.

- God reigns - there is no real contest.
- The world stubbornly and painfully 'learns' through experience, but always at a great cost (foolishness).
- God's people can learn through the truth—God's Word (wisdom).

Final Application

- Do you believe that God is all-important and powerful? What will it take for you to believe?
- Are you still somewhat or completely captivated by secularism's promises, even though they oppose God's Word?
- How vital is God's Word to your life in discovering things that will maximize your service to God and others? This message is for believers!

“The Ongoing Contest With God”

1 Samuel 5-6

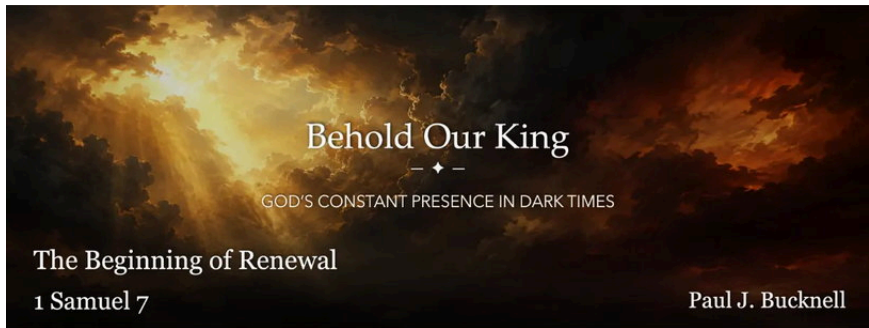
A very unfair contest.

It wouldn't even be a contest unless....



Study Questions

1. What did Dagon's repeated fall before the ark reveal about the God of Israel?
2. What did the suffering in Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron teach the Philistines?
3. Why were the Philistines slow to abandon Dagon even after the evidence became clear?
4. How did the journey of the cows and the ark confirm that the plague was not accidental?
5. What is the difference between learning painfully through experience and learning wisely from God's Word?
6. What belief or practice in your life should change because God is sovereign, holy, and actively involved in His world?



1 Samuel 7:1-14

The Beginning of Renewal

In 1 Samuel 7, we observe the beginning of renewal. Israel had passed through dark times. The ark had been taken, the priesthood had faced judgment, and the Philistines oppressed the people. Still, God had not forsaken His people. Renewal was possible, but it would not begin with military might, political change, or superficial reform. It would begin in the heart.

Before closely examining the passage, we should consider how our culture portrays bondage. A public statement about addiction once said that addiction should not be viewed as a moral failure but only as a chronic illness. Compassion is essential, and those trapped in destructive habits need genuine help. However, when moral responsibility, God's standards, and the reality of sin are removed, the explanation also removes the deepest hope for change that leads to improvement.

If people are convinced that they are merely victims of an illness, they may never know of the choice leading to freedom, by revealing how their choices, desires, loyalties, and false gods hold and waylay them. The Bible provides more than a medical

warning for our sins by honestly addressing sin, accountability, slavery, repentance, grace, and freedom. Jesus Christ not only helps us manage bondage; He came to set captives free.

This is why 1 Samuel 7 is so significant. The chapter shows how renewal starts. We will look at three steps in the passage: first, the cleansing of our intentions; second, the humbling of our hearts; and third, the celebration of our freedom.

1. The Purifying of Our Intentions (1 Sam 7:1-3)

"7:1 And the men of Kiriath-jearim came and took the ark of the LORD and brought it into the house of Abinadab on the hill, and consecrated Eleazar his son to keep the ark of the LORD. 2 And it came about from the day that the ark remained at Kiriath-jearim that the time was long, for it was twenty years; and all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD. 3 Then Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying, "If you return to the LORD with all your heart, remove the foreign gods and the Ashtaroath from among you and direct your hearts to the LORD and serve Him alone; and He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines."

The ark was back in Israel, but having a sacred object did not automatically bring spiritual renewal. The ark stayed at Kiriath-jearim for twenty years. That's a long time. Israel still faced oppression, and only after this long period do we read that all the house of Israel mourned after the Lord.

Three words help us follow the renewal movement: suffering, lamenting, and change. First came suffering—twenty years of Philistine oppression. Then came lamenting—the people began to long after the Lord. Finally, change came—Samuel spoke clearly and told them what a wholehearted return would require.

Impure devotion leads to oppression. Israel desired the Lord, but it also worshipped the Baals and Ashtaroath. The people sought God's help without renouncing their conflicting loyalties. They wanted the blessings of covenant life while clinging to parts of their hearts for other gods. This divided devotion made them weak and enslaved. This principle also applies to our lives. A person might be driven by guilt, hatred, bitterness, lust, desire for power, wealth, or pride. These forms of oppression may look different, but they all share one key trait: something other than God has taken control of the heart. The person might say, "I cannot change," but the deeper truth is that the heart still protects what rules it.

Guilt can control a person who refuses to accept God's forgiveness or admits to hidden sin. Hatred and bitterness can trap us when we replay injuries and make revenge part of who we are. Lust promises pleasure but teaches the heart to misuse others for their own pleasures. This is the opposite of love. Power promises security but makes control more important than love. Wealth promises safety but requires ongoing trust. Pride makes repentance nearly impossible because the person must always seem right.

This is why Jesus spoke so passionately about freedom. Isaiah announced that the Anointed One would bring good news to the oppressed, heal the brokenhearted, declare liberty to captives, and set prisoners free. Jesus applied that promise to His own ministry. He also said, "If therefore the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed." The gospel is a message of true freedom because Christ addresses both the guilt and the power of sin.

“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives, and freedom to prisoners” (Isa 61:1; Lu 4:18).

Four Calls to Action

Return to the Lord with all your heart.

Renewal begins with a change of direction. Israel could not simply feel sad about its condition. Lament had to turn into a return. To return to the Lord means stopping living on our own terms and submitting again to His rule. “With all your heart” rules out a negotiated surrender. God is not asking for a protected space in the house; He is reclaiming the entire house.

Remove the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth.

The idols had to be removed, not renamed, hidden, or managed. Repentance becomes practical. We identify false confidence, reject its claim, dismiss our trust in it, and step out in faith. Some people want deliverance while keeping easy access to what enslaves them. Samuel leaves no room for that. Whatever competes with God must go.

Direct your hearts to the Lord.

The heart does not stay spiritually neutral. If it is not intentionally focused on the Lord, it drifts toward another center. Directing the heart means focusing our attention, confidence, hopes, and plans on God. It involves prayer, Scripture, worship, and deliberate obedience. We stop letting circumstances, fear, desire, or public opinion guide the soul.

Serve Him alone.

This is the language of loyalty. Israel was to learn fidelity, commitment, and complete trust in God. Serving the Lord alone does not mean we withdraw from all everyday responsibilities. Instead, it means that every duty is placed under one ultimate allegiance. We no longer use God to serve other gods. We serve Him.

Samuel attaches a promise to these four calls: “He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines.” Deliverance is God’s work, but it occurs when the heart is fully committed. The people could not overcome the Philistines while continuing to worship their gods. True freedom required pure intentions.

2. The Humbling of Our Hearts (1 Sam 7:4-6)

“So the sons of Israel removed the Baals and the Ashtaroth and served the LORD alone. Then Samuel said, ‘Gather all Israel to Mizpah, and I will pray to the LORD for you.’ And they gathered to Mizpah, and drew water and poured it out before the LORD, and fasted on that day, and said there, ‘We have sinned against the LORD.’ And Samuel judged the sons of Israel at Mizpah.” (1 Samuel 7:4-6)

The people responded, which is crucial. A message about renewal has little value if the hearers admire it but do not obey it. Israel removed the idols and served the Lord alone. Samuel gathered the nation at Mizpah and promised to pray for them. The people poured out water before the Lord, fasted, and confessed, “We have sinned against the LORD.” Their intentions were purified, and their hearts were humbled.

Four responses consistently appear in these verses: they removed the idols, served the Lord alone, Samuel interceded, and the

people repented through fasting and confession. These are not four separate religious actions; together they depict a heart that has stopped defending itself and has come honestly before God.

What does it take to remove an idol? First, identify it. We cannot repent vaguely. We must name the thing in which we have placed false confidence. Second, reject it. We admit that it has lied to us and has no rightful rule over us. Third, dismiss confidence in it. We stop believing that it can provide the security, worth, pleasure, or control that it promised. Fourth, step out in faith. We obey God even when we do not yet feel strong.



Power, wealth, and sex are common gods of the heart. None of these is evil in its proper place. Authority can serve others, money can be stewarded, and sexuality belongs within God's good design. But each becomes an idol when it promises what only God can give or when obedience is sacrificed to obtain it.

Many people say they want freedom, but freedom is often misunderstood. Freedom is not the ability to obey every desire. That is another form of slavery. Biblical freedom means loving God, obeying Him, and living righteously according to His good plan. A person controlled by appetite is not truly free. Someone

who can say no to a master and yes to God is moving toward real freedom.

Serving God alone teaches faithfulness. It means we stop shifting our deepest trust between God and whatever seems powerful at the moment. We learn to depend on Him when circumstances are uncertain. This may require breaking away from old patterns, relationships, possessions, habits, or ambitions. The question is not simply, “Do I believe in God?” The real question is, “What do I rely on when I am afraid?” Samuel also served as an intercessor. He said, “I will pray to the LORD for you.” Samuel points us forward to Jesus Christ, our true intercessor. We do not free ourselves through the strength of our repentance. We come through the One who offered Himself for us and who lives to intercede for His people. Genuine repentance does not turn us inward in despair; it brings us to Christ.

The people fasted and confessed. Fasting shows how serious they are about seeking God. Confession means admitting their wrongs: “We have sinned against the LORD.” They didn’t blame the Philistines, their ancestors, their culture, or their circumstances. The oppression was real, but they first had to face their own divided hearts. This shows humility. When will you fully dedicate your life to the Lord? It’s easy to put off repentance while waiting for a better time. But delay only protects the idol. The right time to return is now.

3. The Celebration of Our Freedom (1 Samuel 7:10-14)

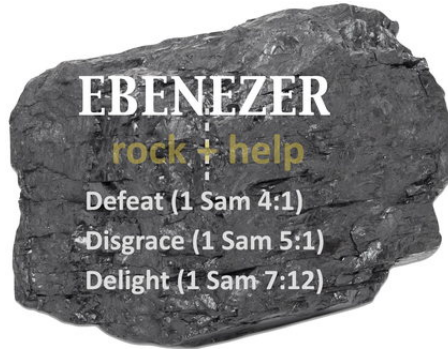
“7:10 Now Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, and the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel. But the Lord thundered with a great thunder on that day against the Philistines

and confused them, so that they were routed before Israel. 11 The men of Israel went out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, and struck them down as far as below Beth-car. 12 Then Samuel took a stone and set it between Mizpah and Shen, and named it Ebenezer, saying, "Thus far the Lord has helped us." 13 So the Philistines were subdued and they did not come anymore within the border of Israel. And the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel. 14 The cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron even to Gath; and Israel delivered their territory from the hand of the Philistines." (1 Samuel 7:10-14)

The Philistines approached to attack while Samuel was offering the sacrifice. Repentance did not mean that Israel would never face another threat. In fact, the enemy struck at the very moment the people were gathered before the Lord. But now, the situation was different. Israel no longer trusted the ark as a religious object or as a means of copying the gods of the nations. The people had humbled themselves, and Samuel was interceding. The Lord thundered against the Philistines and confused them. Israel then pursued them. God brought the decisive deliverance, and the people acted with obedient courage. This balance is important. Freedom is not achieved by human power, yet grace does not make us passive. The Lord fights for His people, and His people rise to walk in the victory He gives.

The result was greater than just escaping from one battle. The Philistines were defeated. The cities that had been captured were restored. Territory was regained. The hand of the Lord remained against Israel's enemies during Samuel's time. Renewal began in the heart, but its effects extended outward into the life of the nation.

Samuel then set up a stone and named it Ebenezer, saying, "Thus far the LORD has helped us." Ebenezer means a stone of help. The stone served as a public testimony. Israel was not to credit the victory to its own strength, better organization, or courage. The Lord had helped them.



This word carries a beautiful progression through the earlier chapters. There was defeat in 1 Samuel 4, when Israel tried to use the ark without true obedience. There was disgrace in 1 Samuel 5, when the ark was captured and taken into Philistine territory. Now there was joy in 1 Samuel 7. The place of painful memory became connected with the Lord's merciful help.

God can transform the meaning of our past. The old defeat does not have to be the final word. The place where pride fell can become the place where grace is remembered. The chain that once symbolized our slavery can become part of our testimony to Christ's freedom. We do not celebrate the sin or the suffering. We celebrate the Lord who met us there and helped us.

"Thus far" also teaches continued dependence. Samuel did not say, "We have now become strong enough to manage without God." Every step had been sustained by the Lord. The memorial looked backward with gratitude and forward with trust. The God who had helped them so far would remain their hope. The closing

verses tell us that Samuel continued to judge Israel. He traveled his circuit and returned to Ramah, where he built an altar to the Lord. Renewal was not limited to a single emotional gathering. It led to ongoing leadership, worship, justice, and faithfulness.

Application: Turn, Purify, and Trust

Are there signs of oppression in your life? Do you constantly find yourself returning to guilt, hatred, bitterness, lust, control, wealth, or pride? Don't just ask how to feel less pain. Ask what has captured your heart. The first step toward renewal is to be truthful before the Lord.

What is the first step you need to take to purify your heart? Return to the Lord with all your heart. Remove the competing gods. Turn your heart to the Lord. Serve Him alone. Identify, reject, and dismiss your confidence in the idol, and step out in faith.

Remember the intercessor. Samuel prayed for Israel, but Jesus Christ is the greater intercessor. He offered the sacrifice, bore our guilt, rose from the dead, and lives to set His people free. "If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed."

Conclusion

- Our oppression will endure as long as the impurity of our hearts continues.
- Freedom comes when we repent and wholly seek the Lord.
- Christ Jesus is the Rock who can intercede and set you free.

Celebrate the way God has set you free. Raise your Ebenezer. Remember where He met you, how He forgave you, and how He broke the power of what once ruled you. It will be different for each of us. Share your testimony about Jesus. A testimony

glorifies God and encourages others who still believe that freedom is impossible. Renewal begins when God's people stop defending divided devotion. It deepens when we humble our hearts through repentance and confession. It becomes a celebration when the Lord delivers and restores. Turn. Purify. Trust. Now is the time.

Study Questions

1. What four actions did Samuel require of Israel in 1 Samuel 7:3?
2. Why was the ark's presence in Israel not enough to produce renewal?
3. What modern loyalties can function like the Baals and Ashtaroth in a believer's heart?
4. What roles did confession, fasting, and Samuel's intercession play at Mizpah?
5. How did the Lord answer when the Philistines attacked?
6. What does Ebenezer—"Thus far the Lord has helped us"—teach about gratitude and continuing dependence?
7. What practical first step should you take to return to the Lord with an undivided heart?



1 Samuel 8:1-22

The Compromise for a King

1 Samuel 8 explains why God's people often face less-than-ideal situations. What about your life? Have you compromised somewhere? Have you demanded something and then realized (or are just now realizing) that what seemed better actually caused more worry?

A. Rejection of the Lord (1 Samuel 8:1-8)

The elders approached Samuel and requested a change in leadership. They now wanted a king. Several reasons motivated their request.



Samuel was aging, and they were contemplating Israel's future (8:5). Samuel's sons were behaving in a very disappointing way (1 Samuel 8:1–3). They even told Samuel this themselves (8:5). They didn't want a repeat of Eli. They wanted to be like other nations (8:20). They were missing out on something.

Samuel's Response

"But the thing was displeasing in the sight of Samuel when they said, 'Give us a king to judge us.' And Samuel prayed to the LORD" (1 Samuel 8:6).

Samuel was very disappointed with their request. There were probably several reasons why he was displeased with their response.

- 1) Remorse over his sons' disobedience. This could have been a personal sadness. Parents rejoice over their children's godly choices and grieve over their evil choices.
- 2) Reflecting sadly on his hard work. Every man values his labor. Samuel hoped his sons would take over, but he had to accept they were not suitable for the role. He knew about the tragedy involving Eli's sons. Is his poor parenting part of the larger problem? What could happen to Israel in the future after all the effort to guide them according to the Lord?
- 3) Grieved over the hardness of their hearts. Samuel probably considered the consequences of this approach. The people weren't seeking God and didn't realize how faithful and caring He was. They were heading into a worse situation.

Samuel rightly handled his disappointment. We all face disappointment, but we often respond the wrong way. He simply went to the Lord and talked with Him. If we want to respond like

this, it's important to develop a regular habit of turning to God; otherwise, in tough times, we might not approach the Lord. The Lord also had His response to this situation.

God's Response

"And the LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them. "Like all the deeds which they have done since the day that I brought them up from Egypt even to this day—in that they have forsaken Me and served other gods—so they are doing to you also" (1 Samuel 8:7-8).

The Lord first tells Samuel that the people have not rejected Samuel but Him. They have turned away and rejected the Lord. We do not know whether Samuel found comfort in this, but it can help him gain perspective on the situation. A child or church leader often makes irresponsible decisions. We might feel unsettled by this, but we should keep the bigger picture in mind to keep things in perspective. It is not personal against you as much as it is against the Lord. God's perspective helps us keep our hearts tender to Him so we can be patient as He is.

Rejection?

Why is it, though, that the Lord actually states that they have rejected Him from being king over them? This suggests that the Israelites have sinned greatly in this matter.

God views Himself as king, and their request for a king like others shows they have rejected the Lord as their king. By the word 'rejected,' God holds them accountable for knowing that He is their king. They should have responded appropriately to that fact. The Lord discusses this issue from a historical perspective. He

relates their request to what happened in the wilderness: "They have forsaken Me and served other gods..."

What about the Law?

There is one matter, though, that needs careful consideration. The Lord discusses Israel's choice of a king. Read the following passage and consider these verses to determine whether it was acceptable to ask for a king.

"When you enter the land which the LORD your God gives you, and you possess it and live in it, and you say, 'I will set a king over me like all the nations who are around me,' you shall surely set a king over you whom the LORD your God chooses, one from among your countrymen you shall set as king over yourselves; you may not put a foreigner over yourselves who is not your countryman. "Moreover, he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor shall he cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, since the LORD has said to you, 'You shall never again return that way.' "Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly increase silver and gold for himself.

"Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. "And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted up above his countrymen and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or the left; in order that he and his sons may continue long in his kingdom in the midst of Israel" (Deut 17:14-20, NASB unless noted).

Don't they already own the land? Are they now claiming they want a king like all the other nations? Why does the Lord see this as so wrong?

Three answers

- 1) They were requesting a king instead of waiting for God's chosen one. The passage does not say they can demand a king.
- 2) The king they asked for was not the one God intended to put over them. He had great plans, but they would not wait. They wanted a king who would operate like the world, regardless of the cost.
- 3) Perhaps most importantly, they were rejecting the Lord as their king. They were distancing themselves from Him. He did much for them, but that was in the past. They entered a new generation and believed they could now care for themselves. They rejected God's unique way of caring for them.

B. Tough Consequences (1 Sam 8:9-18)

We are somewhat surprised by the Lord's response here. Why does the Lord respond the way He does to His people and just let them go on with their inferior plans?

The Lord's Response (1 Samuel 8:9)

"Now then, listen to their voice; however, you shall solemnly warn them and tell them of the procedure of the king who will reign over them" (1 Samuel 8:9).

There are two parts to what the Lord said. First, Samuel is to listen to them, meaning he should agree to appoint a king for them. Second, he is to warn them about the consequences of having a king. Samuel does not start by agreeing to their request; instead, he first explains the potential problems of having a king. He does this in hopes that they will turn away from their evil.

The Consequences (1 Samuel 8:10-18)

Samuel enumerated the difficulties of having a king.

“So Samuel spoke all the words of the LORD to the people who had asked of him a king. And he said, “This will be the procedure of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and place them for himself in his chariots and among his horsemen and they will run before his chariots...

“Then you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the LORD will not answer you in that day.” Nevertheless, the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel, and they said, “No, but there shall be a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles.” (1 Samuel 8:10-20).

Samuel highlighted many negative implications of having a king. He concentrated on the burdens a king would bear. The list is extensive because Samuel wanted them to reconsider their decision.

Consequences & Burdens

- The king will take their sons as soldiers.
- The king will keep some of their sons as long-term army staff.
- The king will take their sons to plow and reap his harvest.
- The king will take a tenth of their flocks.
- The king will require that some will become his slaves.
- The king will take their daughters to serve as perfumers, cooks, and bakers.
- The king will take the best products of their fields, vineyards, and olive groves to feed his staff.

- The king will take ten percent of their grain and vineyards to maintain his government.
- The king will also take your slaves, male and female.
- The king will take their best young men and donkeys and set them to do his hard labor.
- The king will take a tenth of their flocks, and everyone will end up serving him.
- They will face hardship because of the king and call out to the Lord, but He will not hear.

This is an extraordinary list. One must wonder why people still insist on having a king.

“Nevertheless, the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel, and they said, “No, but there shall be a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles” (1 Samuel 8:19-20).

They must have believed that their solution was worth more than the cost. This is very similar to what is happening in the world today. People are willing to sacrifice their freedom and wealth to make things safer, better, and more prosperous. It’s a reckless mistake. The costs outweigh the benefits. When people feel threatened or are simply lazy, the promises from governments and organizations just pull them into submission. There is a better way.

Samuel was offering them a second chance, but they refused to listen. What motivated all this? It seems they were so convinced that a king could better protect them from harm and preserve their wealth and peace of mind. Samuel boldly warned them they would lose their wealth and families as they knew them. Yet, they didn’t care.

Insistent on One's Own Ways (1 Sam 8:19-22)

The Israelites asked for a king. They ignored the Lord. Samuel told the Lord, and the Lord then told Samuel that they could have a king.

"Nevertheless, the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel, and they said, "No, but there shall be a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles." Now after Samuel had heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the LORD'S hearing. And the LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to their voice, and appoint them a king." So Samuel said to the men of Israel, "Go every man to his city" (1 Samuel 8:19-22).

Life seems so simple, but man, with his irresponsible choices, makes it difficult. God's way is far better, but man insists on his own plans and believes his thoughts are superior. He clings to his own decisions. However, God sometimes yields to their requests, but the consequences would follow them for many centuries.

In the Garden

Reflect on what happened in the Garden of Eden. The same pattern occurred: the tempter came and tempted Adam and Eve to reject God's authority over their lives. When we accept God's rule, we follow what He has commanded. It's clear that God offers much more than earthly kings can provide. The Garden of Eden demonstrated this. No man can create such a place for us, regardless of their promises. The tempter keeps returning, enticing humans to believe that their own plans or ideas—like having their own king—would be better. This event is, as the Lord said, just another sign of the same stubborn heart.

The future with a king

1 Samuel 9:1 marks a significant moment in Israelite history as they are about to have their own kings. Although God was a much better King, they needed to understand the limits of earthly kings so they would long for the righteous King God promised—Jesus Christ. It might seem that the monarchial years were good, especially during the reigns of King David and King Solomon. While not entirely bad, these periods were only a display of God's grace, and they were relatively short. Overall, the kings of Israel and Judah were often evil and failed to follow God's ways. Even David and Solomon had serious flaws that affected thousands of Israelites.

Solomon chose to have many chariots despite the Law's prohibition against them (cf. 1 Kings 10:26). Later, in 1 Kings 11, it describes how Solomon's heart began to drift away from God. Remember that the Israelites many years later also rejected Jesus as the King of Israel. This was not unusual; however, through their rejection of the King of Israel, God provided a way for us to receive forgiveness through Jesus and to develop a new heart that embraces His Lordship.

In your life

The Lord is king, but do you also insist on your own way? Do you believe your way is better than what God has planned for you? Beware of the tempter and his promises. Our sin reveals our unbelief. We have begun to trust in something other than God. Many people are convinced that depending on the government to meet our needs—no matter the cost—is better than trusting in what God provides. God designed the government to be His helper, not His substitute! The more we rely on the government,

the more distance we create between God and us. Is there any reason to doubt God's provision? No. He is faithful. God gave them their own land, even with milk and honey, yet they still think their ways are better.

Conclusions and Applications

God's people often find themselves believing that a path different from God's will be better. In each case, they turn from the Lord, abandon what is best, and compromise. What will it take for us to embrace the conviction that God's ways are always better, even when they seem less attractive at the moment? Consider these examples:

- Obey your parents?
- Live within your means?
- Forgive fully?
- Be patient with others?

"For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, And as a garden causes the things sown in it to spring up, So the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise To spring up before all the nations" (Isaiah 61:11).

Study Questions

1. Why did Israel's request for a king displease both Samuel and the Lord?
2. How does Deuteronomy 17:14-20 clarify what was wrong with Israel's demand?
3. Which costs of kingship did Samuel emphasize, and why did the people accept them anyway?
4. What did the people hope an earthly king would provide that God had already promised to give?

5. Where are you tempted to seek security, identity, or provision in the world rather than in the Lord?
6. How should a believer respond after recognizing a costly compromise?
7. How does this chapter deepen our longing for the perfectly righteous King, Jesus Christ?

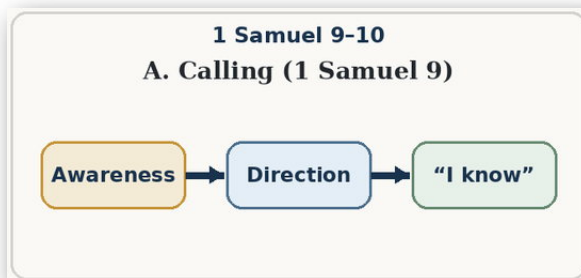
1 Samuel 9-10

Calling and Confirmation

God works differently in the lives of His cherished people depending on their needs. As we explore God's calling of Saul to be king, we will observe His unique ways of working and empowering His people to accomplish His purposes. From this, we can gain a clearer understanding of how God might act in our own lives and find encouragement to complete the tasks He has assigned to us. First, we will examine God's call in 1 Samuel 9 and then His confirmation of that call in chapter 10. 1 Samuel 11 describes the affirmation of Saul's call (not in this article).

A. God's Call for Saul to be King (1 Sam 9:1-27)

The Lord spends a considerable amount of time discussing Saul's call to be king—27 verses, to be exact. The detailed description helps us see that the Lord specifically chose Saul and shows how He made sure Saul understood his calling. The Lord ensured there was no confusion.



Some people dislike using the word 'call' to describe how God works in a person's life to make him aware of his specific duty.

Whether the word is biblical is somewhat irrelevant. The concept is definitely present (note that a calling is not only used for pastoral or missionary work!). But what does the word 'call' imply? How does God bring it about in our lives? Let us learn from the passage before us. Because of Saul's unique calling, we should at least recognize that God personalizes His calling to each person's life and situation to communicate what He wants, thus providing the faith needed to carry out the work properly.

❖ **Observations of Saul's 'call' from 1 Samuel 9**

- 1) God works through everyday events - His father tells him to look for the donkeys (9:3).
- 2) Saul was a Benjamite¹, the son of a mighty Benjamin warrior named Kish (9:1).
- 3) Saul was handsome and tall (9:2).
- 4) The Lord involves a prophet (seer) in letting Saul know what He wanted (9:9).
- 5) The Lord speaks to Samuel the prophet about what He wants (9:15).
- 6) The Lord tells Samuel how Saul will be the key to deliverance (9:16).
- 7) The Lord specifically identified Saul to Samuel, "Behold the man..." (9:17).

¹ But weren't the kings supposed to come from the tribe of Judah? "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples" (Genesis 49:10). One way to answer this is from two perspectives.

(1) Since Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin, we understand that the promised seed would not be from Saul. This shows God's displeasure in choosing a king based on personal preference. His descendants were not linked to God's promise.

(2) Concerning Genesis 49:10, the promise did not say that the kingship could not start elsewhere. It only said that once the kingdom was established in Judah, it would not leave that place, which was true. Jesus, the King of Israel, was a descendant of David, the son of Jesse of Bethlehem in Judah. Because of Saul's stubbornness, the throne was given to another, namely, David.

- 8) Samuel treats Saul more favorably than other leaders (9:20-25).
- 9) Samuel seeks an occasion to speak to Saul about kingship (9:26-27).
- 10) The Lord clearly confirms Saul's call (from chapter 10).
- 11) The Lord prepares Saul for the work (from chapter 10).

A call is how God shows an individual and those nearby that he has a special duty to fulfill.

❖ **Here are some principles about God's calling of someone to serve Him. (1 Samuel 9)**

- 1) God chooses all kinds of people to fulfill His tasks, often someone we might never choose. In this case, Saul was handsome, tall, and well-off (9:1). However, this is not always the case! Amos the prophet was a shepherd (Amos 7:14-15). David came from the smallest family. Saul also mentions that he came from a very small family in the smallest tribe (9:21). The Lord often works with those who have weaknesses so they trust in Him and avoid pride (Saul - 10:21).² God seems to favor choosing unlikely people to perform His most noble tasks.
- 2) In the beginning, the Lord might use our overall life circumstances to connect us with the right people so we can hear what He wants us to hear. We should not

² 1 Samuel 9:1 states that Saul's father was well known and wealthy. The Hebrew word conveys both these meanings. Additionally, in 9:21, Saul mentions that his family is among the least of the families in the smallest tribe. His response might be more polite than truthful. The Benjaminites had faced harsh treatment in the past (Judges 20-21). Alternatively, we can see how God sometimes chooses the most unlikely individuals.

worry about God's ability to bring us together with the right individuals. He can and does handle these matters as needed. We can't easily miss God's plan. Our problem is ignoring His plan because it seems impossible.

- 3) God often speaks through His prophets to more clearly communicate His 'call' to an individual. God relies on those in leadership to recognize and affirm this call. Part of why the Lord speaks through them is to confirm the position that the person is to hold. (Imagine if Saul just said, "God told me I am king.") He needed those in leadership to acknowledge this (chapter 10), especially because he was becoming the first king.
- 4) We do not volunteer ourselves; rather, God appoints us. The call refers to the moment when the Lord reveals what He wants to accomplish through our lives. We do not see the Lord asking for permission (Psalm 24:1). We all belong to Him. Since God created us, He knows best how to use us. His will always aligns with how He has designed us.³
- 5) God knows each of us. He has created us for different purposes, even if we are unaware of Him. We cannot hide from Him. The Lord knew exactly where to find Saul.

God's call primarily focuses on the individual because it seeks to instill the faith and guidance necessary for future service. There is

³ There is no conflict with freewill. God lets us know what He wants and expects us to respond. Admittedly, it would have been hard for Saul not to participate. He did not ask to be chosen with the lot (ch. 10)! However, this issue gets much more complicated when we factor in so-called 'natural' giftings and circumstances in which the Lord puts us.

no single way God achieves this. The Levites have a calling by heritage, but others require a specific series of events to bring them to the place where God wants them to be.

We should recognize, however, that God sometimes lets others know what He is doing so they can make room for a person's new role. This can take a long time, as in David's case. He was anointed king long before he took the throne, but when the time was right, God revealed His choice to the nation's leaders. In Saul's case, the Lord worked through Samuel, and Saul was later publicly identified by lot.

God worked through Samuel partly to help him, other leaders, and the people recognize that Saul's appointment came from God. Samuel himself needed to make way for this new form of kingship (His sons would not rule). Everyone had to see him as king. Since Samuel initiated it, most people (not all - 10:27) could trust Saul's appointment as king.

Saul's calling is very unique because it is highly personalized. God used the events of daily life to get Saul's attention, call him, and establish him as king.

Questions

One thing is clear about callings: although they share similarities, they can also be very different. King Saul's call and the call of Saul (Apostle Paul) are entirely different. We shouldn't assume that one is better than the other. Each is a miracle.

➔ Some argue that a true calling doesn't exist. Is that so?

The Scriptures show that God calls specific individuals and nations. God especially involves Himself in inspiring, shaping, and

guiding particular people like Saul. We need to allow God the freedom to make those calls.

➔ **Some people grow up feeling a sense of calling. How does this relate to a specific calling?**

The Lord can instill a sense of His call on a person's life early on. Samuel, himself, likely experienced this after hearing from his mother and others about his dedication. He does not always do this, but when He does, the Lord begins to shape the individual early on for the tasks He has ahead. These callings give an inner resolve to overcome obstacles and trust God by faith to do what is needed to fulfill what God has placed on their heart.

➔ **Do only those in the clergy receive a calling? What about everyone else? Can they be called too?**

God does not give a 'special' calling to everyone. When a special calling, sense of urgency, or clarity is needed, He provides it in a unique and personal way. Many who become pastors or missionaries need redirection and strengthening in their faith. God provides these. However, if someone is already moving in the direction God desires, then there is no need for these special signs. Our salvation calls vary just as the ways Jesus healed people in the New Testament differed. We should not say one is better; each is suited for its own purpose by our Designer. In this case, King Saul clearly was not a clergyman. Certainly, anyone can receive a special awareness of something God wants to accomplish, even if they are not a child of God (King Cyrus in Isaiah 45).

➔ **How do these special calls connect to a general call to become a Christian or to serve Him generally?**

All of God's children are chosen (literally 'selected'). The calling specifically refers to the inward recognition of what God has done

or wants to do in a person's life. For the believer, each is chosen to go and bear fruit. The task of making disciples is set before each of us. We can trust God's Word to guide us toward His purposes. If we need extra direction, the Lord will provide it. No believer needs to wait to get started!

For more reading, check out Titus' ['Called into His Service.'](#)

B. God's Confirmation for Saul to be King (1 Sam 10:1-27)

Saul's confirmation in 1 Samuel 10 can be understood in four parts. God assured him, through different means, that He would support his leadership.

"Then Samuel took the flask of oil, poured it on his head, kissed him and said, "Has not the LORD anointed you a ruler over His inheritance?" (1 Samuel 10:1)

1 Samuel 10:1 describes Saul's formal anointing as king, affirming God's purpose for him and His readiness to empower Saul for leadership. However, true leadership only began after the people saw the Lord choose him by lot and observed his leadership in battle (1 Samuel 11). Saul clearly needed God's grace. A review of Saul's life reveals that he faced many personal weaknesses that he had to overcome.



➔ **Saul's Inferiority Complex**

Saul apparently felt very insecure. The Scriptures mention Saul's father but offer little insight into Saul's character, focusing mainly on external traits. There are three reasons for this conclusion:

- (1) The Scriptures seem to suggest from his conversation with his uncle after his return that he was very reluctant to reveal what happened. He told a half-truth (1 Samuel 10:14-16). The Scriptures clearly highlight this.
- (2) From 1 Samuel 10:22, we see Saul hiding among the baggage. What does this imply? His reluctance to be recognized as king likely indicates deep insecurity or fear. (3) Later, Saul was terrified by his enemies: "When Saul saw the camp of the Philistines, he was afraid and his heart trembled greatly" (1 Samuel 28:5).

False humility sometimes happens when a person avoids or neglects their God-given duty out of inner fear. The fear becomes so powerful that it dims the response that God has prompted them to take. God had wonderfully worked in Saul's life, but he did not put those experiences into obedience to the Lord. So, during the process of choosing him as king by lot, he hid in the luggage. Later, he would offer a sacrifice himself instead of waiting for Samuel.

1) Personal confirmation (1 Samuel 10:1-9)

Following verse 1, in which Saul is anointed as king, we see a series of prophetic events fulfilled. This was not just unusual for us, separated by three millennia, but also for them.

❖ **List the number of prophecies made in 1 Samuel 10. Were they fulfilled?**

- 1) "When you go from me today, then you will find two men close to Rachel's tomb in the territory of Benjamin at Zelzah; and they will say to you, 'The donkeys which you went to look for have been found. Now behold, your father has ceased to be concerned about the donkeys and is anxious for you, saying, "What shall I do about my son?"' (1 Samuel 10:2).
- 2) "Then you will go on further from there, and you will come as far as the oak of Tabor, and there three men going up to God at Bethel will meet you, one carrying three kids, another carrying three loaves of bread, and another carrying a jug of wine; and they will greet you and give you two loaves of bread, which you will accept from their hand" (1 Samuel 10:3, 4).
- 3) "Afterward you will come to the hill of God where the Philistine garrison is; and it shall be as soon as you have come there to the city, that you will meet a group of prophets coming down from the high place with harp, tambourine, flute, and a lyre before them, and they will be prophesying" (1 Samuel 10:5).
- 4) "Then the Spirit of the LORD will come upon you mightily, and you shall prophesy with them and be changed into another man" (1 Samuel 10:6).

The Lord states that all the signs were fulfilled. "Then it happened when he turned his back to leave Samuel, God changed his heart; and all those signs came about on that day." (1 Samuel 10:9). How

amazing it is that God would list four separate events in such detail. Our question here is why does God do it this way?

➔ **From 10:7, what would you think the purpose of these signs was?**

“And it shall be when these signs come to you, do for yourself what the occasion requires; for God is with you” (1 Samuel 10:7).

Samuel had no doubt that these signs would occur. He said, “When these signs come to you...” The signs were primarily for Saul, preparing him for his new responsibility and assuring him that God was behind him. Saul’s fearful reactions came from focusing too much on himself rather than trusting the Lord’s promises. This same struggle appears in the command of 1 Samuel 10:8 and Saul’s later disobedience in chapter 13.

God strengthens us

The main principle here is that God will help us based on our needs. When God assigns us a task, we can trust Him to prepare us. Pay close attention to His actions, words, or events happening around you at that time. Just like with Saul, nothing was by chance—whether it was the prophets he met or the Holy Spirit coming upon him powerfully. Each event further prepared Saul to be king, strengthening his sense of purpose, involvement, and confidence in God. Everything that happened to Saul confirmed that God was with him. In other words, God would be there to help Saul through tough situations, building his faith for the challenges ahead. It would not just be Saul; it would be God with him, bringing about change.

"God is with you!"

God was with Saul. God empowered him to succeed. How incredible this promise is. But just think, the same applies to Christ followers. Jesus said all authority was His and that He appointed His disciples to make disciples. "Teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). God does not send us into our lives without power. We should remember that the Lord's main purpose for us is to strengthen our faith in Him. This helps us overcome temptations and troubles we might face in life. It also encourages us to face our task of making disciples, knowing He will help us along the way.

2) Spiritual confirmation (1 Samuel 10:9-13)

Saul experienced two major spiritual events. His heart was transformed, and the Spirit of God came upon him powerfully, causing him to speak and act like a true prophet.

"Then it happened when he turned his back to leave Samuel, God changed his heart; and all those signs came about on that day" (1 Samuel 10:9).

What does it mean that God 'changed' his heart? Does it simply mean that God made him more optimistic about his situation? No. There was a profound transformation in his life. The word 'changed' means to be transformed or overtaken. This is best understood to refer to a new heart or being '[born again](#).' [Regeneration](#) is the technical term for this change in a person's heart, in which one once focused only on one's own life needs. Afterward, however, he became genuinely concerned for God's person and work.

Some might question whether this was genuine. I believe it was, but he let his fears and jealousies control his life and prevent him from trusting in the Lord. He chose to trust in what he thought was right, even though he was very inexperienced. There are some difficult things to reconcile with Saul's life, but perhaps the warning we can take is to be careful about drifting away from the Lord, because without abiding in the Lord, we will carry out the deeds of the flesh.

3) Family confirmation missing (1 Samuel 10:14-16)

God might also have confirmed this calling through his uncle, but Saul deliberately hid what God was doing.

"So Saul said to his uncle, "He told us plainly that the donkeys had been found." But he did not tell him about the matter of the kingdom which Samuel had mentioned" (1 Samuel 10:16).

I used to feel awkward telling my parents the truth about what was really going on. I was always suspicious that if they found out, it would embarrass me. I have since learned that I should have trusted them more. God works through our parents. This is why I mentioned earlier that the Lord might have confirmed Saul's calling again if he had been honest. Our deceitful ways never turn out the way we expect.

4) National confirmation (1 Samuel 10:17-27)

"Then he brought the tribe of Benjamin near by its families, and the Matrite family was taken. And Saul the son of Kish was taken; but when they looked for him, he could not be found" (1 Samuel 10:21).

Samuel gathered all the people and cast lots to select Saul! This is a remarkable confirmation. This sign alone is completely

convincing. Out of hundreds of thousands, one man is chosen. Samuel began this whole selection with some serious words.

“And he said to the sons of Israel, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘I brought Israel up from Egypt, and I delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians, and from the power of all the kingdoms that were oppressing you.’ “But you today rejected your God, who delivers you from all your calamities and your distresses; yet you have said, ‘No, but set a king over us!’ Now therefore, present yourselves before the LORD by your tribes and by your clans”” (1 Samuel 10:18, 19).

These words are no different from what was previously written in chapter 8. “They have forsaken Me and served other gods...” (1 Samuel 8:8). Could Saul’s cowardly response, which was very different from God’s incredible signs, have somehow caused trouble for himself? By acting cowardly, it’s easy to imagine how he might have caused some men to look down on him and think he wasn’t worthy of being king.

“But certain worthless men said, “How can this one deliver us?” And they despised him and did not bring him any present. But he kept silent” (1 Samuel 10:27).

Conclusion

God did not simply appoint Saul and expect him to go into battle and win. Our misconceptions about calling or spiritual warfare might lead us to these conclusions, but they are not correct. Saul did not have to fight or lead alone. The battle belongs to the Lord. We must determine what God calls us to do and then faithfully follow through. Having direction, however, may not be the hardest part. As in Saul’s case, the call sometimes comes with an element of surprise. Still, there will be challenges in completing the task. God allows us to face what seems impossible. This is also

true in Saul's case. He, the farmer boy chasing after donkeys, is now meant to be the first king of a whole new dynasty. It is here, however, that we can experience the overflowing grace of God, which strengthens and empowers His people to accomplish His good and perfect will.

Study Questions

1. How did God use ordinary events—the lost donkeys, the servant, and Samuel—to guide Saul?
2. What signs confirmed Saul's calling, and why did he need such clear confirmation?
3. What does Saul's calling teach about God's ability to prepare people for difficult responsibilities?
4. How did Saul's insecurity and fear threaten his response to God's call?
5. What role should spiritual leaders and the believing community play in recognizing a person's calling?
6. How does a special calling relate to the general call of every believer to obey Christ and make disciples?
7. What responsibility has God placed before you, and how has He already begun to equip you for it?

1 Samuel 10:17-27

Gaining Confidence to Serve

Saul, the Publicly Chosen King

Prioritizing God's direction in our lives secures His fellowship and blessing.

Do you ever get preoccupied with the thought that you forget other equally important matters? I received an internet bill with a late fee. We thought we had taken care of it, but with the move, I guess not! They were kind and waived the late fee. Some things don't matter so much, but some do! Worldly preoccupation is always harmful to our relationship with God, as seen in 1 Samuel 10:17-27. Israel believed everything was fine when they wanted a king like the other nations around them. They aimed to strengthen Israel's kingdom and exalt God's Name.

1 Samuel 10:17-27 clearly reveals our tendency to prioritize what feels most important to us while ignoring what is truly essential. Our plans, hopes, and desires overshadow God's message, blocking His voice from coming through. We hear them but dismiss them as mental spam. God kindly reveals His better way in verses 17-18. The following verses show how God lets go of His best and responds to their rejection, demonstrating grace beyond what they deserve (see point 3).

1. God's Pursuit (1 Sam 10:17-18)

¹⁷ Thereafter Samuel called the people together to the Lord at Mizpah; ¹⁸ and he said to the **sons of Israel**, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'I brought Israel up from Egypt, and I delivered

you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the power of all the kingdoms that were oppressing you.” (1 Sam 10:17-18)

God’s work with the nation of Israel was unique. Yahweh, their God, pursued them before and now offers them a second chance. In verses 17-18, God seeks their devotion; He wants them to set aside their focus on having a king as part of their plans.

• ***Samuel assembled them together (1 Sam 10:17)***

The LORD directed Samuel to gather the people, likely hoping they would go through a period of national repentance. This gathering could serve as an opportunity to positively shape their future, a meeting where they might accept God’s better plan. Earlier, God expressed it this way: “The Lord said to Samuel, “Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them” (1 Sam 8:7). I believe verse 17 is a hopeful statement meant to encourage a positive response; to see if anyone would call out to return to God as their king.

Our Blessed Lives

Our lives beautifully illustrate God’s pursuit of our hearts. He has given us so much. Can you deny it? The same was true for Israel. In verse 18, we see four specific ways God reminds them of His faithfulness.

“And he said to the sons of Israel, thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘I brought Israel up from Egypt, and I delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the power of all the kingdoms that were oppressing you.’” (1 Sam 10:18)

• ***Chosen: Samuel reminds them of their identity (18)***

Once gathered together, Samuel reminded them of their identity as the sons of Israel – “he said to the sons of Israel.” Their national

name comes from their ancestor, Jacob. God suddenly appeared to him while he was fleeing for his life. He had just deceived his father, Isaac, tricked his brother out of his blessing, and now he had escaped. (Just one family member, like Jacob, can cause a lot of family bitterness.)

On his way north, God revealed Himself to Jacob in a dream. We know it as Jacob's ladder, where angels ascended and descended. God caught Jacob's attention by wrestling with him, but Jacob sensed something greater and pursued the LORD. "He (God) said, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men and have prevailed" (Gen 32:28). And so, Jacob, now Israel, committed himself to live for God. Through him, twelve sons were born, who became the twelve tribes of Israel.

With twenty precious years of his youth passed, he returned to the Promised Land to that exact spot and remembered his vow. If God brought him back blessed, he would serve His God.

Maybe Samuel hoped that God's blessing on the wayward Jacob, now Israel, would make their hearts break before their generous God. But the Lord received no response from the people—no sign of remorse or humility. They seemed not to hear him; God's words weren't reaching them.

• **Adopted: God's deliverance from Egypt (18)**

All the Israelites, including Jacob, went down to Egypt following Joseph. After four hundred years, God miraculously brought them out of Egypt and back to the Promised Land. God says, "**I brought Israel up from Egypt.**" The adoption of Israel as God's own possession became clear through the Passover (Exodus 12). He chose them, making Himself their Redeemer and their Rewarder.

God began to train His people to obey Him as the source of blessing.

• **Claimed: God worked on Israel's behalf against the world empire (18)**

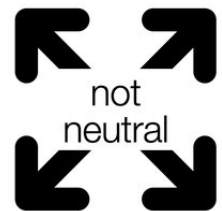
"I delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians." The LORD undoubtedly stirred up their memories of the many miracles He performed to claim them as His people, having delivered them from the demise of their arch-enemy, Egypt. This same testimony would follow them wherever they went. The people of Jericho feared the Israelites because they had heard of God's amazing feats (Joshua 2:9-11).

• **Rescued: God rescued them from many other oppressive forces**

God protected them from "the power of all the kingdoms that were oppressing you." The Israelites' existence and benefits depended on God's choice of them. God served as their great king, did He not? He is their Savior, the best of all kings.

No Neutral Ground

They were not at a neutral decision point. It's not as if many gods had equally blessed or not blessed them so they could choose any of them freely. To pick an alternative, they had to reject God. God alone had befriended and blessed them. Among all the people groups, God chose Israel and took delight in them as in a favored vineyard, "Let me sing now for my well-beloved, a song of my beloved concerning His vineyard" (Isaiah 5:1). He is proud of His adopted sons; they carry His Name, Spirit, and words.



God's Blessings on Our Lives

What a wonderful display of God's gracious work in their lives. Their very existence depends on His care for them. He invites them to trust Him completely. We don't start neutral, as if nothing has happened in our lives. God has led us, blessed us, and sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, to die for us. Paul in Ephesians 1 says, "Who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Eph 1:3). More broadly, all of creation shows God's goodness, calling us to pursue our Maker, yet they rejected God's best because they were preoccupied with their 'better' plan.

God greatly blesses us as His people. Don't quickly abandon your Christian family and heritage. Behind the meetings, meals, love, and teaching is God Almighty, who first sent His Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to die for everyone, regardless of the nation to which you belong. God is good, and there is no greater plan, way, or method than His. What do you believe about God?

To keep my heart warm toward the Lord, I see each day as a chance to respond to God's abundant love poured out on me in Christ Jesus. Hearts become lukewarm when we forget the many things He has done for us. I dislike thinking about where I would be if God had left me as a self-absorbed little sinner boy. "Behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor 6:2). No one on earth can hide from God's goodness. Jesus came into the world to save it. God showed His ultimate sign of goodness when He sent His Son to die for us. How will you respond? God also seeks our hearts; He desires our complete trust in Him.

2. The People's Rejection (1 Sam 10:19)

¹⁹ But you have today **rejected your God**, who delivers you from all your calamities and your distresses; yet you have said, 'No, but set a king over us!' Now therefore, present yourselves before the Lord by your tribes and by your clans" (1 Sam 10:19).

What could have been a great, glorious new beginning for Israel turned into a sharp decline in their spiritual worship. They were too focused on their national pride and security to pay attention to God's desire to be their mighty King and guide them. That, no doubt, sounded spiritually impractical in the real world. Turning points are critical moments to make wise, godly choices, but unfortunately, they can also lead to spiritual complacency. What was the core problem?

Israel shifted from trusting in the Lord's care to being preoccupied with managing the nation. Those involved, eager to move into their newly planned future, failed to see the change in loyalty. Sadly, this same pattern repeats itself with nations, governments, churches, corporations, families, and individuals.

Our decisions always matter!

Now, by God's grace, we find ourselves asking the question: "It started so well. Where did it go wrong?" Have you ever asked that question? Are you asking it now? God highlights the turning point here.

A Bit of History

Instead of following God's leadership, they insisted, "No, but set a king over us!" Why would they ask for such a thing? Did they not recognize the consequences of that decision? We understand their vulnerability; it stemmed from the lack of a clear, desirable transition. Although it seems like a one-time event, God had

already discussed this with them in chapter 8. Chapter 12 serves as their final discouraging reply to God.

“And it came about when Samuel was old that he appointed his sons judges over Israel. ² Now the name of his firstborn was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judging in Beersheba. ³ His sons, however, did not walk in his ways, but turned aside after dishonest gain and took bribes and perverted justice.

⁴ Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah; ⁵ and they said to him, “**Behold**, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations.” ⁶ But the thing was displeasing in the sight of Samuel when they said, “Give us a king to judge us” (1 Sam 8:1-6)

The Israelites, discouraged by the corruption and appointment of Samuel’s unfaithful sons, couldn’t trust God to lead them. Samuel, the aging prophet and priest, quickly disappeared from the scene. They valued how God used Samuel, but he had no one to pass the leadership to, like Moses did with Joshua. We admire their willingness to reject Samuel’s sons’ corruption. Sometimes, we hide a leader’s wrongdoings; this is not right. So while they rejected what they didn’t want, they hadn’t yet learned to see or trust in God’s plans.

Disillusionment leads to blind solutions.

This disillusionment is common among churches and groups that don’t take prayer seriously. Or, their prayers only ask God to bless their plans. Remember how convinced they were? They insisted a king would work best. People must refuse to be mesmerized by gifted individuals or chosen plans and seek God to work through godly leaders.

Three Colossal Mistakes



The Israelites, as a nation, made at least three major mistakes. Each time God's people turned away from Him and His best, the worst, disastrous consequences followed. I will highlight three significant ones.

(1) Rejection at Kadesh after Egypt (40 years) - Numbers 13

God powerfully delivered them from the mighty Egyptian empire. Now, on the brink of the Promised Land, God sent spies to examine its richness. But they lacked faith in conquering the land, even with God's help. They forgot how God had just saved them from Egypt! Their lack of faith led to failure at Kadesh-Barnea, resulting in forty years of wandering in the wilderness (Num 13). God provided for them (i.e., manna), but the delay was unnecessary.

(2) Choosing a king (1000+ years) - 1 Samuel 10

God challenged them to let Him be their King, but they rejected His rule, choosing to be like the world with a physical king. Perhaps, they didn't know the unique way that the Lord brought Samuel into the picture, or maybe they did and couldn't be bothered with God's arrangements.

After all, they faced real-time enemies on their land and at their borders. Samuel would soon die, leaving them without a leader.

Over the next 1000 years, Israel endured many wicked kings and eventually lost their land because of their disobedience.

How often have you felt utterly discouraged by the wicked acts of the Old Testament kings?

(3) Rejecting Jesus their Messiah (2000 years+)

The last major mistake happened when God sent His Son to offer forgiveness and to strongly guide the Israelite nation. However, they lacked patience for someone who told them to love their enemies. They rejected and even killed Jesus the Messiah. The Jewish people continue to face the consequences of this to this day. The Scriptures predict that toward the very end of the ages, Israel will be humbled and finally call on the Lord for help. With all their options gone, they will cry out to God, their Savior. But why not do this sooner? God would have provided for them at the right time, but the severity of the consequences worsened. By rejecting God's solution, they rejected God Himself. They were too focused on their own solutions to consider God's ways. God is so involved in our lives that rejecting His help is essentially rejecting Him.

Application

These uncomfortable questions lead to a central question: "Who can stand before the Lord?" It's not that we shouldn't approach God, but time and again, we find ourselves making wrong choices. Only later do we realize our shortcomings. Luckily, God's mercy is vast. We can choose to leave our desperate situation by coming before the Lord, no matter where we are.

3. God's Selection (1 Sam 10:20-27)

²⁰ Thus Samuel brought all the tribes of Israel near, and the tribe of Benjamin was taken by lot. ²¹ Then he brought the tribe of Benjamin near by its families, and the Matrite family was taken. And Saul the son of Kish was taken; but when they looked for him, he could not be found. ²² Therefore they inquired further of the Lord, "Has the man come here yet?" So the Lord said, "Behold, he is hiding himself by the baggage." ²³ So they ran and took him from there, and when he stood among the people, he was taller than any of the people from his shoulders upward. ²⁴ Samuel said to all the people, "Do you see him whom the Lord has chosen? Surely there is **no one like him among all the people.**" So all the people shouted and said, "**Long live the king!**" (1 Samuel 10:20-24).

Getting What We Want

Samuel followed through with their decision—"Thus Samuel...". God told Samuel to give them what they wanted. "The Lord said to Samuel, 'Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you'" (1 Sam 8:7).

Do you truly want to get what you wish for? What did the Israelites really want? Clarifying our thoughts and desires helps us see our wickedness more clearly. Once again, they rejected God's choice of an earthly king. They rebelled against their mighty and gracious God. When God granted them their king, they fooled themselves with their success, completely unaware of the consequences of rejecting God as their King. Yes, they would be like other nations, but did they realize how that would weaken them?

They wanted someone to protect their nation. Happy with God's choice, they said, "Surely there is no one like him among all the people." The people shouted, "Long live the king!" (10:24). The

rest of 1 Samuel records Samuel's spiritual struggles and the harmful impact this decision had on the kingdom, even on others, such as David.

God knew what they wanted and gave it to them. He didn't trick them but used their request to reveal their foolishness. Earlier, He did this when the Israelites complained about a lack of meat and grumbled to God. He gave them meat, "until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you" (Num 11:18-20). He gave them what they thought would heal their independent spirit, even though He knew it wasn't the best. When we reject God's best, we end up with second-rate options. The choices we make are not always the best, even if they seem good. How many once-successful government, business, and church leaders have become sore points for their groups?

Here are two observations:

- As parents, pastors, mentors, and friends, it's heartbreaking to see those we care about make poor choices. Pray for them.
- Some of us face difficult times because of poor choices. Don't think it's too late. Behind this is a loving God who seeks His people's hearts. Turn back to Him and ask for guidance on what to do next. He'll gladly lead you.

A Kind Head Start (1 Sam 10:25-27)

²⁵ Then Samuel told the people the ordinances of the kingdom, and wrote them in the book and placed it before the Lord. And Samuel sent all the people away, each one to his house. ²⁶ Saul also went to his house at Gibeah; and the valiant men whose hearts God had touched went with him. ²⁷ But certain worthless men said, "How can this one deliver us?" And they despised him and did not bring him any present. But he kept silent" (1 Samuel 10:25-27).

What surprises me is how the Lord chose a tall, well-equipped, strong man, Saul, to be their new king. (Wouldn't you choose a weak, poorly equipped king to teach them a lesson?) The earlier sections remind us that, despite their foolish decision to have a king like the world, God was gracious enough to give them a good king, at least on the outside. He told Samuel to anoint and appoint him. The Lord did it publicly as well to reduce tribal rivalry. Later, Samuel would install Saul as king after his victory when the people's spirits were high. God wished they had chosen Him, but in His patience, He granted them a handsome, tall, strong warrior—someone Samuel respected.⁴ God made the green lights shine brightly for this new dynasty.

A history of God-events lie behind us.



The Israelites had a formidable-looking king-general from a prominent family, but unfortunately, he did not seek God first. This is likely why we are told to pray for our leaders (1 Tim 2:1-2). It's a tough role for them. Their character flaws can lead to compromise and corruption. Samuel began well by giving them their king along with the ordinances, which clarified the rules they were to follow. These were written in a book to remind them and were placed before the Lord. Some suggest it is not the same as Deuteronomy 17:15-17, where God provides a specific

⁴ One author suggested that Saul became part of Samuel's school of prophets.

description because they already had that. I'm not sure that is true. However, it seemed like everyone was in agreement. Perhaps, later on, people would look back and use it to clarify what could or could not be done. The king is powerful but does not have the final say; the prophet still holds his position. The book is probably a blend of both, safely placed in the Lord's presence.

Gibeah's history records some of the most fearless and courageous warriors (Judges 20). The tribe was wiped out due to a purge of their wickedness. Kish's family, possibly Saul's grandfather, must have been among the 600 men who held out by the rock of Rimmon, helping rebuild the tribe of Benjamin (Judges 20:47). "Now there was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish, the son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Becorath, the son of Aphiah, the son of a Benjamin, a mighty man of valor" (1 Sam 9:1).

Division Avoided

Admittedly, choosing new government and military leaders for the first time is a tough task. Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin. Some unknown leaders had difficulty with this. Maybe there was tribal rivalry, but I don't think so because they were described as "worthless" men, people from whom one might expect trouble. We still see such men today! Saul passed two tests that day. First, he followed Samuel's instructions during the meeting. Second, perhaps more challenging, "he kept silent" (1 Sam 10:27)! When someone has just gained power, it's tempting to use it to bring everyone together. He refused to do this. This didn't solve the conflict, but it is noteworthy, suggesting he might be a good king.

Application

Our perception of what we need is often shortsighted, blurred by selfish desires. This is Israel's problem here! When searching for pastors, many initially focus on gifts and degrees. Paul explicitly instructs us to prioritize godly character when choosing leaders, as seen in two places, and explains how it impacts their relationships (1 Tim 3; Titus 1). Character flaws create significant gaps in ministry. This issue will guide us through the remaining chapters of 1 Samuel.

Summary

Our life choices shape our spiritual lives. It's easy to make worldly decisions influenced by those around us, but such choices lead to a dull, struggle-filled spiritual life. It's far better to trust God and His ways, even if they seem confusing or nonsensical. He tests your trust this way to strengthen your faith so He can bless and use you more effectively in this world.

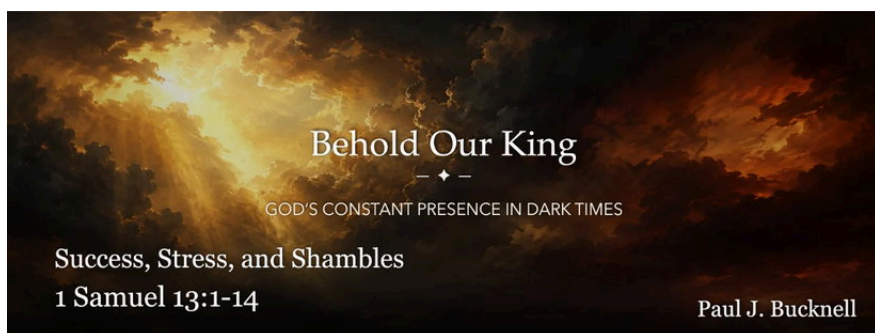
Spiritual Life Points

- Respond to God's pursuit of you.
- Be convinced of His better ways. (faith)
- God works with us where we are at. Seek Him!
- Don't be preoccupied with your plans. Be careful what you seek.
- Repent from any bad decisions.
- Work closely with Him no matter where you are.

Study Questions

1. What did Samuel remind Israel about God's past care, and why was that reminder important?

2. How did Israel's demand for a king amount to rejecting the Lord as king?
3. Why do people sometimes persist in a decision even after receiving clear warnings?
4. How did God continue to guide and support Israel during Saul's public selection?
5. What do Saul's hiding and the contempt of the 'worthless men' reveal about the challenges surrounding his leadership?
6. Where might routine, fear, or preoccupation keep you from recognizing God's better direction?



1 Samuel 13:8-14

The Question of King Saul's Rejection

This study on 1 Samuel 13:8-14 explores why God rejected King Saul and what Saul's failure reveals about waiting, obedience, leadership, and trust in God. Was King Saul saved?

Why?

A major question from 1 Samuel 13 is, "Why did the Lord seem to reject King Saul so quickly?" Does the Lord not show mercy and grace?

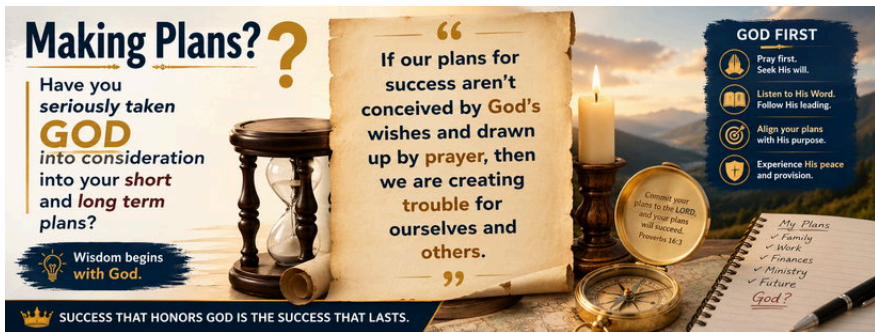
13:8 Now he waited seven days, according to the appointed time set by Samuel, but Samuel did not come to Gilgal; and the people were scattering from him. 9 So Saul said, "Bring to me the burnt offering and the peace offerings." And he offered the burnt offering. 10 And it came about as soon as he finished offering the burnt offering, that behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him and to greet him. 11 But Samuel said, "What have you done?" ... 13 And Samuel said to Saul, "You have acted foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you, for now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. 14 But now your kingdom shall not endure. The Lord has sought out for Himself a

man after His own heart, and the Lord has appointed him as ruler over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you.” (1 Sam 13:8-14).

The Waiting is Never Easy

Saul’s defense and Samuel’s clear accusation show that there is some history behind this action and explain why Samuel waited seven days rather than four or six. This is clarified earlier in 1 Samuel 10.

And it shall be when these signs come to you, do for yourself what the occasion requires; for God is with you. 8 “And you shall go down before me to Gilgal; and behold, I will come down to you to offer burnt offerings and sacrifice peace offerings. You shall wait seven days until I come to you and show you what you should do (1 Sam 10:7-8).



Saul’s guilt stems from his disobedience to Samuel’s clear order, but this doesn’t fully capture the severity of Saul’s sin. It was not merely a struggle for power between two leaders. The accurate understanding comes only through further reflection on how God perceived the situation. The most straightforward answer, at least for theologians or those familiar with the Scriptures, is that Saul, the king, overstepped his bounds by taking on the priest’s responsibility of offering sacrifices.

Discerning Our Roles and Positions

Scripture clearly distinguishes between those who reign and those who serve in the priestly role. Priests like Aaron were not meant to assume leadership roles like Moses (Num 12:1-5). Likewise, kings were not to overstep their boundaries into priestly duties. For example, King Uzziah was struck with leprosy because he dared to make an offering: “But when he became strong, his heart was so proud that he acted corruptly, and he was unfaithful to the LORD his God, for he entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense” (2 Chr 26:16).

The only times these two roles of king and priest are combined are in the Messiah, such as in Melchizedek (Ps. 110:4), or in Jesus Himself, who offered Himself as the Savior. (David might be seen as a forerunner of the Messiah in the Melchizedek priesthood (1 Sam. 21:1-6), but he was not an Aaronic priest.) Separating the offices among men was important to protect the people from corrupt leaders. Only the Messiah could rightfully hold both offices without going astray.

There are other reasons for Saul's rejection. If we carefully examine 1 Samuel 13-15, we see that Saul fails three times, with chapter 13 being just the first. God's rejection should not be viewed as sudden or because the Lord lacked understanding of the situation. We are given three examples of Saul's failures to show why God rejected King Saul.

The second failure occurs in chapter 14. Although the Lord later delivered the Israelites through Jonathan (14:23), Saul cursed everyone from eating until the enemy was defeated. Jonathan, his son and chief general, ate unknowingly but was not executed. Because of Saul's curse, the hungry army greedily ate the food,

causing everyone to sin against the Lord (14:22). Saul's command demonstrated an improper and harsh rule, more like man-made religion than reliance on God's strength. Chapter 15, the third example and the most well-known, shows Saul sparing the best of the Amalekites rather than destroying them as God commanded (15:1-4). Although Saul confessed his sin in 15:24, the Scriptures again state that the Lord rejected Saul from being the anointed king (15:26-29). His decisions revealed his true loyalties.

Identify Our Weaknesses

Saul clearly thought too highly of himself and was unwilling to submit to his God King. He repeatedly disobeyed the Lord's commands. Therefore, we see that chapter 13 was not just an isolated act of ignorance or disobedience, but a reflection of a heart problem that troubled him throughout his life. Although God had helped Saul many times, Saul still chose to disobey the Lord. Once he became king, Saul achieved some success and fame but was unable to follow the Lord's rules and instead acted like a despotic ruler. Chapter 13 spends extra time showing Saul's confidence in himself (13:1-4), which likely stemmed from the victory over the Ammonites and the authority God had given him.

Throughout all of this, we see that the main issue is that Saul fell into the same reckless mindset as the people—placing more confidence in an earthly king than in God, the true King. This shows how Saul, along with the people, rejected their true Lord. Of course, Saul should not have touched the sacrifice, and the king should not have usurped the priestly role, but the core issue is the willingness of a king and his people to follow a man rather than God. In other words, this affair was about trusting someone

other than God the Creator, which is plain idol worship—lifting up a person in God's seat, something more like the anti-Christ.

Instead of the king and people rejoicing in their God, God would remain outside their religious facade. They could not see His provision, accept His laws as good, or love Him with all their hearts. This is why the Lord would choose another who had a heart after Him: "But now your kingdom shall not endure. The LORD has sought out for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has appointed him as ruler over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you" (13:14). God rejected Saul, just as He rejected Eli, and would choose someone rejected by others—David, a type for Jesus the King, whom the Lord would later send.

The message of this passage applies to our lives. God desires a people who find joy in Him and prioritize obedience to Him. We are here serving God in the roles He has assigned us. The main focus in life, then, is not about power or outward success, but about living a life of obedience to the Lord. Our confidence should be in God's guidance rather than our own plans. Our calling is not to seem 'important' but to be genuine in the Lord's eyes by submitting plans, roles, timing, and measures of success to God. If we can keep worldly things from interfering with our goal of pleasing the Lord, we will find true success.

**SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE:
CONSCIOUS ABIDING**

- God helps us due to our prayers / reliance
- God answers, we succeed, and are thankful
- Persist thanking God in everything
- Regularly remind ourselves that God is good and the source of all our good
- We purposely follow the Lord's leading

TRUST • PRAY • THANK • REMEMBER • FOLLOW

	KNOWLEDGE God gives wisdom to guide our path.
	OPPORTUNITY He opens doors no one can shut.
	HEALTH He sustains and renews our bodies.
	STRENGTH He empowers us for every challenge.
	WEALTH He provides all we truly need.

Reflective Thoughts

1. Do your decisions reveal admiration for God or for self?
2. How do you celebrate success? Is it through humble prayer, praise, and service, or via parties, Facebooking, and Instagram?
3. What would it take for you to develop this spiritual discipline of “Conscious Abiding”? Will you?

THE RISING OF THE KINGS

1 & 2 Samuel

A Practical Exposition



1 Samuel 14:1-2

The Spirit of Faith

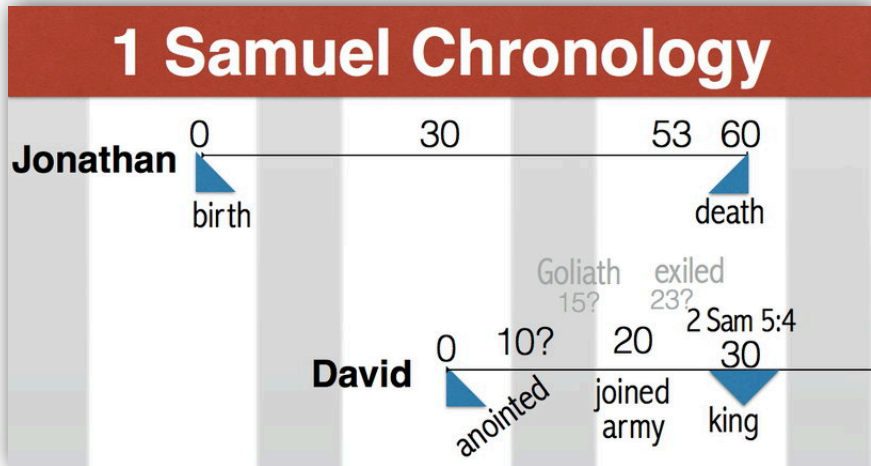
"Now the day came that Jonathan, the son of Saul, said to the young man who was carrying his armor, "Come and let us cross over to the Philistines' garrison that is on yonder side." But he did not tell his father. 2 And Saul was staying in the outskirts of Gibeah under the pomegranate tree which is in Migron. And the people who were with him were about six hundred men" (1 Sam 14:1-2).

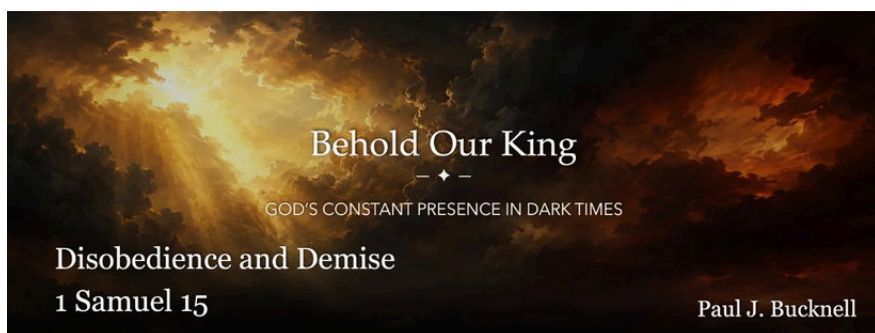
No wonder Jonathan and David later became friends! David's bold fight with Goliath reminded him how God had guided him to fight the massive Philistine army one-handedly (along with his armor bearer). Facing impossible odds, they both shared the same spirit of faith in what the Living God could do.

Jonathan was confronting a powerful sense of immobility as he watched his father do nothing, brooding over his mistakes that messed up his life, while the army prepared to attack the people of Israel. We see Jonathan's faith in action in verse 6, "Come and let us cross over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; perhaps the LORD will work for us, for the LORD is not restrained to save by many or by few."

Although Jonathan was about 30 years older than David (see chart below), they shared a similar faith in what God can do in

desperate situations. What if all of God's people now rose up with this spirit of faith in our marvelous God? We would also see God break through our greatest enemies of His love and advance His kingdom to the farthest corners of the world. What are we waiting for?





1 Samuel 15

King Saul's Disobedience & Demise

The biblical historical books are filled with powerful examples of how God interacts with humanity. 1 Samuel 15 is no exception. Here we see how responding wrongly to the Lord in one area can affect the rest of life if the problem is not corrected. A sluggish heart toward the things of God can influence any of us. By examining King Saul's choices, we can reflect on our own hearts and decisions. Jeremiah says, "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; Who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). Honest self-examination can help keep us from following Saul's path. Below is a brief two-question test.

Evaluate whether you spend time with the Lord daily and whether you genuinely communicate with Him. If you spend time in His Word but feel bored, then you might be lukewarm. If you don't meet with Him regularly, then you are not very close. If you haven't met with the Lord in His Word for months, then you might be distant.

Let's also assess our spiritual lives regarding the compromises we might make.

1- I don't really care what God thinks. I do my best, and He needs to accept me for who I am.

3 - I might compromise, but try not to—I don't want to be legalistic, you know.

5 - I try not to compromise, but sometimes do. It really isn't a big deal. No real confession or restoration.

7 - I don't compromise, or if I do, I spontaneously confess my sins and draw near to God.

A Soul Test

➡ How close or far are you to the Lord?

1 - Rather distant | 3 - Not too close | 5 - Lukewarm | 7 - Eagerly growing

➡ Do you compromise what God expects of you?

1- Don't care | 3 - Compromise. No big deal | 5 - I try not | 7 - I don't compromise/repent

So, how did you do? It's important for us to learn how to self-monitor our spiritual lives. A car is equipped with warning lights; when one lights up, it signals that something needs attention. If we want to stay spiritually alive, we must be attentive to certain signs in our personal lives. Through Saul's life, we can gain insights into how a person ignores these 'red light' warnings and drifts away from the Lord.

❖ Introductory remarks: Was Saul a believer

Before we proceed, we should acknowledge the debate over whether Saul was truly a believer. The reason some believe he was genuine is the heart change God granted him.

"Then it happened when he turned his back to leave Samuel, God changed his heart; and all those signs came about on that day" (1 Samuel 10:9).

Opposed to this view is the idea that he was not a genuine believer. If one adopts this later view, we should be careful not to use this passage as proof of how a person loses his salvation. There is too little certainty—meaning too much debate—about

whether he truly was a believer. I would be comfortable seeing him as someone who never came to know the Lord, but the way God clearly worked in his heart forces me to see him as a believer who hardened his heart. When God changed his heart, it was for the better. This is the clearest reference to regeneration that we can find. Other Old Testament references include those which speak of a 'circumcised heart' (Deuteronomy 30:6) or 'new heart' (Ezekiel 36:26). The new heart represents a new nature along with a new set of desires to please God (cf. Romans 8:1-8). The reason this heart change is mentioned here is that Saul's life looked so much like that of an unbeliever—he simply kept disobeying God. God's desire is clear.



"Oh that they had such a heart in them, that they would fear Me, and keep all My commandments always, that it may be well with them and with their sons forever" (Deuteronomy 5:29).

Remember that, because of his important position, God scrutinized his life more closely. The Lord wanted a king who would learn from Him and rely on Him. Saul had done many things right. However, God pointed out the areas where King Saul disobeyed so we can see the consequences of disobedience and understand that Saul was not the long-promised King who would bring lasting help to Israel.

We will interpret this passage by viewing Saul as a believer and examining how he failed to fulfill God's purposes. God worked in his life despite his poor personal decisions, such as helping him defeat the Amalekites. We will find many points of application in 1 Samuel 15. If someone insists on viewing Saul as an unbeliever, they should still notice how Saul rejected the truth given to him.

Please do not interpret this as proof that a person once saved can lose salvation. We need clear doctrinal passages to draw important doctrinal insights that shape our perspectives.

A) The Crisis: Opportunity and Temptation (1 Sam 15:1-3)

“Then Samuel said to Saul, “The LORD sent me to anoint you as king over His people, over Israel; now therefore, listen to the words of the LORD. “Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he set himself against him on the way while he was coming up from Egypt. ‘Now go and strike Amalek and utterly destroy all that he has, and do not spare him; but put to death both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey” (1 Samuel 15:1-3).

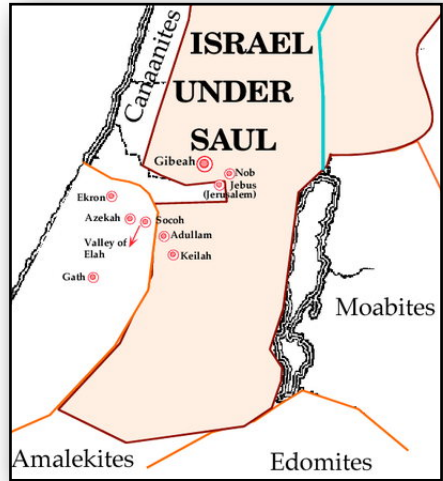
Every command the Lord gives us provides an opportunity to either please or displease Him. We can respond with love or show dishonor. Certainly, the Lord could have created things differently and forced obedience on us, but that is not His approach with humanity. This is one instance where Saul could have either pleased or displeased the Lord. These chances to please God appear in both big and small ways.

As a leader like King Saul, your decisions greatly influence others. Be mindful to observe the choices you make throughout the day. Are your decisions intentionally meant to please the Lord? Are you aware of where you might be tempted to compromise? The historical context behind these verses helps us truly understand the lessons they offer.

❖ Historical Context of the Amalekites

God remembered what the Amalekites had done to Israel long ago, and their punishment was very harsh. What did they do to

deserve God's severe judgment? Fortunately, this passage gives us some information about that or clues pointing to it. The Lord says that His severity was because of Amalek's opposition to Israel when they left Egypt. This happened around 500 years earlier, when Moses led Israel out of Egypt (around 1500 B.C.). Saul ruled from about 1040 to 1000 B.C. Let's examine this incident with the Amalekites more closely.



The Scriptures tell us that the Amalekites lived in the Negev, south of the land that would become the land of Judah.

"Amalek is living in the land of the Negev and the Hittites and the Jebusites and the Amorites are living in the hill country, and the Canaanites are living by the sea and by the side of the Jordan" (Numbers 13:29).

The Amalekites have a long history in the Scriptures, first mentioned in Genesis 14:7. Saul, empowered by God, would eliminate this nation's influence during the battle. The Amalekites would not be listed among the other nations to be judged by the prophets. They were completely destroyed as a nation.

A little history

Back when Moses led Israel out of Egypt, the Amalekites attacked the Israelites. This is the well-known account in Exodus 17, where the Israelites experienced victory as long as Moses kept his hands raised. When he lowered them, the Amalekites would begin to

win. Afterward, the Lord spoke very strongly, issuing strong condemnations.

“Then the LORD said to Moses, “Write this in a book as a memorial, and recite it to Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven” (And Moses built an altar, and named it The LORD is My Banner; and he said, “The LORD has sworn; the LORD will have war against Amalek from generation to generation”” (Exodus 17:14-16).

The Lord never forgot His words. Listen to what He said in Deuteronomy. God commanded them to fight the Amalekites once they were secure.

“Remember what Amalek did to you along the way when you came out from Egypt, how he met you along the way and attacked among you all the stragglers at your rear when you were faint and weary; and he did not fear God. “Therefore it shall come about when the LORD your God has given you rest from all your surrounding enemies, in the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven; you must not forget” (Deuteronomy 25:17-19).

Nevertheless, people will ask many interconnected questions, making it difficult to respond.

- Why did God want to kill them all off, even the women and children?
- Why did God kill off the animals? Isn't that a bit overkill?
- If God is a God of love, why does He carry such a long-lasting grudge? Are we not to forgive?

Many believers share these questions, but often do not know how to answer them. Let me provide a response. God is a holy God and must judge all people. Everyone is accountable to Him. Their

arrogance when they attacked the Israelites on their way to the Promised Land reached a point where God would soon need to judge them. Notice the pride displayed in these verses: "How he (Amalek) set himself against him (Israel)." They were not humbled by witnessing Israel defeat Egypt or crossing the Red Sea.

The Lord was patient, just as He was with the Amorites (Genesis 15:16). In this instance, God waited five hundred years, but they did not repent. He hoped they would turn from their pride, but they kept resisting. The time had arrived for this nation's judgment. When God judges, He removes. Death is the consequence. Destruction would no longer be postponed.

God's people are called to resemble God. While we should not judge in this area, we are to imitate His loving kindness and forgive. God is responsible for judging and punishing all injustice and rebellion, but He also creates opportunities for salvation within these situations. We are to join the Lord in bringing people into forgiveness through Jesus while we have the chance. God will justly address all wrongdoing. He often delays His judgment to allow for salvation. Our role is to forgive and love, reflecting God's kindness and leaving vengeance to Him. This sets the stage for the lesson in this chapter. King Saul is given a chance to obey the Lord. Although it may involve a larger scope or a very different context—such as war—than what He asks of us, He presents us with actions we should take. As we proceed, we will see how he responded.

B) The Response: Tolerating a Little Sin (1 Sam 15:4-9)

"Then Saul summoned the people and numbered them in OT, 200,000 foot soldiers and 10,000 men of Judah. And Saul came to

the city of Amalek, and set an ambush in the valley. And Saul said to the Kenites, "Go, depart, go down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them; for you showed kindness to all the sons of Israel when they came up from Egypt" (So the Kenites departed from among the Amalekites. So Saul defeated the Amalekites, from Havilah as you go to Shur, which is east of Egypt. And he captured Agag the king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword.⁹ But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were not willing to destroy them utterly; but everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed" (1 Samuel 15:4-9).

Verses 4-8 highlight at least three key ways King Saul obeyed the Lord. First, Saul quickly gathered a large army and went to fight the Amalekites. Why did the author distinguish between foot soldiers and the men of Judah? Maybe the first group was made up of actual soldiers, while the others were nearby men supporting the main army. Second, in verse 6, during the battle, we see a compassionate side of Saul. Instead of destroying everyone in enemy territory, he remembered God's priorities. When Saul paused the battle and let the Kenites escape, he sacrificed the element of surprise and speed. The Kenites had shown kindness to Israel when they left Egypt—Kenite was actually Moses' father-in-law. The Kenites treated Israel well, unlike the Amalekites. Many Kenites later moved to live with the Israelites, though some were in Amalekite territory just south of Judah.

"And the descendants of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, went up from the city of palms with the sons of Judah, to the wilderness of Judah which is in the south of Arad; and they went and lived with the people" (Judges 1:16).

Third, the Israelites defeated the Amalekites thoroughly, reaching near the border of Egypt in the Wilderness of Shur, an area resembling mountains. Saul destroyed the people. To reach the edge of Egypt, he had to cross difficult terrain for a long distance. He obeyed and fought well. This establishment of the kingdom was part of a lifetime of work, as seen in 1 Samuel 14:47-48.

However, verse 9 portrays a negative tone about the battle. Saul compromised by not fully destroying everything, such as King Agag, and preserving the best animals when everything should have been destroyed. To highlight this inconsistency, the end of verse 9 states, "Everything despised and worthless, ... they utterly destroyed." Someone is watching our actions– the author noticed this inconsistency, and God observed it. Overall, Saul took some significant steps of obedience; he bravely fought the enemy as he was supposed to. However, he overlooked smaller issues, such as sparing the king and not killing all the livestock.

C) The Test: Differing Opinions (1 Sam 15:10-15)

"Then the word of the LORD came to Samuel, saying, ¹¹ "I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not carried out My commands. And Samuel was distressed and cried out to the LORD all night. ¹² And Samuel rose early in the morning to meet Saul; and it was told Samuel, saying, "Saul came to Carmel, and behold, he set up a monument for himself, then turned and proceeded on down to Gilgal. ¹³ And Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, "Blessed are you of the LORD! I have carried out the command of the LORD." ¹⁴ But Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" ¹⁵ And Saul said, "They have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the

best of the sheep and oxen, to sacrifice to the LORD your God; but the rest we have utterly destroyed" (1 Samuel 15:10-16).

In verses 10-15, we see a clear contrast between what Saul thought about himself and the battle and what God thought of the victory. Before Samuel confronted Saul, the Lord met with Samuel. What Samuel heard from God devastated him. The Hebrew word translated 'distressed' here is more often rendered as 'angry' or 'kindled'. He was clearly very displeased and angry with Saul's willingness to disobey the Lord and not fully carry out His commands. Saul believed he was king rather than treating God as the king. However, Saul saw the situation as a great victory in which he obeyed the Lord. Note his words, "I have carried out the command of the LORD!" (1 Samuel 15:13). Before going to Gilgal, where Samuel was, he set up a monument to himself. This shows that Saul truly thought a lot about the victory. From an external perspective, it was an impressive victory. Everyone was very happy. Saul was pleased with the victory and himself, so he built the monument. This view of himself was very different from God's view of Saul.

➡ Observations of Saul's wrong assumptions

- He believed that a good heart—one that sacrifices—would reduce any actual disobedience.
- He believed partial obedience could be interpreted as obedience.
- He believed God was pleased with His victory and that the other issues were of no importance.

We wonder how God's perspective can be so different from Saul's. We then ask if God views us the same way. How can we avoid such illusions?

D) The Excuse: Shifts Blame (1 Sam 15:16-23)

"Then Samuel said to Saul, "Wait, and let me tell you what the LORD said to me last night." And he said to him, "Speak." And Samuel said, "Is it not true, though you were little in your own eyes, you were made the head of the tribes of Israel? And the LORD anointed you king over Israel, and the LORD sent you on a mission, and said, 'Go and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are exterminated.'" 'Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD, but rushed upon the spoil and did what was evil in the sight of the LORD?"

Then Saul said to Samuel, "I did obey the voice of the LORD, and went on the mission on which the LORD sent me, and have brought back Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. "But the people took some of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the choicest of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the LORD your God at Gilgal (1 Samuel 15:16-21).

It seems Saul was eager to hear what the Lord said to Samuel last night. Saul said, "Speak." He believed God would praise his actions and his defeat of the Amalekites. A sense of delusion took hold of Saul during his disobedience, as he thought so highly of his deeds that he believed others couldn't think or see differently. Samuel's response was very different from what Saul expected. First, Samuel explained how God created Saul—an unknown figure—to lead the tribes of Israel. Then, the Lord appointed him as king. God even sent him on a mission to destroy the Amalekites. Samuel pointed out two failures of Saul: (1) He didn't completely wipe out the Amalekites—King Agag was still alive, and (2) out of greed, the people spared the best livestock instead of killing everything. Saul still convinced himself he obeyed the Lord, seemingly unable to fully understand Samuel's perspective. He

claims he obeyed the Lord and didn't let them escape. Agag is right there, captured.

Regarding the animals, he begins to use 'they' to refer to the people because the conversation might turn sour. But they, he said, kept the animals so they could offer a special sacrifice to the Lord at Gilgal. He is clearly hinting at why he brought them. Saul rejects the idea that they were greedy and presents their bringing of livestock as a very good thing: "To sacrifice to the Lord your God at Gilgal." It's quite possible that Saul was trying to make the best of a bad situation. He didn't control them earlier (perhaps he didn't know how), but at least now he managed to persuade them to bring many to Gilgal for an offering.

The big question is whether Saul truly believed what he was saying. I think he did. He was so excited about the victory that other concerns were really insignificant. This was a major battle, and he led it all in obedience to the Lord.

Is it possible that Saul was hiding his actions? Did Saul truly consider the sin he had committed? There are two ways to deal with sin. Usually, those who are genuinely sorry are struggling with sin throughout the process. They are aware of the standards and confront it first in their conscience and then in their decisions. When faced, they humble themselves and admit their sin. They have been very aware of it.

Others, like Saul, I believe, are not paying attention to the details. They are self-absorbed. He was focused on God's mission—to defeat the Amalekites. He was again fighting for the Lord. He paid little attention to whether killing King Agag or letting the people keep livestock was right or wrong. If he did consider it, he dismissed it easily with some ego-boosting justification. In Saul's

mind, he thought he was doing the Lord a favor by bringing Agag and offering sacrifices that made up for any possible trouble. He belittled the seriousness of the sin.

It was at this point that Samuel spoke some powerful words.

And Samuel said, "Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He has also rejected you from being king" (1 Samuel 15:22-23).

These words strongly rebuke Saul. What he sees as trivial, God views as very important. The Lord steps forward and makes it clear what matters most to Him. (We will see more of this in the next chapter when He chooses a new king.) Let's clarify what each of the key statements means.

➔ **Defines the importance of obedience**

The Lord values obedience more than burnt offerings and sacrifices. In Saul's case, this does not mean that burnt offerings and sacrifices are unimportant. If Saul genuinely wanted to show dedication, which these offerings represented, he should have used his own sheep instead of stealing from God. God clearly states that having good intentions or a good heart does not replace complete obedience.

➔ **Explains the heart of disobedience**

In a sharp burst of pointed words, the Lord explains the real issue with 'a little' disobedience. Rebellion is disobedience because it involves demanding one's own will over God's. "I prefer to do it my way, thank you!" Rebellion, he continues, is just like the sin of

divination. Divination is often translated as witchcraft. It is not a subtle word. He not only accuses Saul of rebellion but also of witchcraft. Perhaps it means that Saul treats God as a manipulative tool to get what he wants. All he needed was to hear an omen from Samuel that he should fight the Amalekites, and he went ahead. But there was no sense that he was on God's mission. Saul was in charge. This is where the term insubordination applies. King Saul lived as if he were not under the Lord's authority. This is iniquity and idolatry, and because of this, God rejected Saul from being king.

➔ **Observations**

- Saul didn't just make a simple mistake; he acted as if he weren't under God's guidance.
- He believed he could handle things fine. God was simply another tool to get what he wanted.
- If a leader is not willing to risk his leadership to carry out God's command, then everyone will suffer.
- A person's lack of reverence for the Lord is evident in not fulfilling their God-given duty.
- God considers incomplete or partial obedience as disobedience.
- Outward victory is not to be understood as inner victory.

E) The Confession: Reveals his Superficial Heart (1 Sam 15:24-31)

"Then Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned; I have indeed transgressed the command of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people and listened to their voice. "Now therefore,

please pardon my sin and return with me, that I may worship the LORD" (But Samuel said to Saul, "I will not return with you; for you have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel" (And as Samuel turned to go, Saul seized the edge of his robe, and it tore. So Samuel said to him, "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today, and has given it to your neighbor who is better than you. "And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should change His mind." Then he said, "I have sinned; but please honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel, and go back with me, that I may worship the LORD your God." So Samuel went back following Saul, and Saul worshiped the LORD" (1 Samuel 15:24-31).

Confessions are important because they can lead to reconciliation. Why was there no reconciliation here? Evidently, Saul had not done so properly. Confessions are crucial for reconciliation. Why was there no reconciliation in this case? Clearly, Saul had not truly humbled himself. Have you ever said, "Sorry," but not genuinely meant it? Sometimes, a confession is just a polite gesture or a convenient way to escape a situation that might otherwise be quite uncomfortable.



Have you ever said, "Sorry," but not truly meant it? The apology was more of a polite gesture, professional cour way out of a situation that could have been quite unpleasant. Notice Saul's

confession. What did he confess? He reveals, under some pressure from Samuel, that he was influenced by public opinion. He was afraid of the people and followed their voice. Fear is a powerful force. Some might immediately object to Saul's confession, thinking it has nothing to do with sin, especially not one that would cost him his kingdom. They argue that fear is a natural response, and he simply couldn't help it. Interestingly, amid accusations of rebellion, witchcraft, insubordination, and iniquity, he talks about how the people caused him to sin. This echoes another chapter from the Garden of Eden, where blame shifts from oneself to others.

How was Saul's confession received? Not very well. Samuel refused Saul's request to accompany him. It seems Saul accidentally tore his robe, which became a prophetic sign that Saul's kingdom would be taken from him and given to someone else. This event paves the way for the next key figure in the Book of 1 Samuel.

Does God change?

Samuel presents a powerful description of God's unchanging nature. Samuel wanted Saul to understand that God would not shift on this matter.

"And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should change His mind" (1 Samuel 15:29).

Those who pay close attention to the Scriptures will not quickly pass this passage without gaining a clearer understanding of the person and nature of God's unchangeableness. What does 1 Samuel 15:29 really say about God, or was it just a quick statement to wake King Saul from his game? After all, the Lord

does sometimes change His mind, doesn't He? It states that God 'repents' from a certain course of action.

"Perhaps they will listen and everyone will turn from his evil way, that I may repent of the calamity which I am planning to do to them because of the evil of their deeds" (Jeremiah 26:3).

God is all-wise. He perceives events in time from an eternal perspective. He knows all things. God does not change His mind as humans do. However, He speaks and acts in ways that accommodate human limitations. God's statement to Saul simply indicated that He would not change His decision to take the kingship away from him. Saul didn't seem to care, which perhaps explains why God said He would not change His mind. It is because Saul had become hardened. He was unwilling to change and was content just to remain king a little longer.

Verses like Jeremiah 26:3 do not suggest that God changes; rather, they demonstrate that God's way of dealing with a people depends on how they respond to Him. God's policies are consistent. If humans change, God may adjust His approach, but overall, His policy remains the same. God desires to pour out His grace, but the people's hardened hearts build a barrier in their relationship with the living God.

God's ways of dealing with humans are consistent and clear. He has revealed them to us. He works in people's lives, hoping they will turn to Him so He can pour out more grace. Even for the hardened person (Are you hardened?), He desires that we change so He can adjust His way of dealing with us. These verses do not portray an unkind God who wishes harm upon us. Quite the opposite. He patiently waits for us to change.

When we focus on external matters, we minimize internal ones.

In this case, the meaning was always quite clear. Saul was not supposed to try to change God's mind. God was determined on this. Saul didn't really care. He did not repent to gain God's favor. So, what does Saul do instead? He seeks Samuel's presence to create a sense of decorum. Everything looked great on the surface—a huge victory, a monument. But inwardly, everything had fallen apart. Saul did not care, at least enough to change.

➡ Observations

Sometimes, people genuinely don't care about their relationship with God. They are so distorted by corrupted ideas about God and themselves that they fall into the devil's ways. They are willing to abandon God just to maintain appearances before others.

Saul, like us, can change; he just doesn't want to. Saul was caught up in the present, worried about what others thought of him, and could never move past it. The future was overshadowed by the present, so he couldn't make good long-term decisions.

Saul was too focused on himself to consider the people's well-being. He did some good things, but the way he did them drained the best from himself and the people.

F) The Future: Arrogance Perpetuates Problems (1 Sam 15:32-35)

"Then Samuel said, "Bring me Agag, the king of the Amalekites" (And Agag came to him cheerfully. And Agag said, "Surely the bitterness of death is past" (But Samuel said, "As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women"). And Samuel hewed Agag to pieces before the LORD at

Gilgal. Then Samuel went to Ramah, but Saul went up to his house at Gibeah of Saul. And Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death; for Samuel grieved over Saul. And the LORD regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel" (1 Samuel 15:32-35).

Improvements can occur, but resistance to necessary changes negates those improvements. Superficial adjustments indicate that a person does not genuinely believe in God's ways as the best. Notice how things changed over time because of Saul's hardened and unrepentant heart.

1. Disconnected from God: Saul did not obey God (no repentance 32-33).
2. Disconnected from God's people: Samuel's relationship with Saul worsened (34-35a).
3. Disconnected from life purpose: God regretted giving Saul the kingship (35).

Changes can happen, but we often resist the important changes that could truly make a difference. We tend to prefer surface-level adjustments because we do not genuinely believe that God's ways are best. Notice several consequences of Saul's hardened heart.

1) Disconnected from God: Saul did not obey God (no repentance, 32-33).

We see no evidence that Saul changed his ways even after acknowledging his evil. He didn't bother to finish off Agag with the sword; he simply didn't care. Samuel had to do it himself. The greed shown by the people could lead to serious problems for God's people. They might think, "We can disobey God and still get something better." After all, they kept the stolen animals. Saul

never truly repented, which keeps him and God in a constant stalemate that only worsens. Saul never truly humbled himself. He might have, but he didn't. His recent victory gave him enough earthly power to hold the kingdom firmly for a while. He didn't believe he really needed God.

Application

Reflect on your life to identify areas where you've made compromises or mishandled situations. Did you only offer superficial confessions? How did you show remorse? How should Saul have repented in this situation? The key is to focus on building a right relationship with God rather than feeling embarrassed when making things right. If you have stolen, you need to return what you took. If you have lied, the truth must be revealed.

2) Samuel's relationship with Saul went sour.

It is very unfortunate that this confrontation resulted in a broken relationship. However, unrepentant hearts often worsen relationships within the church. Previously, Samuel was highly respected. Now Saul would only accept him if he stayed out of his way (cf. 16:2). Because Saul refused to see Samuel, the entire kingdom of Israel was deprived of God's gracious guidance and support. The victory made Saul appear so great in the eyes of the people that he felt he no longer needed Samuel or God's grace through the priesthood and prophetic roles Samuel filled. This is a very sad portrayal of a hardened man. Notice that one reason Samuel was reluctant to see Saul was that he mourned for him. He was grieving for Saul. Samuel longed for Saul to change, but Saul never returned with a humble heart.

3) Lastly, we see that God regretted Saul's kingship.

Saul would lose his kingship, and it would be taken away from his family. This did not happen suddenly. God does not seem to be in a rush to make it happen immediately. The whole situation was not unexpected. God warned about this earlier through Samuel, even before Saul became king (1 Samuel 8) or when he was installed (1 Samuel 12). These warnings do not make things any easier. It's like a parent warning a grown child, but the son ignores the warning and harms himself and others by failing to pay attention. We cannot control others' decisions; we can only influence them. God did. He kept Samuel right beside Saul from day one, but Saul rejected that support. His heart was not fully committed.

God's Regret

Twice in 1 Samuel 15, the Lord regrets making Saul king.

"I regret that I have made Saul king" (15:11).

"The Lord regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel" (15:35)

This raises questions, since God previously stated that He did not want kings in Israel. The question circles back to the original one: "If God did not want other kings in Israel, why did He allow them at all?" If He didn't want them, then why permit their rule? God, in His mysterious ways, allows humans to follow their own paths even when it's not best. He will judge them and intervene at times, but in other cases, like this one, He permits Saul to make foolish decisions.

More importantly, these phrases help us understand how God views all of this. 1 Samuel 15:35 was written to confirm the Lord's

strong intention to do good for Israel. He genuinely wanted the greatest blessing for them, but because of their stubbornness (which He had warned them about), there was little real hope for that. Even when the Lord made Saul king, He actively worked in Saul's life through many prophecies to establish his kingship, and He even provided the best mentor in Samuel. God was there to do good, but Saul chose to do evil. God openly shows His grief over the entire situation.

➔ **Observations**

- Was there any hope for Saul? If so, how?
- Samuel's heart was with the Lord, and he mourned the entire situation. Reflect on Samuel's life, especially in light of the leadership Israel experienced.
- Describe the various stages. Why would that increase Samuel's grief?

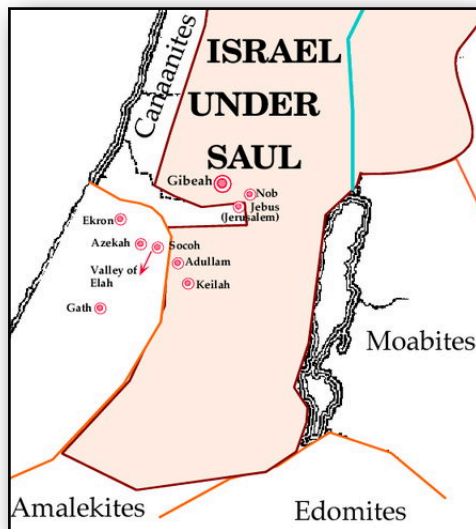
Conclusion

Disaster awaits anyone who dismisses God's commands. What are the signs of backsliding evident in Saul's life? At any moment, Saul could have chosen to repent. Instead, he refused and became a broken, sorrowful man in authority, which led to moral decline among God's people. Saul offers a clear yet tragic example of what happens when someone prioritizes outward success while neglecting inner character growth. They become exhausted, and their inner life can no longer handle external pressures, resulting in collapse. The cycle of decline is outlined in the progression below.

Opportunities > Temptations > Pride > Denial > Consequences > Hardness

Five signs of foolish decision-making

- He concentrated on the present to the exclusion of the future.
- He believed God was pleased with His victory, even though he overlooked other issues.
- He thought that good intentions (sacrifice) made up for small compromises.
- He believed that God was just a part of his life rather than being his life.
- He believed that success was more important than maintaining the right relationship with God and others.



Study Questions

1. What did God command Saul to do, and in what ways did Saul only partially obey?

2. How did Saul's evaluation of his conduct differ from God's evaluation?
3. What did Saul's monument, excuses, and blame-shifting reveal about his heart?
4. What does "to obey is better than sacrifice" teach about religious activity without obedience?
5. How did fear of the people influence Saul's choices?
6. Why was Saul's confession inadequate, and what consequences followed?
7. Where are you tempted to substitute partial obedience, good intentions, or public appearance for wholehearted obedience?

1 Samuel 17:1-54

A Bible Study on Faith in the God of Israel

Two steps are needed to face the world and its challenges:

- (1) Not being caught off guard by the challenges that enter our lives and
- (2) Develop the confidence needed to fight and win.

A. Challenges to Our Faith (1 Sam 17:1-25)

1 "Now the Philistines gathered their armies for battle. 4 And there came out from the camp of the Philistines a champion named Goliath. 8 He stood and shouted at the ranks of Israel, "Why have you come out to draw up for battle? Am I not a Philistine and are you not servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves and let him come down to me. 9 If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants. But if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us." 10 And the Philistine said, "I defy the ranks of Israel this day. Give me a man that we may fight together. 11. When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid. 12. Now David was the son of an Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah, named Jesse, who had eight sons. In the days of Saul the man was already old and advanced in age. 13. The three oldest sons of Jesse had followed Saul to the battle ... 14. David was the youngest. 15 ... but David went back and forth from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem. 16. For forty days the Philistine came forward and took his stand, morning and evening. 21. And Israel and the Philistines drew up for battle, army against army. 22. And David left the things in charge of the keeper of the baggage and ran to the

ranks and went and greeted his brothers. 23. As he talked with them, behold the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name, came up out of the ranks of the Philistines and spoke the same words as before. And David heard them. 24. All the men of Israel when they saw the man, fled from him and were much afraid. 25. And the men of Israel said, "Have you seen this man who has come up? Surely he has come up to defy Israel. And the king will enrich the man who kills him great riches and will give him his daughter and make his father's house free in Israel."

1. Please describe the scene here. What part of the scene would you best be represented by?
2. What challenges did Israel face?
3. What personal challenges did David face?
4. What are the purposes for the challenges that enter our lives? (This assumes God controls what we face each day.)
5. Name one or more areas that you have improperly handled. Why did you mishandle it?
6. What is your biggest challenge now? How are you handling it? With faith?

Summary

There was a personal struggle or battle David had to face even before he could go against Goliath. Discouragements, derailing comments, and doubts of all kinds bombard us, preventing us from considering the fights ahead.

B. Strengthening Our Faith in God (1 Sam 17:26-54)

26. And David said to the men who stood by him, "What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach of Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he

should defy the armies of the living God?"...32. And David said to Saul, "Let no man's heart fail because of him. Your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." ...36. Your servant has struck down both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God." 37. And David said, "The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine."

42. And when the Philistine saw David he disdained him, for he was but a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance. 43. And the Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. 44. The Philistine said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the beasts of the field." 45. Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. 46. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, 47. and that all this assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hand." 48. When the Philistine arose and came and drew near to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. 49. And David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone and slung it and struck the Philistine on his forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell on his face to the ground."

7. How did David handle the reproach from Goliath (17:42-47)?
8. How do you personally deal with disregard from others? Do people's attitudes or words toward you influence how you manage a situation or relationship?

9. How did Goliath's unbelief in the living God affect his life and words?
10. How could David trust the slingshot? David's seeming weakness became the very way God strengthened Him.
11. Was this more a physical battle or a spiritual battle? Explain.

"The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine."

12. What weaknesses do we have in our marriage, parenting, ministry, and work that we can use to show off God's glory? How does it practically work?
13. What are some things that must be dealt with that would hinder you from living by a vibrant faith?

Conclusion

Life presents many challenges. We all face them, but not everyone experiences them in the same way. Some are caught off guard, while others give up. We can all find encouragement in David's faith here, trusting God for grace to overcome every challenge we encounter, even the great battles that hinder others' faith.

1 Samuel 17:55-18:9

A Bible Study on Success

Do you view success as an 'unspiritual' pursuit or at least something that might interfere with our closeness to God? While success can pose additional dangers and temptations, God sometimes places His faithful people in these roles. David was not born into this position but earned it through his faithfulness, humility, courage, and God's presence. These same qualities are crucial for maintaining a close relationship with God.

A. The Upstart (17:55-58)

The young man returns as a great warrior. His fame, courage, and skill immediately convince King Saul of David's worth. King Saul cannot understand why General Abner didn't notice this young man's talent earlier. Still, the head of the Philistine giant was in David's hand. King Saul needed to reward him as he had promised (1 Sam. 17:25).

1. What brought David to the court? (Describe the context)

2* Do you think General Abner felt threatened by King Saul's questioning (55)? Why?

3* David walks in with the giant's head in his hand. What things contributed to David's victory? Name some feelings you think David might have felt as he entered there?

4* How do you respond to victory? Think of one or two victories (any kind) in your life.

B. The Impression (18:1-5)

Everyone seemed captivated by David's new role. The town enjoyed the fresh gossip, especially now that they were free from war. The court was uplifted by the presence of this brave man. Even King Saul made his presence a permanent fixture. Jonathan found a true friend in David. This young prince quickly opened up to this rugged yet simple man. It was a promising start for David, even though it was easy to forget God.

1. What brought on this friendship between Jonathan and David (1)?
2. Why did Jonathan make a covenant with David (3)?
3. List the things given at the making of the covenant or formal commitment between Jonathan and David. *What was strange about it?
4. King Saul really liked David's style of victory. He sent him to different places to fight. What else did King Saul do for David (5)?
5. Do you think it is good to think about what impression people might have about you?
6. Why or why not? One of the standards of a leader in the church is to have a good reputation outside of the church (1 Tim. 3:7). Is this any different from having a good impression on others?

C. The Challenge (18:6-9)

The background is provided, making the rest of the Book of Samuel clear. The king becomes jealous of the new superstar. The people did not criticize King Saul because he had proven himself worthy of his kingship; he had slain his thousands. However, they also believed David's achievements deserved praise. Still, Saul thought David was after his throne or at least that he might take it.

7. What happened one time when David returned victorious from the battlefield (6-8)?

8. From what Saul said in verse 8, do you think his jealousy began at that point or had already begun to form? Please explain yourself.
9. Sometimes we idealize high positions and believe that people in those positions have an easy life. Why isn't the opposite also true?
10. What strains does jealousy put on people's lives (whether your jealousy or others)?
11. If we knew Saul, how might we counsel him?
12. Think through this whole passage again. What characteristics helped David not only win his position but also maintain his godly life?

Conclusion

David became everyone's celebrity overnight. He clearly resisted the various temptations that come with being 'famous'. David seemed more suited to be a king, not because he killed more people, but because he faithfully completed the tasks given to him.

1 Samuel 18:1-4

Exploring Deep Friendships

Reasons Homosexuality Excludes Love

❖ A Troubled Heart

I've encountered poor interpretations before, including one for this, but this time, my heart feels very heavy. In a written exchange with someone, a person repeatedly used these and similar verses to suggest that David was a homosexual. I wish I didn't have to address this because it taints a beautiful friendship. When evil takes hold and corrupts the few good, wholesome, and glorious things, it shows that the society as a whole is approaching its end.

They have turned a pure and beautiful friendship into an immoral, lust-filled situation. Homosexuality is defined as two people of the same sex being sexually attracted through lust. True friendship between men has none of this self-gratification in mind. Those caught in the web of lust cannot understand pure friendship because there is always some form of self-gratification subtly motivating them.

I don't think many people who have reached this conclusion are open to truly seeing what the passage says. They are past that point. It's like the little boy with chocolate all over his hands and face who denies to his mom that he stole or ate any chocolates. Evil is smeared over their hearts and eyes, preventing them from seeing good in good or evil in evil.

Hopefully, my message will reach someone seeking genuine friendship who will pause and find joy in what is truly good. When

people adopt extreme viewpoints, they often ignore important observations. And perhaps by observing more closely, they will catch another glimpse of what is pure, so they may turn away from evil and discover, delight in, and embrace what is wholesome and pure.

And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will (2 Timothy 2:24-26).

❖ **The Text: 1 Samuel 18:1-4**

Now it came about when he had finished speaking to Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as himself. And Saul took him that day and did not let him return to his father's house. Then Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his armor, including his sword and his bow and his belt (1 Samuel 18:1-4).

❖ **Observations**

These verses describe the period after David single-handedly defeated Goliath, the giant. Jonathan, the son of King Saul and probably about 30 years older, also achieved a similar victory (1 Samuel 14) and came to love David. There is no doubt that when Saul tried to find out whose family David belonged to (1 Samuel 17:58), Jonathan hoped he would become his brother-in-law. This is one of those dreams—believing that a long-lasting friendship can somehow be created through a marriage arrangement.

As we keep reading, the promised marriage resulting from David's victory over Goliath was delayed. However, David stayed at King Saul's residence from that point on. There is some unresolved question as to why Saul did not recognize David earlier, since he had previously become Saul's personal harp player and armor bearer. During that time, David moved between his father's home and Saul's court. Either the story's timeline is slightly shifted, or Saul was so self-absorbed that he failed to notice those around him. After all, he was king and seemingly didn't care about non-royal people. The details are unclear. Luckily, this does not affect the overall story. We can assume that the friendship was developing gradually and did not form suddenly. David had been around for quite a while by this point.

Was it Jonathan's influence that made David stay there constantly? We assume he was not just involved with the military but also, as Saul's son, a member of the royal family. Jonathan and David developed a very deep friendship. We know this friendship is mutual, but this passage only highlights Jonathan's great love for David, without suggesting David's similar feelings. For such a close friendship to work, it must go both ways. However, we suggest it was probably started by Jonathan because he was the prince, had considerable wealth, and was older. David, on the other hand, was new to the scene, from a very poor family, untrained in protocol, and the youngest in his family. In other words, don't read too much into this scene. If anything, it reminds us of God's incredible grace and His power to lift a poor shepherd boy to lead Israel. So let's look at how Jonathan treated David.

➡ **(1) The soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David.**

Jonathan's heart was linked to David's. The word for 'knit' literally means to tie, bind, or, in a different context, to conspire. This suggests the binding of their hearts so that what one desires, the other also pursues. The word 'soul' is used twice to refer to the heart or the inner part of a person. The meaning is clear and suggests a deep, mutual mentoring relationship. Perhaps Jonathan always hoped to find a God-blessed man of character and bravery.

➡ **(2) Jonathan loved him as himself.**

Jonathan is said here to have a strong affection for David. One might look in a dictionary and see that the word could be used for romantic or sexual love, but this would be an incorrect use here. I mention it only because some try to justify a homosexual relationship, that is, a relationship bonded by sexual pleasures. Clearly, it does not mean that in this context. The Hebrew language lacks the rich vocabulary of other languages. Instead, a single word has many meanings depending on its context. The word 'light' (not heavy) also means vain or empty. In this case, the context clearly does not allow the sense of 'had sexual love' because of the phrase 'as himself.' It is an improper way to interpret it.

Clearly, there is a friendship that has reached its purest form. What is that purest form? It occurs when we treat another person as we would treat ourselves. Jonathan would do anything for David. We see this in the following words, as well as later when Jonathan defends David even at the risk to the throne itself.

Some people regard sexual love as the highest form of love. It is not. There is something that goes much deeper: the voluntary commitment to another's well-being. Sexual love is often rooted in selfishness. The Greeks rightly describe it with the word 'erotic'. God intends friendships to reach the level of commitment Jonathan demonstrates. The family of God shares deep care for others (i.e., agape love). This is what Jesus spoke about. We leave ourselves behind in our commitment to benefit another. It is most clearly shown when Jesus hung on the cross for His people's sins. He lost everything to gain us. Jesus' commitment was to save unworthy people.

➡ **(3) Then Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself.**

Real love shows itself through actions. A person's commitment is demonstrated by what they do. This idea is often highlighted in the New Testament. Consider the first action Jonathan took because of his deep love for David: he made a covenant with him. The exact words of the covenant are not recorded, but we can infer that it meant they would stay friends until death. Jonathan stayed true to his promise, even when it was greatly tested.

What does the covenant do? It captures the depth of feelings at a specific moment, making what is temporary last. It extends commitment and strengthens the friendship. It's important to see that there are no spoken words or suggestive acts indicating sexual attraction. The text shows what Jonathan did out of his deep friendship—he made a commitment. We must not interpret this as anything else, especially not as a homosexual relationship, which is considered a terrible perversion before God and man.

(4) And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his armor, including his sword and his bow and his belt.”

Lastly, we see that Jonathan, because of their great friendship, took off his prized robe and gave it along with his personal armor to David, including his sword, bow, and belt. Again, we must remember that Jonathan had no hidden motives. He was committed to treating David as he would treat himself because he loved him for who he was. Later, as David would ride into battle, he would more often than not wear Jonathan’s own armor and sword. The friendship would continue despite the rivalry that would develop between King Saul, his father, and David. These verses are not meant to suggest David’s perversion. Not at all. Instead, they are carefully placed to help us understand how God had been preparing David all along to serve under Him as king and to secure his protection. Remember, David would be a type of the Messiah. Jesus likewise trusted God’s protection during the time He was being hunted down. God similarly arranged all that protection for David because God was with him.

❖ **Conclusions on Friendships**

Let us draw some conclusions about friendship.

Many people don’t understand this kind of friendship. They have never experienced friendships that develop between young men and women of the same sex. It is a shame. This affection is built not on sexual attraction but on shared lives, visions, dreams, and experiences. They do everything they can to spend time together. One sees the other person as a vital part of their lives. Jonathan

saw David this way. They both had a deep love and devotion to God, aiming to win outstanding battles for the Lord through faith.

Many of us never go beyond simple friendships based on mutual benefit. There are hidden motives, known as *philia*, which means love in Greek. Older people tend to become more cynical and are hindered by excessive caution from forming deep friendships.

Another factor that has undermined genuine relationships is pornographic films and scenes that portray fun relationships as always ending in bed. This reflects the West's distorted view of friendship. Such portrayals lead to bribery and hatred and have nothing to do with true friendship, as in this case.

Someone asked me, "Why can't one be romantically in love with someone of the same sex?" It's a shame that some might even think this is possible. Since it has been asked and will be asked again by those who have compromised themselves, let me give an answer.

True love is willing to sacrifice itself (agape love). A husband and wife are meant to be deep friends, but sexual expression is only a manifestation of that love, not what creates it. Pure love is to love one as oneself. It is repeated twice in these verses. It would be good for us to think, "Who would we treat so special that we would give up anything?" Sexual expression of love is far from the highest form of love. The opposite is true. Sexual love is not love but lust, and is typically driven by sexual desire, characterized by a craving to take rather than give. The drive to satisfy one's desires leads to planning a series of complex actions. Let us not call that romantic. It is treacherous when someone acts to fulfill themselves. The marriage relationship, however, requires commitment and should not seek to earn it, but to reward it.

Sexual pleasures further enrich a strong bond and, through children, strengthen their shared purpose.

Jesus stated that when a man looks at a woman with lust, he is committing adultery. "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery'; but I say to you, that everyone who looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:27, 28). Jesus clearly explains the tenth commandment. The world celebrates erotic love, but Jesus condemns it for what it is—lust. This is evil, regardless of who one lusts after, whether before or after marriage. What about romantic love?

Jesus does not use the words romance, but love and lust. What we call romantic love should only be for one's spouse. Infatuation and selfless passion for caring for another exclude a deeper commitment. They do not include sexual fantasies. They see the person, not sexual fulfillment, as the key to their happiness.

Our culture is so sexually aware that people often mix thoughts of love with sex. This is unfortunate. Friendships often break down once that line is crossed. Those who have gone down this path can't see other options. They believe that's what friendship is all about. The same people ask me, "So can I romantically love someone of the same sex without sin?" Of course, one cannot. Romance is not part of true friendship. Friendship is best understood without it. Romance involves special, warm, tender moments that can lead to sexual expression. These should not be confused.

Romanticism merges with sexual love and should not be seen as separate from it. Naturally, couples in long-term relationships share many romantic gestures and moments, but even then, all

special treatment and gifts are for the ultimate fulfillment if the relationship lasts. Jesus condemns unrestrained sexual interests in Matthew 5. He might refer to a heterosexual relationship because homosexuality was condemned, but certainly, any self-gratifying sexual behavior outside of one's heterosexual spouse is entirely immoral.

Let me revisit the topic of friendships. A man can love another man, but this does not involve sexual attraction. From a biblical perspective, once lust enters the picture, it ceases to be true love. The same principle applies to male-female relationships. Having friendships with sisters in the church is fine, but I must avoid romantic situations, being alone, or engaging in 'close' conversations to protect those friendships. If I allow the relationship to develop into using special words, thoughts, or situations, I start to create sexual innuendos, which are inappropriate and clearly forbidden. I need to exercise self-control in what I say, think, and where I go.

In courting, we aim to build strong, genuine friendships, but these should not involve private moments where touches are sexual. Once things go beyond that, the friendship ceases to be genuine. Other motives then come into play. Men and women, young and old, must continually practice self-control. Avoid being alone together. Do not treat each other as more special than anyone else.

Let's return now to Jonathan and David. Jonathan treated David specially. He spent a significant amount of time with him. This is possible when sexual notions are excluded. A boy enjoys playing with another boy. A guy enjoys jogging with a guy. Their friendship deepens. It is this complete absence of sexual notions that allows same-sex friendships to grow and develop.

Friendships between men and women require different boundaries. Within marriage, friendship can deepen alongside the sexual union God permits.

Homosexuality destroys the simplicity of friendship. This is wretched. Making homosexuality seem normal removes the completely free sexual zone where men–men and women–women friendships can flourish. Please do not confuse the innocence of friendship with selfish sexual desires. Do not pollute love with lust. The blurring of these lines indicates the demise of any culture or relationship. Allow Jonathan to freely love David without any sexual connotation. Learn how to develop deep, non-sexual friendships.

“To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled” (Titus 1:15).

1 Samuel 18

Great Friends & Horrible Jealousy

1 Samuel 18 illustrates how jealousy can lead to anger, delusion, murder, and paranoia. King Saul is the main focus here; don't forget to consider what David was experiencing as well. David shifts from being Saul's favorite helper to his worst enemy. He learns firsthand how to deal with misunderstandings, bitterness, and jealousy—challenges many of us face at different times in our lives.

Introduction

Jealousy can be deadly, but the process isn't simple. Anger and bitterness must grow, giving the evil one a chance to distort a person's perception before they strike out against another. We hope we don't imitate Saul, but this passage provides helpful insight into how someone might do so much harm.

A. Deep Friendships (1 Sam 18:1-4)

Now it came about when he had finished speaking to Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as himself. And Saul took him that day and did not let him return to his father's house. Then Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his armor, including his sword and his bow and his belt (1 Samuel 18:1-4).

Some friendships aren't chosen; they develop naturally. We shouldn't wait for such special friendships, as they might never happen, but if they do, be very thankful for them. After Saul

interviewed David for the battle against Goliath (chapter 17), Jonathan, King Saul's son, came to love David. They became best friends. 'Loved him as himself' shows a genuine love without selfish motives. Many people have never experienced such a friendship and dismiss its existence. It is rare, but it does exist. Jonathan loved David.



There could not have been greater joy than discovering that Jonathan's father would actually allow David to live at their royal house. I remember how excited I was as a child when I learned a friend could come over. I wanted those play times to last forever. But now, David could actually live there in his house!

Jonathan, a prince about thirty years older than David, built their friendship through kind acts and special gifts. David had little besides God's sincere friendship. Along with these gifts was a covenant of friendship. No details are given about what this meant, but we see its importance when Jonathan protects David from his father, who sought his death.

- What makes for a great friendship?
- How are true friendships different from fornication and homosexual relationships?

B. Success Breeds Jealousy (1 Samuel 18:5-9)

Everything seemed to be going smoothly for David—victory, love, friendship, and royal approval. King Saul cared for him, and his son became his closest companion. But when things are going

well, stay cautious, as they can turn bad just like they did for David. We need to be prepared for anything.

David's persistent prosperity (1 Samuel 18:5-7)

So David went out wherever Saul sent him, and prospered; and Saul set him over the men of war. And it was pleasing in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of Saul's servants. And it happened as they were coming, when David returned from killing the Philistine, that the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with joy and with musical instruments. And the women sang as they played, and said, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands (1 Samuel 18:5-7).

David was Saul's messenger, warrior, lyre player, and faithful servant. Whatever task Saul assigned to David, God was with him, and he completed it in a way that impressed Saul and others. Sometimes, this meant he would even be in charge of a division in the army. Everyone was captivated by this young man, including Saul's own staff. One day, after returning from war, King Saul heard a new line added to an old song. Note that they had come to meet King Saul, not David, but this made little difference. They had tambourines and were singing and dancing. They still sang, "Saul has slain his thousands." They only added one short line, "And David his ten thousands." Saul's proud reaction to this line set the tense tone for the rest of his life.

Is King Saul envious or jealous?

ENVY

- a. A feeling of discontent and resentment aroused by and in conjunction with **desire for the possessions or qualities of another.**
- b. The object of such feeling: Their new pool made them the envy of their neighbors.

JEALOUS

- 1. being supplanted; apprehensive of losing affection or position.**
 - 2.a. Resentful or bitter in rivalry; envious: jealous of the success of others. b. Inclined to suspect rivalry.
 - 3. Having to do with or arising from feelings of envy, apprehension, or bitterness: jealous thoughts.
 - 4. Vigilant in guarding something: We are jealous of our good name.
 - 5. Intolerant of disloyalty or infidelity; autocratic: a jealous God.
- The American Heritage Dictionary

From these definitions (see above), it becomes clear that Saul was mainly jealous. He was afraid of losing his praise and his position. Jealousy often goes hand in hand with envy. He likely envied the praise David received.

- Are you jealous? When was the last time you experienced jealousy?
- How did you deal with the jealousy?

It is important to recognize what event or words trigger someone's jealousy. The words, "David has ten thousands," in this case, point us to Saul's insecurity, something he has not fully dealt with. Saul could have rejected his jealousy by (1) acknowledging and appreciating David's gift (David helped his kingdom) and (2) realizing that what he himself had was from God and would be protected as long as the Lord desired. This would have restored Saul to humility before God, and, even more, it could have made David a great son-in-law.

C) Jealousy Brings Anger (1 Sam 18: 8-9)

Then Saul became very angry, for this saying displeased him; and he said, “They have ascribed to David ten thousands, but to me they have ascribed thousands. Now what more can he have but the kingdom?” And Saul looked at David with suspicion from that day on (1 Samuel 18:8-9).

The author carefully notes the source of Saul’s anger. The crowd’s applause, “And David his ten thousands,” greatly displeased Saul. Someone nearby or an advisor probably overheard him say, “They have ascribed to David ten thousands, but to me they have ascribed thousands. Now what more can he have but the kingdom?” It’s reasonable to think that Samuel’s words about the kingdom being taken from him came to his mind. Suddenly, it all clicked—David was the one to replace him!

Sometimes we accept fate as it is portrayed, but we should remember that Saul could have turned away from his pride and humbled himself. Saul simply did not understand. Instead, he allowed a jealous spirit to wrongly interpret David’s motives. As we read on, we discover David’s humble life. What famous general do you know of that would go and play the lyre? David showed no signs of exalting himself. These are the things that Saul attributed to David. This is the distortion that happens when jealousy takes hold of someone’s soul (see diagram below).

David became a marked man from this point on. Saul was determined to kill him. In fierce anger, he silently plotted to eliminate this threat to his throne.

- Was Saul envious of David’s success or jealous of losing his own throne?

- What are you afraid of losing to more capable people? How do you manage this?

❖ **Anger and the Evil Spirit**

Then Saul became very angry, for this saying displeased him; and he said, "They have ascribed to David ten thousands, but to me they have ascribed thousands. Now what more can he have but the kingdom?" And Saul looked at David with suspicion from that day on (1 Samuel 18:8-9).

Some might dismiss the connection between the evil spirit and anger, but that would be unwise. Maybe they do this because they don't believe in evil spirits. From 1 Samuel 18:10, we see that during intense anger, the evil spirit actively influences the situation. Other questions are not clear from this passage, but they are very important to consider.

- What role does the evil spirit play in anger? How, for example, did it influence Saul?
- At what point does the evil spirit begin to influence a person in his anger?
- How can I escape the influence of the evil spirit in times of my anger?

Let me suggest the role of the evil spirit during times of anger. Perhaps it is not always this way, but the evil spirit does seek such opportunities, and he would often consider himself 'invited' when he sees bitterness and anger, much like how darkness gathers when the light goes out. Or perhaps it is like a person automatically looking for an open seat after boarding a crowded bus. The evil spirit seeks opportunities to deceive and control a person's life. When a person enters a certain state of mind and heart, the evil spirit gains access to his life.

How does the evil spirit influence a person? It is clear from Jesus' words that the evil spirit is not the source of hatred or bitterness, as these come from a person's evil heart. We need to take responsibility for our jealous fits.

For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man (Mark 7:21-23).

The evil spirit influences the mind by planting thoughts and steering situations to make us pay more attention to our raging anger. It stirs us up by slipping insinuating phrases into our minds. "You aren't going to let him get away with that, are you?" "What are you, a fool? Don't just let him steal your kingdom." "Are you not king? Deal with that imp!"

Anger clouds our judgment, making an angry person more vulnerable—like an open seat on a bus—to the suggestions of the evil spirit. The spirit's suggestive voice feels convincing in that moment. Temptation appears appealing because it wraps around and warms our inner evil desires. If we assess the situation, we would see that David did not intend to steal Saul's kingdom. But Saul held a wrong thought, which the evil spirit then used to help corrupt the rest of his life. "Saul looked at David with suspicion from that day on" (1 Samuel 18:9).

Believers can be influenced by evil spirits. They go to places where there is a seed of bitterness in a person's heart. For example, if we hold bitterness because of what our parents did to us, we become vulnerable to further attacks from the evil one. God protects us through His principles. If we simply obeyed the

Lord and honored our parents, we would be shielded. However, bitterness is a sign of rebellion and disrespect.

We might be far from our parents, and they might even pass away. But that seed of bitterness takes root in us, allowing the evil spirit to cause turmoil in our souls and negatively influence how we handle disagreements with those around us.

We often mistakenly judge the work of the evil spirit in a believer by asking whether a person can or cannot be possessed. Instead, we should focus on living obedient lives and seeking protection from the evil spirit. Yes, temptation will still come, but staying close to God makes it easier to recognize the subtle temptations by which He tries to lead us. The more influence the evil spirit has, the more likely we are to do wrong and follow his suggestions. In Saul's case, we see that the evil spirit could and would sometimes exert a stronger influence on Saul, inciting him with crazy ideas like killing David. I think that when Saul believed a false conclusion about David, he let his jealousy take control, enough to even justify murdering him.

If we uncover the roots of anger and bitterness within us, there is probably also a seed of an unforgiving spirit. Or, as in Saul's case, he believed something wrong about David, which fostered bitterness. Saul concluded that David wanted the throne and became extremely jealous. David wasn't thinking that way (1 Samuel 18:23). He was not of royal blood. Even if David had such intentions, Saul should have turned to the Lord for help instead of letting jealousy control him.

- What place does the evil spirit have in anger? Slow-burning anger? Violent anger?
- When was the last time you got angry? Why?

D) “Whoops” Plot #1: Saul’s Two Pretend Accidents (1 Sam 18:10-16)

Now it **came about on the next day** that an evil spirit from God came mightily upon Saul, and he raved in the midst of the house, while David was playing the harp with his hand, as usual; and a spear was in Saul’s hand. And Saul hurled the spear for he thought, “I will pin David to the wall.” But David escaped from his presence twice (1 Samuel 18:10-11).

This is the first of many plots to kill David. We should connect verses 18:8-9 with 10. “On the next day” shows that Saul’s conclusions were driven by jealousy and intense hatred. Something important happened that day: he became very angry over the kind words people had for David. Bitterness and anger made the evil spirit more influential, leading to thoughts and actions that were evil.

There are different interpretations of what actually happened in 18:10-11. Some translations, like the NASB, use ‘rave’ instead of ‘prophecy’ because it’s not entirely clear what occurred. The evil spirit apparently entered at some point and was linked to Saul’s plotting (similar to Judas Iscariot) and the throwing of the spear. However, David soothed Saul ‘as usual’ by playing his musical instrument (see 1 Samuel 16:23).

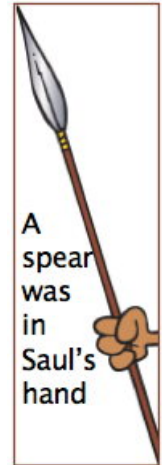
Saul allowed himself to be more influenced by the evil spirit, and it only led to more delusion and scheming.

Interpretations of 1 Samuel 18:10 and Saul’s Prophecy

So, what happened at 18:10? There are several difficult issues when interpreting this passage. Some try to resolve the inconsistency by using the word ‘rave’ instead of ‘prophecy.’

'Prophecy' often indicates that it is the Holy Spirit speaking, especially when David was playing the calming lyre. However, what Saul did was undoubtedly not from the Holy Spirit.

Some translate prophecy as a rave. The word 'to prophesy' is based on speaking or telling. We do not deny that a prophet might sometimes rave, meaning 'to speak very angrily or madly,' but this is not the main issue. Prophets can speak this way, but using it this way strips the word of its divine, revelatory meaning. Why not just translate it as prophecy? There are no extra words showing anger next to the word prophecy. The verb to prophesy is sometimes used by false prophets. When translated simply as 'rave,' the sense of prophecy and the Spirit's influence is lost.



The NASB version 'raved' is not accurate. The word means to prophesy, as the KJV and NIV have. This Hebrew word for prophecy simply means to prophesy rather than to rave, as Keil-Delitzsch supports (p. 190). The NASB uses 'raved' because of the connection with the evil spirit that influenced King Saul and the attempted murder (allowing context to determine meaning). On the other hand, using 'prophecy' does not make sense because the Holy Spirit did not cause this attempted murder. Let us look at two possible scenarios.

Saul was often affected by David's playing, causing the Spirit of God to come upon him. Note the phrase 'as usual.' David was not surprised when Saul prophesied in response to his music. Saul was a prophet and had prophesied before, so we can assume this was a regular occurrence. However, this time was different. It's possible that the Holy Spirit began to speak through Saul as it had

at other times (19:23-24), but then, during a break, the evil spirit entered, bringing its insidious suggestions.

Another suggestion is that the word “*prophesy*” means the evil spirit helped Saul stage this scene. Sometimes, the word to prophesy does suggest false prophecy, apparently through an evil spirit. In this interpretation, the evil spirit sponsored the entire plot rather than just entering at some point. This would make the end result more consistent. However, the phrase ‘as usual’ seems to prevent us from accepting this conclusion. David certainly did not regularly play while the evil spirit filled Saul. It was the other way around!

In prophetic times, the prophet was often told to pick up an object, such as a spear, and pretend to throw it at his enemies. This act was a symbol of God’s plan to defeat Israel’s foes. In one instance, Saul noticed he had a spear in his hand. He could feign prophesying and then ‘accidentally’ throw the javelin (a wooden spear with a metal tip) at David. He could then blame the prophetic event, of which he had little control, claiming, “And whoops, the spear fell out of my hand!” In reality, the evil spirit was the one truly controlling him. The text clearly states that the influence of the evil spirit was upon him. Meanwhile, the Lord protected David.

Saul actually thought, “I will pin David to the wall.” This was premeditated. Saul went from jealousy and anger to attempted murder. It would have been murder if God had not watched over David. This happened twice. From this, we can conclude that Saul deceived David enough for him to see it as an accident. Keil-Delitzsch suggests that Saul may have swung his javelin two times around at that one point. It seems that two events took place here rather than just one, though maybe within 1-3 days.

Saul's Fear and Jealousy Increased (1 Samuel 18:12-16)

Now Saul was afraid of David, for the LORD was with him but had departed from Saul. Therefore Saul removed him from his presence, and appointed him as his commander of a thousand; and he went out and came in before the people. And David was prospering in all his ways for the LORD was with him. When Saul saw that he was prospering greatly, he dreaded him. But all Israel and Judah loved David, and he went out and came in before them (1 Samuel 18:12-16).

One might think that David would fear Saul, but it was Saul who feared David.

The reason given for Saul's fear is that the Lord was with David but no longer with Saul. It's difficult to pinpoint exactly what was happening. Saul probably felt similar to a backsliding believer—no longer sensing God's presence. Everything he did was overshadowed by fears, jealousies, and anxieties. Today, we might call this paranoia. Paranoia is a constant fear that others are plotting against you. Meanwhile, David had everything working in his favor. He was at peace enough to believe that Saul's first 'spear throwing' was just an accident.

Saul realized this plan no longer worked and tried to calm his mind by removing David from his presence (18:13). He might also have used this opportunity to cover up his repeated mistake. At the same time, he probably thought that making David a commander of a thousand men could put him at risk of death in battle. Saul no longer wanted David to serve as his lyre player and armor bearer (1 Samuel 16:23).

Early on, David would have appeared before the people because of his association with Saul, but now he was on his own. Nevertheless, the people truly liked him. They supported him

when he went into battle and cheered his victories. David acted wisely and was blessed by the Lord. Both 18:13 and 16 describe how David moved back and forth in battle before the people. This became the main event of each major battle. Clearly, news of his victories even reached northern Israel, where the people also started to love David.

E. “May I?” Plot #2: Saul’s Offers of Marriage (1 Sam 18:17-30)

Saul’s first plan failed. David managed to escape, while Saul’s efforts continued. Saul was subtle yet deliberate in trying to kill David. The second plan is designed to protect Saul’s reputation while also setting the stage for David’s death. Any means to eliminate David were acceptable, even if it involved his daughters. Uncontrolled jealousy drives madness.

Plan #1: The Proposed Marriage of David and Merab (1 Samuel 18:17-19)

Then Saul said to David, “Here is my older daughter Merab; I will give her to you as a wife, only be a valiant man for me and fight the LORD’S battles.” For Saul thought, “My hand shall not be against him, but let the hand of the Philistines be against him.” But David said to Saul, “Who am I, and what is my life or my father’s family in Israel, that I should be the king’s son-in-law?” So it came about at the time when Merab, Saul’s daughter, should have been given to David, that she was given to Adriel the Meholathite for a wife (1 Samuel 18:17-19).

If Saul used this romance to pressure David into taking extra risks and getting killed, then blame would shift away from Saul. It’s hard to understand what was going through Saul’s mind. Maybe, driven by a hunger for power, he simply thought David would

jump at the chance to become the king's son-in-law. He didn't really think about his daughters' or his family's well-being. If he succeeded in having David killed in battle, his daughter would lose her husband, and the grandchildren would lose their grandpa. Hatred often defies reason.

Saul's goal in having the Philistines kill David was only to keep others from thinking he wanted David dead. Saul apparently treated David very kindly, acting like a caring future father-in-law who genuinely liked having him in his family. However, David didn't see through this plan; he thought it was too sinister.

Time went on. David didn't take the bait. His actions showed his true heart. He barely tried to take the throne. He was nobody and couldn't marry the king's daughter or become the king's son-in-law. This should have told Saul that David had no interest in the throne. That would have been simple—marry and then get rid of potential heirs. But David wasn't thinking that way. From this, we see how he had a heart after God.

Plan #2 David and Michal (18:20-30)

Now Michal, Saul's daughter, loved David. When they told Saul, the thing was agreeable to him. And Saul thought, "I will give her to him that she may become a snare to him, and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him." Therefore Saul said to David, "For a second time you may be my son-in-law today." Then Saul commanded his servants, "Speak to David secretly, saying, 'Behold, the king delights in you, and all his servants love you; now therefore, become the king's son-in-law'" (1 Samuel 18:20-22).

Saul was undoubtedly upset about his first daughter's marriage. He wanted to use her to get to David, but when he learned that Michal, his other daughter, cared for David, he renewed his old plans. The Scriptures show us his thoughts: "I will give her to him

that she may become a snare to him, and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him.” How terribly evil.

So King Saul approaches David a second time with a proposal to marry his daughter. Saul’s instruction to his servants to secretly tell David that Saul and his officials all love him is very interesting. Was it because he felt his dislike for him was showing? Or was it that his servants might tell David what they were really hearing him say?

So Saul’s servants spoke these words to David. But David said, “Is it trivial in your sight to become the king’s son-in-law, since I am a poor man and lightly esteemed?” And the servants of Saul reported to him according to these words which David spoke. Saul then said, “Thus you shall say to David, ‘The king does not desire any dowry except a hundred foreskins of the Philistines, to take vengeance on the king’s enemies.’” Now Saul planned to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines. When his servants told David these words, it pleased David to become the king’s son-in-law. Before the days had expired David rose up and went, he and his men, and struck down two hundred men among the Philistines. Then David brought their foreskins, and they gave them in full number to the king, that he might become the king’s son-in-law. So Saul gave him Michal his daughter for a wife (1 Samuel 18:23-27).

When David hears these things, he considers not having anything to contribute to the marriage for the dowry. David has mentioned this before, but I believe Saul did not think this would actually be the problem. However, this situation turns out even better! Saul figures that David can be killed even before the marriage. Saul simply tells him he has a way for David to earn the dowry. All he needs to do is, before the marriage, to get a hundred Philistine foreskins. In other words, David had to kill a hundred enemies, and that would be considered an acceptable dowry.

Saul hoped that David would be killed in battle. David accepted the offer but, to the king's dismay, safely returned with 200 foreskins. He, of course, cared more about their heads than David did. So Michal was reluctantly given to David as his wife.

When Saul saw and knew that the LORD was with David, and that Michal, Saul's daughter, loved him, then Saul was even more afraid of David. Thus Saul was David's enemy continually. Then the commanders of the Philistines went out to battle, and it happened as often as they went out, that David behaved himself more wisely than all the servants of Saul. So his name was highly esteemed (1 Samuel 18:28-30).

Saul's problem worsened when his plan backfired. Now David has the king's daughter and is a partial heir to his possessions! His son, Jonathan, is David's closest friend. His daughter loves him. David kept going out to battle (probably because of Saul's command, hoping he would be killed in action), but he always returned victorious.

Saul was afraid of David because he sensed David might take over the throne. His fear, like most fears, was all in his mind. Saul was right that he would lose his throne as God had declared, but he was wrong to judge David's motives. David had no ill will and was not trying to take the kingship. From Saul's perspective, things were gradually getting worse.

- How was David able to achieve such success? Was it related to his anointing by Samuel?
- Why would God give him an advantage over others?
- David rides through these tough times by God's grace. Have you ever been mislabeled by others? How did you handle it?
- Saul's deceit hid his murderous plan from David. How often do you cover up your guilty actions? Do you realize that if you were a person of

integrity, then you would not deceive others and would refrain from doing wrong?

Conclusion

Saul's jealousy worsened as he watched David slowly take the throne. His fear, like many fears, was all in his mind—not that Saul would lose the throne to David, but that David himself hated Saul. Saul could have repented and appreciated his son-in-law's contributions.

- Saul's deception concealed his murderous plan from David. How often do you hide your guilty actions?
- Do you realize that if you were a person of integrity, you wouldn't deceive others and would instead avoid doing wrong?

Summary of 1 Samuel 18

Although the focus of this passage is on Saul's mishandling of his jealousy, David is going through some serious struggles.

- "How can I be liked one day and hated the next?"
- "What did I do wrong to be so wrongly treated?"
- How can I respect those in authority when they have succumbed to such evil schemes?

God is preparing David for His service. The training is tough. This passage reminds us that if we dwell on past or present victories, our joy will be lost. Instead, we should concentrate on doing God's will and persevering in what is right, even when circumstances seem so wrong. Indeed, what David experiences clearly reminds us of the great misunderstandings and jealousies Jesus had to face all the way to the cross.

1 Samuel 19-21

David Faces His Life Crisis

What is a crisis? Have you ever faced a crisis? How did you handle it? Did God factor much into it?

Main Characters

Saul

The current king of Israel started out well, but did not last because he was unwilling to obey God and submit his will to Him. His jealousy toward David continues and intensifies.

Jonathan

Saul's son, a man of integrity, honor, and faith, has a deep and loyal friendship with David, who shares his heart for God. (14:6)

David

The anointed king, yet not reigning. After reaching the highest of highs, David sank to the lowest of lows. Although a national hero for serving in Saul's court, David was now hunted by Saul.

The Story Unfolds:

19:1 Saul's jealousy towards David became open hatred.

19:2-5 Jonathan speaks on David's behalf

There is a special friendship between Jonathan and David, even though Jonathan was about 30 years older than David. How did that happen? (18:1-4)

19:9-10 Saul's hatred and jealousy rage against David, so David escapes.

(v. 9. Evil spirit. God's sovereignty and man's responsibility)

19:11-17 Michal helps David escape

19:18-24 God's protection

Propheied (naba) – sometimes used to describe uncontrolled ecstatic behavior or enthusiastic praise of God.

20:1-17 David confronts Jonathan

20:13-14 Jonathan accepts God's will for him.

20:18-42 Saul's hatred confirmed

20:30-31 Saul's selfish attitude

20:32,34 Jonathan's sense of justice

20:41 Real Godly man's love.

21:1-9 David flees to Ahimelech (22:10)

21:2 David uses deception (22:13-18 the consequence).

21:10-15 David flees to the land of the Philistines

Gath: - one of the 5 major towns of the Philistines

Verse 13 David resorted to deception again

The Diary of a Fugitive

So far, we see David running from Saul and using deception to save himself. But in the Psalms, we can get a better idea of what was going through his mind.

Psalms 59 (I Sam 19:11) from Fear(1-2) to Anger(4-7) to hope(8-17)

Psalms 56 (I Sam 21:10-15)

Other Psalms related to I Samuel: Ps 34/1 Sam 21:13, Ps 52/Psalms 22:9-10, Ps 54/1 Sam 23:19

Application:

- God used stress to test and refine David's trust in Him and to build his character (as Jesus did, Heb 5:8).
- As the stresses of life increased, David turned to God, found refuge in God, and gained a deeper sense of
- God's love moved me to praise Him (Ps 59:16-17). God uses crisis and stress in our lives this way. What causes you stress? How do you handle such pressure?
- David's crisis prompted him to examine his relationship with God more closely. How about you?
- Look at the characters of Saul, Jonathan, and David—who do you relate to the most?
- Homework: Read 1 Samuel 24-25.

1 Samuel 21-22

Facing Depressing Circumstances

"Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him for the help of His presence" (Psalm 42:5).

David faced many challenges. First, although he was anointed king, he was constantly accused of secretly seizing Saul's throne and of using his best friend, Jonathan, the son of King Saul, for political gain. Saul's treacherous treatment of David signaled that it was time to leave. He had to flee the country, permanently running away from everything and everyone he loved. Leaving it all for a very uncertain world was difficult. To where? He did not know.



The situation worsened, however. Perhaps nothing was more confusing for David than hearing the tragic news from Abiathar, the only survivor from the city of priests, that King Saul had destroyed the City of Nob because of David. Saul accused them of supporting David simply because he had recently obtained water, food, and his sword (the one he won from Goliath). Saul, God's chosen king of Israel, had become raging mad—a jealous

tyrant willing to kill God's own priests, even if it meant doing so through a foreigner.

Being in a hurry, David found himself in a bit of a trap. The King of Gath heard that this runaway David was a threat to his kingdom, so David actually pretended to be a madman when brought before the Philistine king (1 Sam 22). Had David himself gone mad along with King Saul? Although he was promised the kingship by God's prophet, David ended up a refugee, leading a band of bandits and other discontented people. "And everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented, gathered to him; and he became captain over them. Now there were about four hundred men with him" (1 Sam 22:2).

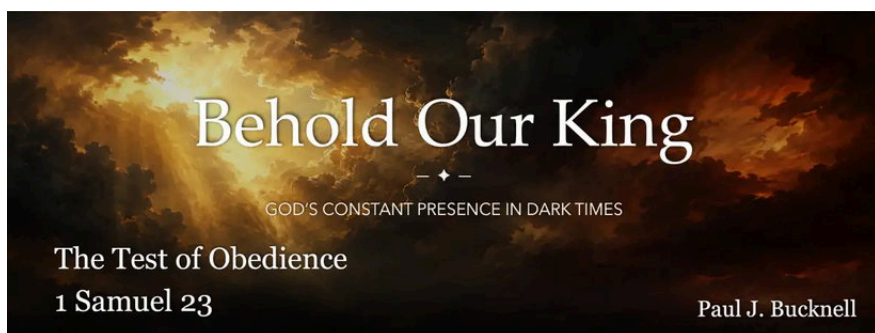
Deep-rooted questions could easily surface in David's mind. Was it possible that David's lie caused the early death of all those priests and their families? How could he handle this group now following him? Why has God allowed all this to happen? Each question could easily lead him into depression.

Depression happens when we let unreasonable, confusing, and furious events around us steal the last shred of hope from our hearts. David's world seemed to have gone wild like a rabid dog, eager to spread its deadly confusion to others. Sometimes it feels like God has pulled away from life and let the world spiral out of control, allowing us to drift away alone, much like an astronaut cut loose from his life-support cable.

Tragedies in our lives distort our view of normalcy, breaking any simple trust in God. But it is this trust in God that becomes our only link to sanity. Perhaps David's experience of madness

happened when he took his eyes off the Lord during this most desperate time.

But despite David's weak attempt to understand all this, along with his madman prop, observe how the Lord cared for him through this period of disillusionment. In the Psalms, we see the advice David gave to himself, as if trying to wake himself from his stupor of unbelief: "Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him for the help of His presence" (Psalm 42:5). Our true connection to sanity is not in understanding the incomprehensible but in trusting the God who controls our very lives, even in this unpredictable, sin-stained world.



1 Samuel 23:1-15

The Test of Obedience

Unknown but important

What is Keilah? Keilah was a small town northwest of Hebron in Judah. It is only mentioned once more in scripture, in one of those long lists (Joshua 15:24). It's interesting how, sometimes, a town becomes known not because of its greatness but because of the trouble it faces. Who would have even heard of this town if it hadn't been attacked? When we get sick, it's the affected organ that gets our attention. It's the hurt finger that receives special care. It's the hurting brother and sister who get our focused prayers. Keilah was this hurting, broken-down town.

1 Then they told David, saying, "Behold, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah, and are plundering the threshing floors." 2 So David inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall I go and attack these Philistines?" And the LORD said to David, "Go and attack the Philistines, and deliver Keilah." 3 But David's men said to him, "Behold, we are afraid here in Judah. How much more then if we go to Keilah against the ranks of the Philistines?" 4 Then David inquired of the LORD once more. And the LORD answered him

and said, "Arise, go down to Keilah, for I will give the Philistines into your hand." 5 So David and his men went to Keilah and fought with the Philistines; and he led away their livestock and struck them with a great slaughter. Thus David delivered the inhabitants of Keilah. 6 Now it came about, when Abiathar the son of Ahimelech fled to David at Keilah, that he came down with an ephod in his hand. 7 When it was told Saul that David had come to Keilah, Saul said, "God has delivered him into my hand, for he shut himself in by entering a city with double gates and bars." 8 So Saul summoned all the people for war, to go down to Keilah to besiege David and his men. 9 Now David knew that Saul was plotting evil against him; so he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod here." 10 Then David said, "O LORD God of Israel, Thy servant has heard for certain that Saul is seeking to come to Keilah to destroy the city on my account. 11 "Will the men of Keilah surrender me into his hand? Will Saul come down just as Thy servant has heard? O LORD God of Israel, I pray, tell Thy servant." And the LORD said, "He will come down." 12 Then David said, "Will the men of Keilah surrender me and my men into the hand of Saul?" And the LORD said, "They will surrender you." 13 Then David and his men, about six hundred, arose and departed from Keilah, and they went wherever they could go. When it was told Saul that David had escaped from Keilah, he gave up the pursuit. 14 And David stayed in the wilderness in the strongholds, and remained in the hill country in the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul sought him every day, but God did not deliver him into his hand. 15 Now David became aware that Saul had come out to seek his life while David was in the wilderness of Ziph at Horesh. (1 Samuel 23:1-15 NASB).

Vulnerability in Aloneness

You might ask, "What was the problem?" We have two issues: the problem itself and its severity. First, in 23:1, we read that the Philistines are fighting against Keilah. It is true that Keilah literally means fortress, so we can assume it was a somewhat protected

city. Yet, when an entire nation comes against you to attack a city, it shows how desperate the situation truly is. I think of the inner city—those should be the strongest places. We’ve been looking at it all wrong. One of the weak points in our church and society today is that we are scattered. What good is a brother if he’s halfway across the country? Proverbs says a brother nearby is more helpful to your specific needs.

The inner city is a place of strength because it has a strong community. I know my neighbors. When asked if the area is safe, I say yes. It could be better. If there were more politeness, there would be fewer offenses. It can also be a place of more hatred because people live so close together. But we haven’t yet considered the beauty of these places if we reclaim the city. If our church members decided to live closer, we would see a very strong community where God’s love would be more visible. I’m not suggesting a commune, but when we think of how the enemy attacks, it’s easy to see how an isolated soldier or platoon can be overcome. The enemy was targeting Keith.

Demoralization

Let’s consider the extent of the damage. We see that the Philistines were attacking Keilah so often that they would push the inhabitants back, steal the winnowed wheat, and then retreat. This creates a pattern of ‘constant depression,’ where hope is lost and morale is broken. A little damage here and a little damage there—this kept happening. Every effort they made seemed to vanish. In their case, they cultivated the wheat or crops, worked hard plowing the land, caring for the soil, and watering it. Then comes the joy of harvesting. They carry it to the threshing floors to separate the grain from the chaff, the valuable part from the

worthless. But how discouraging it must be to do so much work repeatedly, only for the enemy to come, chase you off, and take all your hard-earned grain! What pain and misery. They had no hope inside themselves; their hope only came from outside, which is why they told David.

Two Tests of Faith

Problems are frequently raised, but we are often too selfish to care or too unfaithful to act. We tend to ignore the voice.

First Test

We don't care because we are too busy focusing on our own lives and handling our responsibilities. If we asked anyone if Keilah was important, they would all say, "Yes!" But convincing others to commit is a different matter. People are often too selfish. Sometimes this selfishness shows itself in thoughts like: "Well, if there is a problem, it isn't mine. I don't want to deal with a problem like theirs. If I get involved, then the enemy will notice me. I don't want that." The main decision here is that, although Keilah is important, it isn't more important than our own well-being and safety. As long as we hold this attitude, the church of Jesus Christ will fail to show the world God's love.

The Second Test

The second test, of course, is to wonder whether we can effectively do anything about it. In some ways, this response is much better than the first. Initially, they never got out of their own lives enough to see if God could do anything. They simply didn't care. Our churches often relate to each other this way. They do not collaborate. The churches could be a community working

together for the benefit of society, or they could be separate entities with petty jealousies. But the belief that something can be done is so important. We see this as closer to the problem David and his men faced. And this, no doubt, is most of our problem. Our issue is not the money or resources, but our belief that God wants to do something about it.

We often resemble David. We care enough to ask God about the situation, but when we receive His reply, we encounter all kinds of obstacles. Notice this progression in verses 2-3.

- Ask - So David inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall I go and attack these Philistines?"
- Answer - And the LORD said to David, "Go and attack the Philistines, and deliver Keilah.
- Self - But David's men said to him, "Behold, we are afraid here in Judah. How much more then if we go to Keilah against the ranks of the Philistines?"

Most projects stall at this point because, along with people's selfish responses, confusion occurs. In one sense, we can't blame David's men; they weren't cowards. They had invested time in their training and lived tough lives. They didn't fear the battle like some might have. David, their leader, believed they could be part of the solution. We remember David's fight with Goliath many years earlier. His faith still bravely lead them.

The problem was that David's men were regularly being chased in Judah. They viewed the land of the Philistines as a safe place to hide. However, attacking the Philistines would eliminate any chance of finding refuge there. In fact, they would be caught between two enemies fighting to get rid of David and his men: Judah, with Saul on one side, and the Philistines on the other.

They would be completely surrounded. David responded differently than usual. He was a strong leader. See verse 4.

Ask again– “Then David inquired of the LORD once more. And the LORD answered him and said, “Arise, go down to Keilah, for I will give the Philistines into your hand.”

David might have followed his men’s advice because he cared about them. It’s clear that their loosely organized group had become a loyal, close-knit team. David’s men knew this and trusted his leadership. When David asked God again, he risked everything. God answered with what no one wanted to hear. But the question arose from a deep concern for some Israelites. This is the part we can easily overlook. David was not trying to be a hero but a helper. He saw someone in need and believed God could use them to resolve it. And so David’s values (care) and faith (rallying them) prompted an army to move forward into battle. Sometimes, as leaders, we lead God’s people for the wrong reasons. Here, David had concern, and God empowered his army to accomplish His own works of deliverance.

Application

Do I always lead based on what is right and what God desires? Do I have enough courage to approach God alone about a specific issue? Do I work closely enough with God’s people so they trust how I hear God? I am not the best leader. Though I am willing to go alone, I struggle to convince others. I am not confident or bold enough to put the issue before everyone: “This is God’s way.” So, I often tend to lead alone and lack the communication needed to work with God’s people. Fortunately, David and God went out together with the army. Whether David asked the people or they simply set one condition for him before leading them, such as:

"Try asking God one more time to be sure." God responded, and the men went to fight against the Philistines in obedience and trust.

4 Then David inquired of the LORD once more. And the LORD answered him and said, "Arise, go down to Keilah, for I will give the Philistines into your hand." 5 So David and his men went to Keilah and fought with the Philistines;

They won the war, but, as expected, they not only incurred the hatred of the Philistines but also had Saul exploit the situation to try to destroy David. We should remember that this whole scenario took place before David sinned. This persecution wasn't because he did wrong, but because he was seen as a threat. Even in this difficult time, we can clearly see David's love for God's people. However, despite his good heart and bravery in helping Keilah, there was no relief. God did not intervene to end the oppression. Instead, it only worsened. Now, the Philistines would also be an open enemy.

What enabled David to fight and win? It was his faith, just like in the old days with Goliath. Indeed, there were many more complicated factors in this case. The situation became more difficult, but the outcome was the same. God would always come through. God would handle the battle, which we are not even really discussing here, and God would resolve all the other issues. David focused more on obedience and trusting God to handle the details. This allowed him to do what he could and rely on God for the rest. Many of us like to control the details ourselves. As a result, we either become overwhelmed and give up or overestimate our abilities, creating many problems. Worry arises from trusting in our own methods of solving problems. True faith is trusting God to solve them. When we try to handle everything

ourselves, it usually leads to a situation that is beyond our control. This is due to two reasons:

- 1) God is drawing us to trust Him and not ourselves, and
- 2) We have not used God's way and therefore will hit hidden snags.

Application

Obedience doesn't always reduce conflict. Sometimes, acts of faith and obedience lead to increased oppression and challenges. We shouldn't be fooled into thinking obedience is easy once it's done. Like David, we need to trust in the God who manages all the details, even those we can't see.

Let me summarize some lessons from this section.

- The vulnerable and unrecognized are often targeted.
- God provides chances for the stronger or brother to aid the weak during these times.
- Our genuine values and beliefs are reflected in how we respond to our brother's needs.
- Helping our brother in need is rarely convenient and easy; it comes with a cost.
- It's easier to ignore our brother's needs and prioritize our own safety and security.
- A good leader will find out what God wants, speak to the people, and guide them to do what is good and right, rather than protecting themselves.

In conclusion, let us consider what ultimately enabled David to lead these unruly and insecure men into battle at Keilah. He spoke with them once, and they had issues with that. David could have

given up at that point. He could have said, "I have tried." But he went back to the Lord. It is not clear whether the men asked him to seek God's guidance again or if he returned to God on his own. However, it is clear that David was following God's direction, and the men recognized his authority. They knew he could be trusted to lead them. David must have earned the men's great trust, which he built through his care for them and his consistent faith in battle. This was nothing new. Every fight or challenge was an opportunity to demonstrate faith.

Application

It's difficult to ask for this kind of faith. The only way to earn it is by facing uncomfortable and desperate situations. It rarely just impacts your own life. God wants others to see us trust Him, so He receives the glory. We become examples so people can strengthen their faith in God. It's not easy. But the faith and the journey clearly demonstrate God's abundant grace and peace that He offers to all of us.



1 Samuel 24

Discerning God's Will in Confusing Times

Have you ever wanted to please God but felt confused about what He truly desires? There's no doubt that the dilemma David faced in 1 Samuel 24 falls into one of those common situations. Although the situation is not easy to follow, it is quite predictable: (1) We face a certain issue; (2) a decision must be made; (3) yet we are uncertain about God's will in that moment; (4) so we struggle, sometimes intensely; and (5) we make a decision, hoping it glorifies the Lord.

Deep down in our hearts, we need to be convinced that God's will is the best choice, or we will be like an airplane that never gets off the ground. The following verses not only confirm that God's will is good and achievable but also proven and tested. We can always trust the Lord for the very best, removing any doubts about what is truly best. If David or we argue from a place of doubt, we will never choose God's ways. We need to be mature enough to reach that point, as David did. These Scriptures reassure us of the Lord's trustworthiness in his words and ways.

"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, **that you may prove what the will of God is**, that which is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2).

"As for God, His way is blameless; **The word of the LORD is tried (proven)**; He is a shield to all who take refuge in Him" (Ps 18:30).

In the end, we need to make a decision. It's comforting that we can trust God with the outcomes and, as in this situation, see good results not by ignoring our feelings but by remembering the importance of God's Word.

During such moments, we must quickly and carefully gather the facts, be aware of our immediate reactions and tendencies, and carefully examine God's Word to understand what He truly desires. David probably had less than a minute to process this. It was tough, but it was God's test for David. That's why, even when David's friends urged him to go ahead, he refused. Similarly, Jesus, even when facing certain death, chose the path of suffering. The key is to recognize what God is trying to accomplish through the situation. When we understand what primarily pleases Him, we can find extra grace to resist the urge to please people and instead endure the situation by doing what pleases our Lord. Knowing that your choice pleases God gives you extra strength, even if others protest your decision.

1. Handling Perplexing Moments (1 Samuel 24:1-4)

How should we handle a sudden new situation that appears in our lives?

24:1 Now it came about when Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, saying, "Behold, David is in the wilderness

of Engedi. 2 Then Saul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel, and went to seek David and his men in front of the Rocks of the Wild Goats. 3 And he came to the sheepfolds on the way, where there was a cave; and Saul went in to relieve himself. Now David and his men were sitting in the inner recesses of the cave. 4 And the men of David said to him, "Behold, this is the day of which the LORD said to you, 'Behold; I am about to give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it seems good to you.'" Then David arose and cut off the edge of Saul's robe secretly.

Earlier, the anointed King David had to flee for his life after King Saul chased him. He was looking for anyone connected with David. So, we read in chapter 22.

2 And everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented, gathered to him; and he became captain over them. Now there were about four hundred men with him. 3 And David went from there to Mizpah of Moab; and he said to the king of Moab, "Please let my father and my mother come and stay with you until I know what God will do for me" (1 Sam 22:2-3).

An Unfortunate Choice

Chapter 24 begins by emphasizing that King David's jealousy was not accidental, nor was it caused by a local concern for David's presence. Instead, it resulted from a genuine fear of David's growing kingdom. 24:2 states, "Then Saul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel, and went to seek David and his men in front of the Rocks of the Wild Goats." Saul took his best men and pursued a man of Israel whom God had clearly raised up. It's clear that Saul was not seeking God's will. He did not trust that God's will, timing, method, and purpose were good, as the verses above show. No matter how much you justify your actions (for example, protecting God's kingdom of Israel, which God had established

through Saul), when we oppose God's will, we are fighting against God Himself.

Killing David became King Saul's full-time occupation.

David, of course, along with his men, became real victims in this contest to see how long he and his few men could survive such an evil pursuit.

What made it a perplexing time?

As we continue reading, however, God arranges for David to kill King Saul. There he is, in a cave with his men, vulnerable and seemingly deserving to die. This seemed to be David's chance, right? Wrong, even though he had many reasons to justify killing King Saul.

- He should protect himself from this mad tyrant (4).
- David was also anointed king; he could confront his attacker and solidify his kingship (3).
- Moreover, David was responsible for delivering justice for the wrong, right (4)? Think about it. Saul should be avenged for his massacre of Nob's godly priests.
- Saul was also mistreating many people, including David.

But something didn't feel right about all these factors. David refused to kill King Saul and instead cut off a piece of his robe with his sword. In an instant, he had a chance to end this wild chase and prove his kingship, but David still didn't raise his sword against Saul.

Confirmation or Confusion?

What made this worse was the opinion of his men. They strongly told David, "Behold, this is the day of which the LORD said to you!" They were correct that the Lord had created this unique situation, but does that mean the opportunity is God's will? Or was this a test of his values? He would soon be king. What kind of respect should he show the king, even if people disagreed with his policies? But King Saul was anointed by the Lord, and what right does he have to go against the Lord Himself? So, although David's men urged him to strike the king, and it seemed very clear to them that it was God's obvious will, David was not so sure. All the signs pointed to a shared desire for revenge among David's men. They even used religious words to persuade David: "Behold, this is the day of which the LORD said to you!" Needless to say, if Saul had the chance, he would kill all these men without a second thought. Even if it troubled David, couldn't he have ordered his men to attack Saul? They would have happily killed King Saul for him.

What did David do? What would you do? Unless we have private and quiet times with the Lord, the world's voice will seem very persuasive, and we, in turn, will make huge mistakes. Maybe some of you have already made such choices and seen the harmful results of reactive decision-making, that is, doing what feels right in the moment.

Without private times with God, we will make colossal mistakes.

Don't underestimate the importance of quiet time spent with the Lord. If we don't meet with Him regularly, we might find it hard to focus on His words during confusing moments.

2. Struggling With Inner Testings (1 Samuel 24:5-7)

In this section, we further learn how to identify and work through these kinds of decisions.

4 Then David arose and cut off the edge of Saul's robe secretly. 24:5 And it came about afterward that **David's conscience bothered him** because he had cut off the edge of Saul's robe. 6 So he said to his men, "Far be it from me because of the LORD that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD'S anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, since he is the LORD'S anointed." 7 And David persuaded his men with these words.

David's Conscience and The Spirit

David, who had killed tens of thousands, realized that taking Saul's life was wrong, and at the last minute, he instead cut off a small part of Saul's robe (4). Afterward, "David's conscience bothered him" (5). The Spirit of God was deeply at work in David's decision-making, prioritizing God's esteem for his anointed over his own self-protection. "Far be it from me." David even goes further, rebuking himself for seeking revenge (6).

6 So he said to his men, "**Far be it from me** because of the LORD that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD'S anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, since he is the LORD'S anointed."

In the end, he had to explain himself to his men. Here is the big hero who looks like a coward. They had difficulty understanding, so he “persuaded his men,” emphasizing the challenge David faced in preventing his men from harming King Saul (7). His main argument centered on how David restrained his actions out of respect for God’s anointed.

Developing a Practical Theology of Responsibility

Just a bit further down in verse 12, we see David affirming his resolve to respect King Saul—despite him being a madman, a persecutor, and a destroyer of many good men: “May the LORD judge between you and me, and may the LORD avenge me on you; but my hand shall not be against you” (12). David was not going to raise his hand against God’s anointed. He trusted that God could and would do what He wanted when He wanted regarding Saul.

David refused to mirror what he saw in the world around him, even when much of the pressure came from his loyal men. We must not be people pleasers but God-pleasers. Despite David’s mistakes, his resolve in this decision made him a great person.

In the end, it would be several years of hiding in the wilderness before this time arrived, but David was right in affirming his response to the opportunity. We all face unexpected situations that enter our lives, sometimes forcing us into crucial decision-making moments. As God’s people, we must not just react to pressures but carefully judge and discern what God desires.



Responsibility is a person's expected duty in a specific situation. David was supposed to seek vengeance, save his country from a crazy tyrant, and lead his men to victory. But there was also a commitment to honor what God had done by anointing Saul as higher in authority than everyone else, including himself. This kind of understanding can't influence our core values unless we spend time with God. The sense of responsibility is shaped by conscience, God's Word, one's sex, family, culture, and more.

Many factors influence how a person understands responsibility. David himself struggled with others' expectations, personal and group protection, and God's sovereignty in keeping King Saul alive. "If God anointed him, then I dare not go against God's appointment." God's values must take precedence over ours, no matter what challenges we face. It could mean losing a position, a job, friendships, or even life, as in David's case. Yet, David trusted that if he honored what God honored, God would guide him powerfully. He wisely, and in faith, based his seemingly reckless decision on God's Word and trusted God to care for his life and his men: "May the LORD avenge me."

3. Living by Personal Resolve (1 Sam 24:8-22)

24:19 "For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go away safely? May the LORD therefore reward you with good in return for what you have done to me this day. 20 "And now, behold, I know that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand. 21 "So now swear to me by the LORD that you will not cut off my descendants after me, and that you will not destroy my name from my father's household." 22 And David swore to Saul. And Saul went to his home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.

Proper theology displays itself in righteousness

There is a significant breakthrough here near the end of the chapter. No, Saul is not instantly struck by God, as Nabal is. Saul's pursuit of David's life continues as if Saul had forgotten these brave lessons, which was probably a big disappointment in itself. But Saul did have a breakthrough, though temporary, where his terror and fears vanished for a brief moment. Saul could, for that fleeting moment, sense God's love, mercy, and grace through David. He could understand David's inner struggle. And in that moment of truth, Saul cared for another—his descendants—more than himself. "So now swear to me by the LORD that you will not cut off my descendants after me, and that you will not destroy my name from my father's household" (24:21). David, also in this moment, was extraordinarily gracious by honoring that oath. Despite Saul's remarkable transformation, David wisely went to the stronghold. He did not trust Saul's new perception of David. As a result, David and his men lived in the wilderness for a long time because Saul had indeed forgotten these valuable lessons.

The Psalms display David's real inner struggles.

35:1 (A Psalm of David.) Contend, O LORD, with those who contend with me; Fight against those who fight against me. 2 Take hold of buckler and shield, and rise up for my help. 3 Draw also the spear and the battle-axe to meet those who pursue me; Say to my soul, "I am your salvation." 4 Let those be ashamed and dishonored who seek my life; Let those be turned back and humiliated who devise evil against me.

In the Psalms, we see firsthand how God shaped David's heart during difficult times. Notice the struggles mentioned in the psalm, such as the personal attacks on David, where he seemed helpless. This was the case when Saul was chasing him, yet he couldn't fight back. In verse 4, David clearly states what was true about Saul and how he pursued David's life. Nonetheless, several principles show how David ultimately placed his trust in the Lord.

This Psalm doesn't stem from a place of powerlessness, but rather from a moment when David chose not to do what others expected. This is notable. David resisted taking personal revenge against King Saul multiple times. He had the chance but decided against it. Instead, we see David demonstrating faith in God's larger plan. Unknowingly, David becomes an example of the powerful statement from James, "Mercy triumphs over judgment" (James 2:13). Deeply ingrained in David, this act of mercy would become a key trait of the Anointed One who would later descend from him. David served as a model of grace, embodying our Savior's work.

A Portrait of the Savior (John 3:17-18)

Whether David was used as an example for people to see the coming Messiah, the Anointed One, or whether this trait was passed down through David's family line to the Anointed One, we just don't know. However, these characteristics of David were also seen in Jesus, David's descendant.

First, we see David withholding revenge. Second, David shows mercy, and third, David waits for the Father's timing for revenge. However, a more important principle was at stake: salvation. The Messiah would demonstrate mercy through sacrificing His own life. His safety and well-being were not as important to Him as the Father's greater purposes.

"For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him" (John 3:17).

Summary

- Opportunity does not dictate God's will.
- Pay attention to one's conscience.
- Identify God's greater purposes/truths.
- Choose mercy over revenge (God is Judge.)
- Like Jesus, pour God's mercy and grace on this world.

Study Questions

1. Why did the cave appear to give David a clear opportunity to kill Saul?
2. How did David's conscience correct his first response?
3. What principles guided David's view of authority and God's timing?

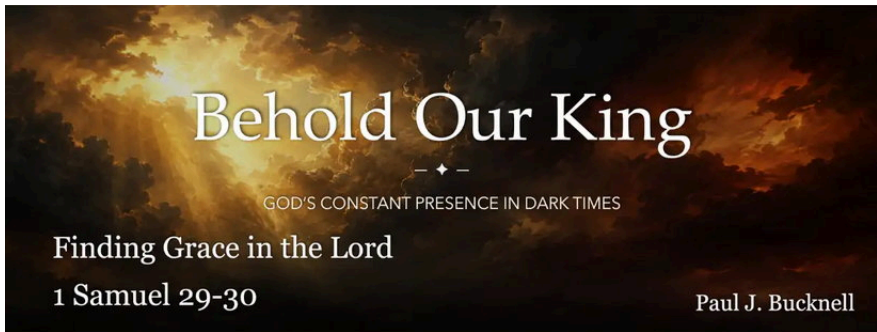
4. Why did David refuse to harm Saul while still confronting him truthfully?
5. How did sound theology lead David to a righteous choice in a confusing situation?
6. Describe a perplexing decision you face. What biblical truths should guide you before circumstances or advice do?

1 Samuel 27

Living in Less Than Ideal Situations

David's life in 1 Samuel 27 shows how fear and prolonged pressure can lead a faithful person into compromise. The passage invites us to examine our motives, recognize the danger of self-protective choices, and trust God's grace when circumstances are less than ideal.

1. Why did David leave Israel and seek protection among the Philistines?
2. How did fear shape David's reasoning and decisions?
3. What compromises and deceptions followed his move to Philistine territory?
4. How did David's choice place him under pressure to fight against Israel?
5. How did God graciously intervene in chapter 29 despite David's poor decision?
6. What less-than-ideal situation are you facing, and what faithful step can you take without compromising truth?

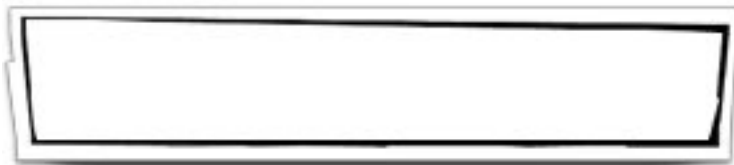


1 Samuel 29-30

Finding Grace in the Lord

Purpose of 1 Samuel 29-30

1 Samuel 29-30 clearly shows God's incredible grace and how He interacts with His people. Grace is available both during our disobedience and times of discipline. The main message is that God is always with us.



Ever feel like giving up? For some, giving up isn't uncommon. Things might go well, but then suddenly all efforts seem pointless. David faced many frustrations in his life. Although not all problems stem from our wrong decisions, some do. David quickly learned that God can correct a person.

David approached this training in two ways. During tough times, he realized how abundant God's grace was. A) Handling Moral Dilemmas (1 Samuel 29:1-11)

- ➡ Reflection: Think of a moral dilemma you might face where you don't know how to resolve it without dishonoring your Lord. What would you do?

We're unsure what David and his men were thinking when they went to war against Israel. Did they have some secret plan to betray the Philistines? We're not sure. Did they secretly scheme to gain King Saul's favor and take control of the Israel government? That seems unlikely because of David's previous sensitivity about not harming King Saul. Still, they definitely discussed this issue carefully. Again, we have no record of what they were thinking. However, we do know what the Philistines were thinking.



The Philistine army's thoughts (29:1-3a)

"Now the Philistines gathered together all their armies to Aphek, while the Israelites were camping by the spring which is in Jezreel. And the lords of the Philistines were proceeding on by hundreds and by thousands, and David and his men were proceeding on in the rear with Achish. Then the commanders of the Philistines said, "What are these Hebrews doing here?" (1 Samuel 29:1-3a, NASB used unless noted).

Time for a reality check. David's well-known army and victories were gathered for battle behind their own Philistine forces while facing the Israelites. They were understandably concerned. David was an Israelite and had previously fought strongly against the Philistines. Observe the Philistine king's thoughts (King Achish) (29:3b):

And Achish said to the commanders of the Philistines, "Is this not David, the servant of Saul the king of Israel, who has been with me these days, or rather these years, and I have found no fault in him from the day he deserted to me to this day?" (1 Samuel 29:3b).

Background: Why did King Achish like David so much? 1 Samuel 27:8-28:2 shows a serious case of deception (not something to follow). David was careless with his lying. From 1 Samuel 27:8 to 28:2, David repeatedly lied to King Achish of the Philistines. He made the king think that David was killing Israelites, but in truth, he was fighting other enemies of Israel. King Achish's trust in David was so strong that he wanted to make David his own bodyguard (28:2).

The Philistine armies' thoughts (29:4-5)

"But the commanders of the Philistines were angry with him, and the commanders of the Philistines said to him, 'Make the man go back, that he may return to his place where you have assigned him, and do not let him go down to battle with us, lest in the battle he become an adversary to us. For with what could this man make himself acceptable to his lord? Would it not be with the heads of these men? 'Is this not David, of whom they sing in the dances, saying, 'Saul has slain his thousands, And David his ten thousands'?" (1 Samuel 29:4-5).

Ultimately, King Achish was pressured by his generals to dismiss David from the army. This decision also carried risks. From the Philistines' point of view, David might have become upset and caused serious damage to the Philistines for this insult. They considered David's potential reluctance to help the Philistines in the future as less threatening than if he had secretly defeated the Philistines while fighting the Israelites.

Resolving the Problem (1 Sam 29:6-11)

6 Then Achish called David and said to him, "As the LORD lives, you have been upright, and your going out and your coming in with me in the army are pleasing in my sight; for I have not found evil in you from the day of your coming to me to this day.

Nevertheless, you are not pleasing in the sight of the lords. 7 “Now therefore return, and go in peace, that you may not displease the lords of the Philistines.” 8 And David said to Achish, “But what have I done? And what have you found in your servant from the day when I came before you to this day, that I may not go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?” (1 Samuel 29:6-8).

We should acknowledge King Achish’s kind words here. Some of his kindness was genuine, and some may have been driven by fear that David could harm him if he became angry. David pretended to be disappointed, acting as if he truly wanted to defeat the Israelites (29:8). He handled this situation flawlessly. David probably felt very relieved to escape this moral dilemma. God had saved him and his men from a terrible predicament. The world understands revenge but not forgiveness. King Achish believed David was fighting Israel out of hatred, especially against King Saul, who had driven him out of the country. Achish couldn’t grasp David’s true heart of compassion and forgiveness. That’s why he was so easily fooled.

Understanding the situation

So, what really happened here? We see God’s infinite grace demonstrated in two ways.

❖ Intervening grace

David and his men escaped a precarious situation. They had few options. If they retreated, the Philistines would quickly see through David’s plan and attack. If they advanced, David and his men would be fighting against the Lord and His people. God intervened in this difficult situation and provided a solution that seemed impossible. He used the Philistine generals to pressure King Achish into reconsidering sending David away. Since the

Philistines initiated this proposal, David and his men weren't viewed as spies or a real threat. (If they truly believed the Israelites were dangerous, the Philistines, with their large army, would have simply destroyed David and his men. But they didn't.)

Application

No matter how difficult our situation is, God can make a way to escape. God's intervention enabled David and his men to escape a terrifying situation. When we face tough times with no obvious solutions, we should trust God to help us find a way out. God is capable. He is willing. Trust Him. Many Psalms likely reflect the deliverance that David experienced here.

*"No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and **God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able**, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).*

❖ Compassionate grace

There is another lesson, perhaps even more important. David had, through his own actions, led himself and his men into this terrible situation. Many times, the problems we face are not caused by our mistakes. This was not the case here. Over the years, David lived a life of deceit and false loyalty. We should see this incident as a moment when God revealed how fragile David's plan was, effectively breaking it apart. Now, David and his men found themselves in a dire situation with no way out. David was powerless. Some of our worst predicaments come from our own wrongdoings. Think of a child born out of wedlock, a single lie that snowballs into a thousand, or a revenge plan we've been nurturing for years—then suddenly, we're trapped, and our scheme is exposed. There's no escape.

The question here is, why would God help David? He clearly did not deserve it. We don't even see him praying. God exposed David's plan and then delivered him.

Application

God did this to teach David a powerful lesson in grace and compassion. Even when a person deserves the worst, we can still choose to live by grace. We see the teaching, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy" (Matthew 5:7). David was merciful to King Saul. Perhaps because of this, God showed David great grace. We do not know for sure, but only that God's grace came upon David. When God chooses to bless us, we should turn to His abundant grace for our life's mistakes. In some cases, we have completely failed. Don't give up. Expect God's gracious work in our lives and learn from His grace. As God has been gracious, we are called to be gracious. Strive to be like the Lord. However, we should not think this is the end of the story. In the next chapter, we see that the training continues.

B) Handling Difficult Testings (1 Sam 30:1-31)

The words, "Then it happened" (1 Samuel 30:1), set the stage for perhaps David's most difficult life trial. It is important to connect this chapter with the previous one, as the chapter division is artificial. The events are interconnected. What happened to David and his men in 1 Samuel 30:1-5?

30:1 Then it happened when David and his men came to Ziklag on the third day, that the Amalekites had made a raid on the Negev and on Ziklag, and had overthrown Ziklag and burned it with fire; 2 and they took captive the women and all who were in it, both small and great, without killing anyone, and carried them off and went their way.

3 And when David and his men came to the city, behold, it was burned with fire, and their wives and their sons and their daughters had been taken captive. 4 Then David and the people who were with him lifted their voices and wept until there was no strength in them to weep. 5 Now David's two wives had been taken captive, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess and Abigail the widow of Nabal the Carmelite" (1 Samuel 30:1-31).

Three days after David narrowly escaped a great disaster involving the Israelites, he returned home to Ziklag only to find something even worse had happened. While they were away, the Amalekites came, took what they wanted, burned the city to the ground, and left. David and his men had lost not only their homes and possessions, but also their wives and children. No one was left.

The people were deeply grieved. The scripture describes this intense weeping, "wept until there was no strength in them to weep" (30:4). David did not escape the pain of the event; he lost his two wives (30:5).

How did things get even worse for David (30:6a)?

6 Moreover David was greatly distressed because the people spoke of stoning him, for all the people were embittered, each one because of his sons and his daughters" (1 Samuel 30:6a).

A superficial look at this whole scene might lead us, like David's men, to conclude that God had simply judged David's small army for their evil. Verse 6 begins to reveal the release of all the men's suppressed anger and frustration from following David. They were bitter against David because of their loss. They had no doubt that this trouble was because of David.

Everyone looks to David and blames him. After all, this scam was David's. His own men started talking about stoning him.

Remember, many of these men were runaways from King Saul and the Israeli government. They were not cowards and were willing to kill David. It's helpful for us to see that while God miraculously delivered David and his men from a serious mistake, the Lord was not pleased with David's irresponsible actions. What did David deserve? He deserved this tragic ending to his life. Things could not get worse.

- ➡ What was David and his men tempted with during this unexpected event? What makes the temptation so strong?

What was the turnabout in David's life at this time (30:6b)?

6 But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God" (1 Samuel 30:6b).

David faced a crisis. The Accuser was likely constantly blaming him. David had failed God and his people. He misled them and lost everything. In such desperate times, we are tempted to lose all hope. Satan is just waiting for us to give him full control over our minds with his temptations.

"You are no good."

"God has left you!"

You might as well end it now!

"You are a failure."

"Stop pretending to love God."

Satan's purpose is to drive David and us to despair. Step back from everything happening and confess your failure, but don't forget God's grace. Seek His grace. Hold onto His mercy. God is still present. This is a special time for learning. The sooner someone softens their heart, the sooner the Lord can set down His whip. Remember, David could only see failure at this time. He

only knew of the lost. He could only hear the voices threatening to destroy his life. However, David shows us the right way to respond. He strengthened himself in His Lord.

What happens when one strengthens oneself in the Lord?

The phrase 'strengthens oneself in his Lord' is very important not only for Old Testament characters but also for New Testament believers. We often use the word 'trust' instead of 'strengthen oneself in the Lord.' The Old Testament example helps because it shows how someone strengthens their faith in the Lord through David's example. When someone strengthens themselves in the Lord, their faith becomes stronger. Their confidence in God's care and their concerns increase. They are able to handle the situation. Having built that stronger faith, they can take the next step as David did, even if they don't know what the outcome will be. David trusted in God, not his plan, since he did not know what to expect.

Confidence helps us move forward. Without it, we tend to give up or avoid difficult situations. Avoidance is the opposite of what we should do and can lead to negative outcomes. Sometimes, procrastination happens because we lack God's strength. We don't want to face such things, so we avoid them.

➡ **Reflection:** Explain what 'strengthened oneself in the Lord his God' means in your own words. Share an example from your life when you did this. Compare it to a time when you did not strengthen yourself in the Lord.

How do you strengthen yourself in the Lord? (1 Samuel 30:7-9)

7 Then David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelech, "Please bring me the ephod." So Abiathar brought the ephod to David. 8 And David inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall I pursue this band? Shall I overtake them?" And He said to him, "Pursue, for you shall surely overtake them, and you shall surely rescue all." 9 So David went, he and the six hundred men who were with him, and came to the brook Besor, where those left behind remained.

Your trust is not in yourself. You are not strong enough, but God is. Approach the Lord and seek His help in specific ways. He does what you cannot do. This process explains how you put your trust in the Lord rather than relying on external or internal resources. This step of seeking the Lord in verse 7 is significant. It sets David apart from others. During times of great crisis, he would turn to the Lord. A sense of humility seemed to surround David. He was willing to admit his mistakes but hoped for God's grace. Instead of giving in to all the many attacks, David persisted in trusting God. He did this by having Abiathar the priest bring out his ephod and seek God's guidance. When confidence comes, we can move forward and take the right step. Judgment does not mean that God has abandoned us.

We can turn back only because God is gracious. Notice how God promised David and his men that all would be rescued (30:8). Discipline has a purpose. When that purpose is fulfilled, God is there to comfort, encourage, and even restore.

➡ **Application:** Remember to seek God's promises to inspire you as you take your next steps!

What happened afterward? (1 Samuel 30:11-20)

16 And when he had brought him down, behold, they were spread over all the land, eating and drinking and dancing because of all the great spoil that they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from the land of Judah. 17 And David slaughtered them from the twilight until the evening of the next day; and not a man of them escaped, except four hundred young men who rode on camels and fled. 18 So David recovered all that the Amalekites had taken, and rescued his two wives. 19 But nothing of theirs was missing, whether small or great, sons or daughters, spoil or anything that they had taken for themselves; David brought it all back. 20 So David had captured all the sheep and the cattle which the people drove ahead of the other livestock, and they said, "This is David's spoil" (1 Samuel 30:16-20).

An Egyptian servant fell ill, so the Amalekites left him in the desert to die. They assumed they now had a new supply of slaves from the Israelites. Although this may seem like a minor detail, it is part of God's bigger plan. Once the servant regained strength, he could lead them directly to the Amalekites to reduce the harm that might happen to the captives from Zigzag by the drunken Amalekites.

The Amalekites celebrated so intensely because of their success. They were not prepared to face David and his men. David's men fought valiantly and regained everything just as God had promised. "But nothing of theirs was missing, whether small or great, sons or daughters, spoil or anything that they had taken for themselves" (30:19). This was a remarkable miracle. Only God could have accomplished this.

God doesn't just judge; He disciplines His children (see Hebrews 12). Discipline may sting, but it aims to change our ways and thoughts about certain behaviors. God never intends for us to

believe He has abandoned or rejected us. Parents can learn a lot from this. Application: No matter what a child does, he should never be able to conclude from his parents' actions and attitudes that they have rejected him. After disciplining our children, we hug them. Forgiveness is offered, and the relationship is restored. This reflects God's way of guiding our lives.

Understanding the situation

Notice what occurs here. David and his men are miraculously saved from this moral dilemma, only to find out that their family and possessions have been stolen.

- ➡ Reflection: Why would God allow this situation to happen if He was going to help David get through it?

God's purpose isn't just to deliver judgment. That would have been much easier than planning these 'close calls.' God is exposing and rebuking David so he can become a greater man, even a better king. God is revealing His ultimate touch of grace. David did not deserve this. One can wonder why Saul was not given more grace. However, God did show Saul much grace, but time and again he rejected God's counsel and acted more wickedly than before. David was broken. This strengthening in the Lord showed he was ready to abandon his small plans and trust God, who can devise special plans.

Application

We might also face situations that seem impossible, where everyone—even our friends and colleagues—turns against us. It could be because of our own sin, like in David's case, or it might not be. Either way, these times should be seen as the Lord being fully in control of our training. We can trust Him. Call upon the

Lord and then, step by step, work through what can be done. This usually involves drawing near to Him through His Word. It helps to remember that the Lord wants to glorify Himself through that situation and draw you closer to Him.

"Blessed be the Lord, who daily bears our burden, The God who is our salvation. [Selah. God is to us a God of deliverances; And to GOD the Lord belong escapes from death" (Psalms 68:19-20).

Handling Rewards (1 Sam 30:21-31)

Special Rule (1 Samuel 30:10,21-25)

There are two concluding insights regarding the spoils the Amalekites acquired.

21 When David came to the two hundred men who were too exhausted to follow David, who had also been left at the brook Besor, and they went out to meet David and to meet the people who were with him, then David approached the people and greeted them. 22 Then all the wicked and worthless men among those who went with David answered and said, "Because they did not go with us, we will not give them any of the spoil that we have recovered, except to every man his wife and his children, that they may lead them away and depart." 23 Then David said, "You must not do so, my brothers, with what the LORD has given us, who has kept us and delivered into our hand the band that came against us.

24 "And who will listen to you in this matter? For as his share is who goes down to the battle, so shall his share be who stays by the baggage; they shall share alike." (1 Samuel 30:21-24).

Share and share alike. David insisted on rewarding equally those on the front lines and those staying back at the camp. Those who disagreed with David were called 'wicked and worthless' men (20:21). David was addressing greed among the people (Saul earlier refused to rebuke the people's greed - 1 Samuel 15:19).

They were willing to have their spouses and children returned, but still wanted their goods. David recognized that true deliverance came from God (30:23). As a result, he established a new rule in the army: everyone shares alike. This offers several helpful lessons for daily life and attitudes.

Application

Think of a mother at home nursing a child while the husband is visiting guests. God will reward both of them. When I travel or write, I am glad that God will reward us equally. This is also true in a church. Some may seem to have more significant ministries, but it is easy to overlook the prayers of a sick, elderly widow. God knows we live as a body, serve together, and will be rewarded together.

Special Favors (1 Sam 30:26-31)

26 Now when David came to Ziklag, he sent some of the spoil to the elders of Judah, to his friends, saying, "Behold, a gift for you from the spoil of the enemies of the LORD: 27 to those who were in Bethel, and to those who were in Ramoth of the Negev, and to those who were in Jattir, 28 and to those who were in Aroer, and to those who were in Siphmoth, and to those who were in Eshtemoa, 29 and to those who were in Racal, and to those who were in the cities of the Jerahmeelites, and to those who were in the cities of the Kenites, 30 and to those who were in Hormah, and to those who were in Bor-ashan, and to those who were in Athach, 31 and to those who were in Hebron, and to all the places where David himself and his men were accustomed to go."

On one hand, we see that David was not going to take any spoils for himself. He had done wrong and was not going to reward himself for his wrongdoing, even though the Lord made things turn out okay in the end. We see David doing similar things when

he refused the offer of free property for an altar of God (2 Samuel 24).

Second, we see how David took the spoils he had and used them as gifts for elders in various Israelite cities. He realized he could no longer continue the deceitful game he had been playing for the past few years. That was the end. So, he began rebuilding good relationships with those in Israel again. He could see that things might not go well with Saul, as they indeed didn't. He wanted to lay the groundwork for a good path back into leadership if this was the right time.

Conclusion

1 & 2 Samuel vividly illustrate God's incredible grace. The challenges David faced were mainly because of his sin, yet they were closely watched over by the Almighty. The Lord rescued David and his men from the moral chaos they were in. He timed their return perfectly so they would witness the destruction and be humbled. The Lord made sure the Amalekites did not kill the people but took them alive. He also arranged for an Egyptian along the way who could guide them to the Amalekites' location. God disciplines. He isn't focused on general judgment but on effective training so we can better reflect His wonderful mercy.



Strengthen Oneself in the Lord

1 Samuel 30:1-6

1 Samuel 30:1-6

Strengthen Oneself in the Lord

Learning to recover from our failures, guilt, and shame.

Discernment and wise decision-making come from spiritual maturity. David demonstrates how to develop proper dependence on the Lord through his responses in tough situations. In this case, the pain, grief, and threats were so intense that David could only respond appropriately because he already had the faith needed, which he had gained from past experiences.

As we examine David's response, let's consider: How would I react in similar situations? May all of us be inspired by David's example and learn how to respond to God, even during very stressful times, in the right way. As we face challenges, like David, our worship will deepen, helping us better see God's gracious care for us. I can't imagine facing the distressing circumstances David encountered in 1 Samuel 29-30. Although the three trials—what I'll call stages—were separate, they felt like one because of

the short time span and the same people involved. David—the general, the anointed, the prophet, the harp player, the warrior—found it impossible to handle this on his own. God finally broke him.

Have you ever been in a situation like this? Are you currently facing a problem that seems impossible to handle? Or maybe the opposite is true – wishing for a normal life but feeling like you don't have one. This past year has been incredibly difficult. Many people have taken their own lives. This is a situation in which they succumbed to the belief that they couldn't cope. I believe that what we learn from this study of David will be particularly helpful here. David faced his terrible circumstances, losing everything he had, including his family, the affection of his men, and rumors about him taking his own life.

Please don't think this extreme situation is insignificant. Our era is very unstable; we may have unknowingly entered the end times. I know for my brothers in India, it feels like that now. In two cities, a pastor friend reported that over twenty pastors had died from a virus in each city. The plague is devastating.

Let's explore how David entrusted himself to the Lord during these difficult times. While it is effective in extreme situations, it also helps us in less severe cases. I'll first outline the three stages of David's struggle and then explain how he handled them by God's grace.

Facing Life's Distresses (1 Sam 29-30:6)

Stage 1: Public Failure (1 Sam 29)

Have you ever realized you were on the wrong side? King Saul of Israel chased David for so long that David ended up joining the

Philistines—Israel’s enemies! You might think this could never happen, but I’m surprised it did. How did David become King Achish’s right-hand man (his personal bodyguard)? The Philistines tolerated it for a while, but only up to a point. It became too much when they started fighting Israel and found David and his men at the back of their forces. The Philistine generals then gathered and demanded that Achish send David and his men away.

To support their request, they reminded King Achish of who David was. Don’t you remember when they sang and danced?

“Saul has slain his thousands,

And David his ten thousands?” (1 Sam 29:5)

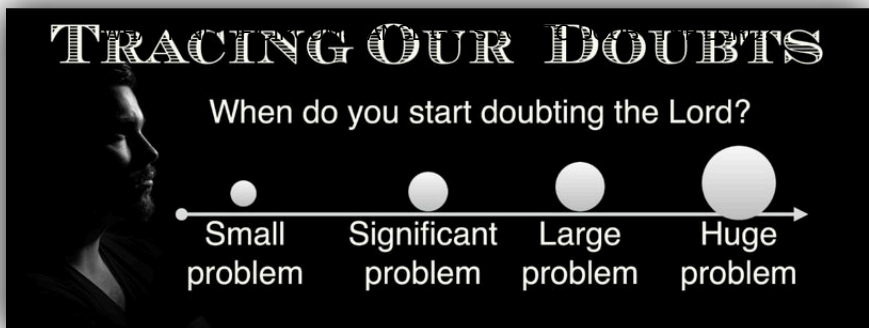
David, in his innocence, declared his allegiance to Achish. Achish reiterated that the “commanders of the Philistines insisted, ‘He must not go up with us to the battle’”(9). “So David arose early, he and his men, to leave in the morning and return to the land of the Philistines. And the Philistines went up to Jezreel” (29:11). Was David offended that he could not fight Israel? Or was he desperately trying to hide his true identity? David appears to have fallen into a pattern of compromise, doing things he should not. Sometimes brothers and sisters compromise by dating and marrying unbelievers. Others justify disobedience to parents. Are we immersing ourselves in scenes that do not please the Lord? We become spiritually dull—until we get a shock, but even that doesn’t always wake us up.

The Chronicler confirms David’s sin. David planned to go into battle against the Israelites. Some Israelites even joined David, encouraging him. Maybe David had grown tired of King Saul’s many poor policies.

"From Manasseh also some defected to David when he was about to go to battle with the Philistines against Saul" (1 Chr 12:19).

David's choice to support the Philistines, Israel's enemies, was more than just a personal decision. As shown earlier, it involved all of his several hundred men and their families. From the next scene, we see that some of David's men were not as convinced as he was that he should have accepted being a bodyguard for King Achish. Yes, they were desperate refugees—men on the run, a people without a permanent home, an army without a commander—and yet, what David did, and led many others to do, didn't match God's clear will. David and his men returned home as asked, but they wondered, "Would David have fought Israel? Could we kill our own people?" I interpret this as a sign of David's weakness, not his strength.

In summary, this event left everyone wondering about the future. What would their next step be? As for David, God was starting to open his eyes to the fact that he had joined the wrong side. He was ready to fight alongside the Philistines. However, I don't think David was fully aware yet that he was on the wrong side. Stage two arrived.



Have you compromised in one or more areas of your life? Do you believe something you're doing is right, even if it clearly goes against what God says? David had to face public shame.

• Stage 2: Loss of All (1 Sam 30:1-6a)

The situation rapidly worsened. David and his army headed back home, questioning whether God was saving them, reproaching them, or both. They started to see that they had been opposing the Lord. But now, it seems the reproach has turned into judgment. It couldn't possibly get any worse – literally.

^{30:1} Then it happened when David and his men came to Ziklag on the third day, that the Amalekites had made a raid on the Negev and on Ziklag, and had overthrown Ziklag and burned it with fire; ² and they took captive the women and all who were in it, both small and great, without killing anyone, and carried them off and went their way. ³ And when David and his men came to the city, behold, it was burned with fire, and their wives and their sons and their daughters had been taken captive. ⁴ Then David and the people who were with him lifted their voices and wept until there was no strength in them to weep. ⁵ Now David's two wives had been taken captive, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess and Abigail the widow of Nabal the Carmelite" (1 Samuel 30:1-5).

David and his men, reflecting on what had just happened, traveled three days back to their city of Ziklag. But upon arriving, instead of seeing their families, they found that the Amalekites had attacked their home, burned the city, and taken everyone captive. Remember, they were refugees, and even though they were on the run, many had started families during this time. No one was left; all they saw was smoldering rubble from the raid. Their belongings, including their wives and children, were gone. It's easy to picture David and his men running to find their homes

in vain—no one was there. Everything and everyone of value was gone.

What a harsh wake-up call! If anyone hadn't doubted David's leadership before, they certainly do now. David misled them, and as a result, they lost everything because they followed him.



You can imagine everyone's thoughts—everyone's attention fixed on David. David, too, undoubtedly believed his delusion had caused all his men to lose everything they had. What could be worse than displacement or losing one's precious little ones? We can almost hear their despair.

"Then David and the people who were with him lifted their voices and wept until there was no strength in them to weep" (1 Sam 30:4).

• **Stage 3: Rejected and Blamed (1 Sam 30:6a-b)**

When things go wrong, what do we do? We blame others. Bitterness accelerates this process and quickly shifts the blame to David.

"Moreover David was greatly distressed because the people spoke of stoning him, for all the people were embittered, each one because of his sons and his daughters" (1 Sam 30:6a-b).

David's men discussed secretly—likely in his presence—their plans to stone him. "All the people were embittered." Each of them had

lost everything. Their hope for life quickly disappeared, leaving only their cause—David. They believed that God wouldn't have judged them this way if they had refused to support the Philistines. Some had openly questioned why they had joined the Philistines. But now, they had proof it was a wrong decision, and they strongly blamed their reckless leader, David.

So where did that leave David? Where would it have left us? Did David consider taking his own life? Probably. Did he blame himself? I'm sure he did. Did he make mistakes? Was he foolish and blind? Where were his family and possessions? Did it seem like God had forsaken him and his trust in God? I believe we know the answers to these questions. David mourned the loss of his family and realized that his foolishness and 'overconfidence in God' had cost him everything, including the loyalty of his men, whom he loved dearly.

- Does one go on? Is there any hope left?
- Can one go on?
- What can one do now?
- What actions should he take concerning his relationship with God and his failures?

David destroyed everything. Past victories now seem pointless—like passing breezes. What was it all worth anymore?

Has discouragement turned into dismay and depression for you? Do you feel trapped, not just because of the virus lockdown but also due to guilt, blame, and accusations? Your wrong decisions have piled up, weighing you down so much that you can't move. You are suffocating from a lack of hope. Our circumstances are very different from David's, but we often fall into the same cycle of

defeat, guilt, self-blame, and failure because the Accuser constantly pushes us into wrong conclusions. David, like Jonah, probably agreed with the sentence of being stoned to death.

Be honest. Assess your decisions and circumstances in light of God's Word. Step back from your situation to see if you've somehow compromised your allegiance to God. You might have found what seems like a good reason, like David, who had to live among Israel's enemies. Wake up, repent, and change before it's too late. But maybe the end has already come for you—bankruptcy, divorce, being deserted, friendless, etc.

And if you're a leader, have you led others down the same treacherous path? That is even worse!

Summary

In the first stage, David faces public rebuke and reproach. He appears to have been caught off guard. David and his men now realize they made a wrong choice. The Lord could have stopped there by exposing them, since they were no longer working with God's enemy. But He chose a different, more difficult lesson—they lost everything. While they were away learning this lesson, they returned to face God's judgment. We are not saying that God always acts this way, but sometimes He does. The Lord teaches each of us unique lessons. I believe most of us can largely avoid God's reproof; we just need to repent, confess our sins, and seek His will.

This judgment, however, intensified the critique by delivering a double blow, devastating David by tearing away his sense of purpose—stripping him of his pride in leading his men, among other things. He lost everything in an instant. So, what is life when

the ground suddenly shifts beneath you and you end up falling flat on your face?

I hope we are aware of any sins we need to repent for. Don't be the fool, the insolent, or the prideful person who ends up in the dirt. The Lord chastises those He loves (Heb 12:5-8). However, in true Gospel glory, remember that all of this blame, guilt, and evil can transform into a remarkable story in the third stage. Stick with me as we examine verse 6 more closely.

2. Resolving Life's Struggles (1 Sam 30:6c-18)

"Moreover David was greatly distressed **because** the people spoke of stoning him, for all the people were embittered, each one because of his sons and his daughters. But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God." (1 Samuel 30:6)

Let's review verse 6 and uncover its three parts.

- (1) His distressed men spoke of stoning him.
- (2) David's bitter men lost their children.
- (3) "But David strengthened himself in the Lord."

We have no trouble connecting clauses one and two; the author does it for us with the word 'because.' What he hears from his men—the loss of their wives and children—and his flawed plans are at the heart of it all. His own men were ready to stone him. But something else in clause three is difficult to understand. It doesn't quite make sense. How did David go from intense distress to "strengthening himself in the Lord"? Let's see what we can learn from David. Although he preceded the Apostle Paul, we observe David renewing his mind.

"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of

God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Romans 12:2).

(1) God is always present

“In the Lord His God”

God remains present even in tough times. David didn’t just run away from life or turn his back on God during his biggest mistakes. We can imagine his shame, guilt, and even his fear of how others would judge him, but notice the key words “in the Lord.” Instead of withdrawing from God or doubting His presence or help, he chose to turn to God. Satan’s temptations always lead us to mistrust and doubt God. That is what many do, and they go from bad to worse. This is not the time to reject God! Like Job, David kept trusting God despite his extreme difficulties.

“He has redeemed my soul from going to the pit,
And my life shall see the light” (Job 33:28).

Being spiritual doesn’t mean you won’t make mistakes or go through periods of isolation. From David’s life, we see that spiritual principles always work, regardless of where we are. Isn’t this how we view Jesus’ life on the cross? Despite being shipwrecked, the Apostle Paul still heard God and offered comfort and advice to the frightened crew (Acts 28). Why do believers think God isn’t with them when things go wrong? Isn’t this how we often feel? But that’s not God’s advice. It’s Satan’s bait to ensure everything goes wrong. David, however, had learned from past mistakes—no matter how tough his circumstances were, he would turn to God and trust Him.

We believe our faith is strong until we face a tough moment when everything seems to fall apart. What if... we have a big argument, my friend turns against me, our investments drop by 30%, we lose

our baby, I break a foot, our child can't or won't find a spouse, and the list goes on. We can also include events from last year, like losing a loved one to Covid, having an aunt in a nursing home, not having a traditional wedding, or missing a graduation celebration.

Theologically, David recalls that God remains his Father in heaven, or, in pastoral terms, the good shepherd (cf. Psa 23). Doesn't that get to the heart of the issue? We often lose connection with the relationship with God who disciplines us, but the Scriptures teach us that He disciplines those He loves (Heb 12:3-9). God cares for us—even when we make mistakes. The cross also shows that the Lord cares for us no matter how tough things get. And based on David's example, we can accept that people do some stupid things and make it worse by not admitting it early on!

(2) Discovering our Weaknesses

"Strengthened himself"

I remember how tough it was to use a crutch and later a cane. I'm not that old, but I broke my foot. I had to swallow my pride and start walking with some sticks for support. David discovered his weakness. God showed it to him, and it wasn't easy. If he didn't fully learn his lesson, the Lord had another one waiting when he got home. When we strongly identify with our gifts, roles, and strengths, we often struggle to see our weaknesses. David was not quite thirty when all of this happened—full of enthusiasm for life. Our secular culture doesn't help either, suggesting that we can and should think highly of ourselves.

It is God who is great. We often overlook this importance when trying to impress others to earn their favor and applause.

However, that's just a game—and it's not real. I'm not saying that individuals aren't talented, successful business owners, or researchers. We simply have a shallow understanding of God and our lives. Do you tend to get offended if someone doesn't compliment you? These are tough lessons to learn because we become very insecure when thinking about our weaknesses. But we are weak, aren't we? How quickly our plans change when they shut down the oil pipeline. What is the West doing now that they have no water? Before I recall trying to understand how deadly the spread of the virus was, I prayed, realizing I might die within a month.

The Lord undoubtedly used various situations to humble David, correct his mistakes, and prevent him from foolishly leading his men. I believe the more outspoken among his men—possibly even his wives—questioned whether working so closely with the Philistines was wise. Less severe rebukes from others sometimes don't work, but God's methods do. There was intense embarrassment, shame, defeat, guilt, and sin. Who likes confronting these feelings when you are a leader, and everyone is watching? However, God didn't just send David home. There was more—much more. They returned to find, to their shock, their burned-out city of Ziklag.

Why did David and the men grieve so deeply? The most important things are the people close to your heart; a huge void is left when they suddenly disappear. I can imagine each man returning home to find burnt clothing, missing loved ones, and quick-fading memories of each one. Like the pop of a balloon, all of it was gone.

Bill Gothard specialized in sharing how God uses our circumstances to teach, rebuke, and guide us. If a teenager has an

issue with his parents, first check if you are honoring them. If you have a problem with a coworker, start by evaluating your own attitudes and actions. Bad attitudes lead to many bad encounters.

God does get involved in our lives, initially mildly, but eventually with strong action to bring us back to Himself and His plan. We all say we want God's will, but that usually means we want God to agree with how we choose to do things. Oh, I'm like you and David. We don't wait for God to reveal our problems. Who lists their weaknesses on their resumes? But isn't that part of who we are? Unless we see ourselves as we truly are, then we hide our real selves and needs. We can't be honest with God and others. No wonder so many people are surprised when they find their spouses are not the people they thought! We are phonies, not wanting to admit our situation. A good disciple is honest about his life and mistakes (Gal 6:3-4).

Sometimes God allows difficult things in our lives to teach us important lessons. I'm thankful that David was able to move past his reproof. God disciplines us because He cares about us. Reproof doesn't mean that God (or our parents) doesn't love us; instead, it means He is shaping us for His good and perfect will (Rom 12:1-2).

"But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Corinthians 1:30 NASB).

This verse and passage from 1 Corinthians illustrate where the Lord guides us. He desires our complete trust to be in Him—who provides all strength, wisdom, wealth, and righteousness. We may lack in one area, but He can help us. We might be strong in another; that strength and gift come from the Lord. We have nothing to boast about, but like Paul, God has chosen to work in

our lives to make us more like Christ. How incredible is God's grace!

Theologically, I believe David remembered that God's love for him was not because he was strong or always correct, but because of grace, as shown on the cross. God wanted to share His goodness with someone who didn't deserve it. Do you see how David turned to the Lord despite his many failures? This is how God wants all of us to turn to Him.

(3) God's Marvelous Person

"But David"

The final words of this last phrase in verse 6 remind us of a real person in history who chose to live by faith rather than by sight. David decided to strengthen himself in the Lord because of who God is. It was not just God's strength, but also His marvelous grace—God's love. God is always strong. He is Sovereign, carefully weaving together all kinds of impossible situations for His foolish and fragile children. He is always loving and gracious. And us? We are always weak, sinners, in need of grace, air, food, friends, and the like. To pause this train of thought for a moment. If you are wondering what a Christian is, this is a beautiful example of how God welcomes each sinner into His presence. We might have all our sins laid out before us, but don't let that keep you from believing and trusting God. No! Those are the weaknesses that the Lord brings to our minds so that we actually run to Him, our Savior, for help.

But you, like David, must choose to trust God. It's not blind faith. David knew how God lifted him from his mistakes, and he carried that confidence into his most difficult circumstances. A new believer experiences this for the first time. They wonder if God

knows about their sin. Yes, He does. They wonder if God wants to accept them despite their sin. Yes, He does. They wonder if God, as a holy God, can accept them with their unholy acts. Again, yes. God sent Jesus to die for us to take away our sins and make us His children forever! This was David's confidence.

Once God's sheep, He would lead. This was the dark valley, yet the Lord was with him. But David strengthened himself in the Lord; he trusted God. Despite his failures, God would be with him if he corrected his path. With God, there is an infinite amount of grace for all our sins. Hallelujah.

Read what happened.

"7 Then David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelech, "Please bring me the ephod." So Abiathar brought the ephod to David. 8 David inquired of the Lord, saying, "Shall I pursue this band? Shall I overtake them?" And He said to him, "Pursue, for you will surely overtake them, and you will surely rescue all." 9 So David went, he and the six hundred men who were with him, and came to the brook Besor, where those left behind remained. 10 But David pursued, he and four hundred men, for two hundred who were too exhausted to cross the brook Besor remained behind. 11 Now they found an Egyptian in the field and brought him to David, and gave him bread and he ate, and they provided him water to drink. 12 They gave him a piece of fig cake and two clusters of raisins, and he ate; then his spirit revived" (1 Samuel 30:7-12).

In David's case, he immediately sought God's guidance through the priest (verses 7-8). Once he understood God's will, he acted confidently on it. He had only 600 men; 200 dropped out because they were too exhausted, but in faith, they fought those who stole their goods and families. David did not force the 200 dropouts but trusted God to use a smaller band to accomplish His

will. By God's magnificent grace, everything was restored—including their families. What a lesson for everyone!

Summary

We can confidently rely on God's grace even in tough times. Be honest with God. Confess your sins and failures. As followers of Christ, we receive complete forgiveness through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. No situation is ever too hopeless for us to trust God to guide us. It might be hard to admit our faults and step courageously into where God calls us. But, as someone naturally shy, I can sincerely say there is no safer or better place than living out God's will.

Study Questions

1. What did David and his men discover when they returned to Ziklag?
2. How did grief turn into blame, and why was David especially vulnerable at that moment?
3. What does it mean that David "strengthened himself in the Lord his God"?
4. How did David seek God's guidance before acting?
5. What did David's treatment of the exhausted men teach about grace, leadership, and shared reward?
6. How can you turn guilt, failure, or rejection into a renewed dependence on the Lord?



1 Samuel 31 - 2 Samuel 2

God's Perfect Timing

Never Frustrated

God is never frustrated by our choices, even when they are completely shortsighted. We suffer because of poor decisions, but God's perfect timing reveals how He orchestrates events for His purposes. His will is never defeated by human sin; He can even weave stubborn choices into His larger plan. We often look back and think, "It could have been so much easier if I had only..." Yet today marks the beginning of the future. Let us obey faithfully and demonstrate that God's will is best (Rom 12:2).

Our choices shape our lives for better or worse. Disobedience reveals flaws in a person's character, while obedience—the willingness to follow the Lord's commands rather than one's own—demonstrates a person's virtue.

Since this chapter briefly covers three chapters, we will focus on two main themes: Saul's tragic ending (1 Sam 31) and David's new beginning (2 Sam 1-2).

1. A Pitiful End - Saul (1 Samuel 31)

Now the Philistines were fighting against Israel, and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines and fell slain on Mount Gilboa. 2 And the Philistines overtook Saul and his sons; and the Philistines killed Jonathan and Abinadab and Malchi-shua the sons of Saul (1 Sam 31:1-2).

6 Thus Saul died with his three sons, his armor bearer, and all his men on that day together. 7 And when the men of Israel who were on the other side of the valley, with those who were beyond the Jordan, saw that the men of Israel had fled and that Saul and his sons were dead, they abandoned the cities and fled; then the Philistines came and lived in them" (1 Sam 31:6-7).

There is no doubt that verse 6 records one of the saddest scenes in the Holy Scriptures: "Thus Saul died with his three sons, his armor bearer, and all his men on that day together" (31:6). All the promise associated with Saul's anointing and installation as the first king of Israel faded into a harsh awakening that even leaders fail, and that God's words to the disobedient Israel about a king were very true. Had Saul faithfully followed the Lord as king, Israel would have grown and prospered. Of course, Saul's failures didn't end with the death of his own family. One disaster after another unfolded because of King Saul's neglect. A leader's neglect treacherously leads many down a tragic path. Let's examine this tragedy that never needed to happen.

- Saul and his three sons untimely died.
- The Philistines defeated Israel and occupied their cities.
- Many Israelites died, and others fled, losing their homes.
- God's patience with Saul was clear, but it ended in disaster when he inflicted a self-inflicted wound that killed an entire city of priests and their families (Nob).

The Book of 1 Samuel highlights Israel's failed attempt to find the right king to lead them. Their effort did not succeed. Saul looked impressive and didn't have a large group of officials advising him, but power went to his head and corrupted him. David, too, wasn't the perfect king, so the wait for the true Messiah would continue into the future. At the same time, however, we notice two big questions that stand out.

- Why was God so patient with Saul?
- Why did the Lord not install David earlier to solve the problems of Saul?

Why does God allow these things to happen? We will answer each of these questions soon, but it's important to remember that foolish decisions create problems that wouldn't exist otherwise. The world already suffers from too much rudeness, yet Saul, a believer in God and anointed by the Lord, let the evil one spread his wicked schemes among God's people. How deeply sad!

Why was God so patient with Saul?

I don't think anyone would say that God was impatient with King Saul after reading about his life. Perhaps someone might point out God's rebuke of Saul's early sins, but definitely not later, when Saul wasted his strength chasing after David. Saul became blind to God's wise placement of David because he was filled with jealousy. We then wonder, "Why was God so patient?" You see, God had the power and wisdom to change everything. However, once the Israelites, in their unbelief, chose a human ruler instead of God, their decision was bound to seem wrong.

First, we acknowledge that the Lord unquestionably exercised His patience. He saw His priests being destroyed by Saul, who used a

foreigner (Doeg) to assassinate them and their families. God gave Saul His Spirit, but Saul misused it for his own glory. Moreover, Saul constantly disobeyed the Lord. One might think that all of this would push the Lord to His patience limit, but it didn't. The Lord waited patiently, even recording these events for us. God revealed a greater truth here: man cannot save. Yet, God maintained His patience despite the rise of evil.

Second, the Lord endures unjust situations. This point is very interesting—some people are outraged by the evil the Lord tolerates. But when we read the Scriptures carefully, we see that the Lord's wrath is still stored up, or that once evil has accumulated enough, God releases the full punishment. One reason for the delay is to recognize the consequences of our sin, while another is to prompt us to cry out to God for salvation. Unless God's grace becomes very clear to us, we will despise our appreciation for His work. That is why we boast about the gospel or the cross—because there we see how wicked our sins truly are. Jesus, His only Son, had to die for us. The Lord has endured many unjust situations where abuse and pain increased because of man's pursuit of personal goals instead of God's.

Personal Reflections

Just because we have power and authority as a boss, parent, or elder, it does not mean we always need to immediately correct everything. We have a broader goal. By setting aside our anger, we can become part of God's greater work of mercy. "For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment" (James 2:13). God's mercy is connected to His patience. If the Lord

lacked patience, there would be no mercy because patience involves holding back His wrath. Without mercy or patience, immediate justice would be required for God's righteous anger.

1) The Lord hopes for and works towards our best.

God is on our side. It might not seem that way, but He placed His image in us, and through His redemption plan in Jesus, He is trying to restore it. God's grace was very clear in His dealings with Saul. That's why we ask, "Why put up with him?" But by using David, the Lord was trying to remove his jealous spirit so he would turn back to Him. Although he was touched for a moment, Saul did not learn his lesson. We see God giving every chance in the book and more.

2) The Lord demonstrated His extreme mercy (Rom 9:22-23).

Every time the Lord showed patience, He demonstrated His great mercy. As Romans 9:22-23 teaches us, this is one of the main goals of the redemptive plan. God didn't fully punish man in the Garden but tolerated sinful people because He chose to show His mercy and redeem us for His glorious purposes. God emphasizes the greatness of His love to His people. This then serves as a model for us: be patient, kind, and forgiving.

By setting aside our anger, we become instruments of God's greater work of mercy.

Personal Reflections

If you believe you can't tolerate unjust situations or "intolerable" people, then consider the Lord who has been patient since man disobeyed in the Garden of Eden. And God's mercy is far greater because He sees the hearts of everyone! Patience allows for mercy, restoration, and eventual success. Justice is coming, but by delaying it, mercy has its time of influence.

**Patience allows for mercy, restoration,
and eventual success.**

Why did the Lord not install David earlier as king?

God knows men's hearts and trains them so they can stand strong and faithfully serve Him. Even with this training, though, David would fall again. The point: God prepares, but leadership comes with specific risks. With King Saul's clear incompetence and unwillingness to follow basic orders, why did God not replace him with David, who was already anointed? Besides showing mercy, there's another reason behind God's strategic delay.

David was an excellent general, defeating tens of thousands of enemies. He was the obvious choice. Moreover, God had

already chosen him, filled him with the Holy Spirit, and loved his heart. So why not make him king now? Instead, the Lord allowed Saul to rule for forty years, including many years after he disobeyed, leaving David, who was promised, gifted, but tested. By keeping Saul alive, God delayed the actual crowning of David as king (which finally happened in 2 Samuel 2).

People often trust appearances. You can see how people believed David could succeed. But that's the problem: they couldn't see where David was not fully trained. So, while they cheered for David, saying, "He can do it!" he definitely seemed likely to perform better than Saul. His men also applied pressure, like during the time he was in the cave, and could have killed Saul. David also had to work on his own confidence: "I can do it better!" He was being tested with pride. Who would dismiss David with all the awards he received? Remember Goliath, the Philistine he defeated with a sling? Everything seemed to favor David—except for God's purpose!

God's purpose was not just to show mercy to Saul and serve as an example of His compassion, but also to properly prepare David. David had flaws that the Lord needed to address, or he risked becoming like Saul. The same pattern happened with Abram, who twice traded his wife for a sister to save his own life. Their marriage was struggling. So, although David experienced much success, he was not fully

ready to be king. These flaws didn't mean David lacked a heart after God or that he didn't do many good things. However, Satan wants us to stumble over our faults and never recover. The Lord reaches out His hand to lift us up and guide us on the right path. God's training involves careful preparation. Here are a few "fault lines" in David's character.

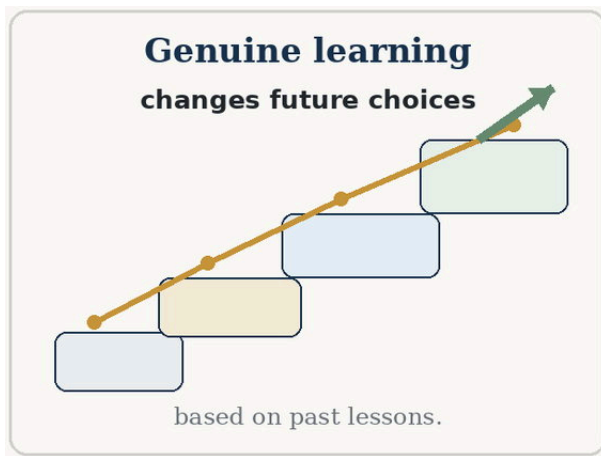
- In 1 Samuel 21, David behaves like a madman. What was he thinking?
- In 1 Samuel 25, David had a hot temper toward Nabal.
- In 1 Samuel 27, David sank into a state of discouragement and aligned himself with an enemy king (Achish).

Although these flaws may seem minor on their own, they become more noticeable under pressure when someone assumes a leadership role. Remember Saul? His insecurity was obvious early on when he hid behind the baggage. As time passed, his insecurity worsened, especially as people praised David. The evil one exploited this vulnerability and other weaknesses to take control of Saul's mind and his kingdom.

Lesson: The Believer's Patience

Let's then consider, through God's forbearance towards Saul and David, that we as believers should all be patient like our God and exercise mercy.

- Love is patient (1 Cor 13:4)
- We care more about the person than our convenience
- Our purpose goes beyond the immediate scene. We are not just trying to correct the obvious wrong, but also pursuing a greater goal: extending mercy.
- We show mercy to extend God's grace. When we face troubles, those are the moments when God's love and mercy shine the brightest.
- Be firm with expectations yet gentle. Stick to our standards, but also recognize infractions as opportunities to be kind and helpful. After all, we are sinners too!



- An example could be a father upset with his wife or child, or vice versa. Someone has done something wrong, perhaps intentionally. The standard is challenged, but within the broader concept of patience lies the chance to show mercy and forgive. Of course, we must not show mercy in a way that disregards or diminishes justice.
- Great caution is necessary with non-profits that make handouts seem earned, so that God's mercy is not

overlooked or felt. Saul never learned his lesson. All of us should be humbled by the numerous ways God's mercy and grace are shown to us.

- Don't take God's mercy for granted or ignore His lessons. Sadly, Saul never learned his lessons.

2. A New Beginning - David (2 Sam 1-2)

"Then David took hold of his clothes and tore them, and so also did all the men who were with him. 12 And they mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and his son Jonathan and for the people of the LORD and the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword. 13 And David said to the young man who told him, "Where are you from?" And he answered, "I am the son of an alien, an Amalekite." 14 Then David said to him, "How is it you were not afraid to stretch out your hand to destroy the LORD'S anointed?" 15 And David called one of the young men and said, "Go, cut him down." So he struck him and he died. 16 And David said to him, "Your blood is on your head, for your mouth has testified against you, saying, 'I have killed the LORD'S anointed.'" 17 Then David chanted with this lament over Saul and Jonathan his son, 18 and he told them to teach the sons of Judah the song of the bow; behold, it is written in the book of Jashar. 19 "Your beauty, O Israel, is slain on your high places! How have the mighty fallen!"

(2 Samuel 1:11-19)

Finer Testing Moments

How does a person behave once they are in power? We truly don't know what we're like until we're tested. Many people are fine before they assume a certain position, but whether it's power, wealth, ease, or pride, they can turn bad like Saul did, and as a result, they end up worse than they were at the beginning. Let's

examine what in these verses highlights David's gentleness after he has essentially secured his royal position. David became very tender-hearted following his difficult situation where he realized how he had drifted away from the Lord (1 Sam 30).

- David generally showed respect for Saul even after his death.
- David and his men mourned for Saul and his sons, even weeping and fasting (1:11-12). Somehow, David managed to lead his men in grief. There was something about David's respect for Saul that left no room for bitterness—only mercy.
- David executed the man who claimed to have killed Saul (1:13-16). The man lied about killing King Saul, but nonetheless, the incident still shows David's respect for God's anointed.
- David performed a deeply heartfelt lament later in chapter 1 (1:17-27). There is no sign of superficiality, only a sincere song that shows genuine love for Saul and his sons. David had forgiven his enemy. It seems this forgiving spirit is what God valued most about David.
- David did not rush in as King and General (2:1-3). After all these years, he could have come in as the one who "I told you so." He did no such thing. Instead, he sought God as he should have earlier on.
- David spoke kindly to the men of Jabesh-Gilead (2:5-7). These men rescued Saul and his sons' bodies after they were killed. David didn't yell at them but promised to support them in their efforts. They were now on the same team. Truly, David had no hidden hatred for King Saul.

The training we get through life experiences—heart training—is more important than just securing a position.

Recasting a Vision

David experienced countless dashed hopes over the years, making it hard to reshape his vision for the kingdom. When David was finally broken (ch. 30), his lost dream ultimately resurfaced. However, he was very careful not to repeat his previous mistakes. David humbly asked God two important questions that he had not asked before.

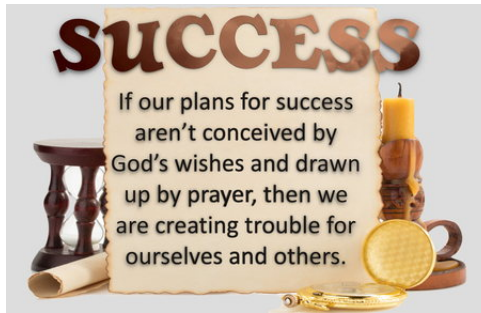
- What should I do? Should he go to Judah and become king (2:1)?
- Where should I go? What city should he go to (2:1)?

Though David was anointed earlier (1 Sam 16:13), the men of Judah anointed and installed him as King of Judah (2:4). I assume this rekindled many memories from long ago. Much had passed since he was a boy, and now the kingdom seeks him to be king. But even here, we see David not aggressively pursuing the whole kingdom but waiting for God's timing.

David was not alone in working through the broken vision syndrome. This reflects the biblical pattern seen in Joseph, David, and Jesus.

- Joseph had a dream, but it was realized only after many years.
- David had an anointing as king, but it only came to fruition later.
- Jesus also had an anointing but faced much rejection at the cross, making the promise of success seem empty until after His resurrection.

God takes us low through life's valleys to teach us lessons we couldn't otherwise learn.



Lesson

God's definition of success includes moral character development (heart training), because otherwise, the evil one will find ways to sneak into the holes of our hearts and corrupt God's good work. Have you seriously considered God when making your short- and long-term plans? Are you more focused on God's will and purpose or your own?

- Do you find yourself impatient for success?
- What area of your life is God working on right now? (Probably your problem area!)
- Instant success is dangerous because we are little prepared for it.
- Redefine success by focusing on the small, daily, faithful choices instead of the big accomplishments others notice.

Conclusion

1 Samuel ends almost awkwardly—very differently from the Book of Revelation. God's hidden work might suggest that He was not involved at all. He allowed many corrupt things to happen (Gen 6), just as He does in our world. Yet in His incredible mercy, the Lord confronted Saul and David about their weaknesses. David

did not deserve grace, but like Abram and all of us, he received it. Jesus alone deserved every grace and mercy, yet He died the death of a criminal on the cross, bearing our sins in His body.

Study Questions

1. What does Saul's tragic end reveal about the long-term consequences of persistent disobedience?
2. Why was God so patient with Saul, and what does His patience teach us?
3. Why did the Lord delay David's accession to the throne after anointing him?
4. What weaknesses was God training out of David during the years of waiting?
5. How did David continue to honor Saul even after Saul's death?
6. What did David do before moving to Hebron, and what does that reveal about his dependence on God?
7. How do small, daily choices of faithfulness prepare a person for lasting success?

2 Samuel 23-24

Handling Success and Failure

David's End, Our Life's End

These final two chapters of 2 Samuel offer a unique overview of David's life. Through them, we are personally reminded to live for the Lord and care less about what others think.



Just like in the description of these two chapters of David's life, everyone will end up with two lists at the end of their life: one for their failures and one for their successes. At a funeral, you might hear, "Too bad he drank so much. He wasted his life," or "He really got ahead in life." David's success is shown in chapter 23, while his colossal failure appears in chapter 24. Similarly, each of us faces an evaluation.

These final two chapters, along with the entire books of 1 and 2 Samuel, remind us to understand God's purposes for our lives and to fulfill them. However, these chapters also provide a powerful theological insight. David, though loved by God, was not the king of Israel who would ultimately save Israel. These books, especially the last chapter, serve as a sharp arrow pointing toward the need for Jesus the King.

David's Great Success (2 Sam 23:1-39)

David's last words are recorded here in 2 Samuel 23:1-7. Following David's final thoughts is a fitting list of all his mighty men, through whom God brought victory. No battle is fought by a single person. This chapter connects with well-known passages that highlight the unity of God's people, such as the collection of items for the temple in Exodus 35:20-21 and the building of the wall in Nehemiah 4:6, 6:15-16. These passages show how powerfully God works when His people are united and work together to fulfill His purposes (Philippians 1:27). They also portray the body of Christ serving God with one heart. Isn't this what we see in the early part of Acts (Acts 2:42-47)?

1) David's Last Words (2 Samuel 23:1-7)

"Now these are the last words of David. David the son of Jesse declares, And the man who was raised on high declares, The anointed of the God of Jacob, And the sweet psalmist of Israel" (2 Samuel 23:1).

2 Samuel 23:1-7 shows us David's "last words." This isn't his final speech but probably his last prophetic message. There are two ways to interpret verse 1.

These are the last words of David: "The oracle of David son of Jesse, the oracle of the man exalted by the Most High, the man anointed by the God of Jacob, Israel's singer of songs (NIV).

Now these are the last words of David. David, the son of Jesse, declares, and the man who was raised on high declares, The anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel (NASB).

In case #1 (NIV, ESV), the first verse introduces David, while in case #2 (NASB, KJV, LXX), it describes David as part of what David himself said. Does this make a big difference? Not really. The meaning remains the same. The words portray David. The

question is whether others attributed these things to David (case #1) or if he said them about himself (case #2).

❖ **David's acclaim (2 Samuel 23:1)**

Three key phrases describe David (whether written by others or himself is hard to determine - see above). What does each of these phrases mean, and why are other aspects left out? Interestingly, we don't see David called king, prophet, rich, or a great general, even though he was all of these.

A man who was raised on high (23:1)

David was a man lifted up, born in a humble village. He never forgot it (2 Samuel 7:18 - "Who am I?"). He experienced grace after grace. Isn't this a reflection of our own lives? We start with nothing as sinners (a debt we cannot pay) and then see God's goodness graciously poured out upon us over the years.

The anointed of the God of Jacob (23:1)

God's grace on David was clearly demonstrated through the anointing of God (Samuel was told to anoint the young shepherd boy - 1 Samuel 16:13). While "raised high" refers to outward blessings, this anointing signifies inner change from God's promised presence. As he remained in the Lord, he was greatly blessed (see John 15:1-10).

The sweet psalmist of Israel (23:1)

David's last tribute was the 'sweet psalmist.' One might think that David's hard-fought battles would overshadow his humble meditations, but they do not. The battles were necessary for justice, yet David's greatest joys and peace came from reflecting on God's mercy and faithfulness.

Summary

These three phrases express deep grace, closeness with God, and reflections on His goodness. How wonderful that through Christ, we can all experience this in our lives. Maybe no large crowd will celebrate God's nearness to us as David did, but those closest to us will truly appreciate God's work in our lives.

➔**Reflection:** What do you value most about your life? How much has God's grace influenced your thoughts and choices? When your life ends, what will matter most to you and others? Your accomplishments and possessions or your special moments with the Lord?

❖ David's words of hope (2 Samuel 23:2–7)

" 2 The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, And His word was on my tongue. 3 The God of Israel said, The Rock of Israel spoke to me, "He who rules over men righteously, who rules in the fear of God, 4 is as the light of the morning when the sun rises, a morning without clouds, when the tender grass springs out of the earth, through sunshine after rain" (2 Samuel 23:2-4).

Instead of focusing on his title as king (God anointed him), he concentrates on the coming days of the Messiah's righteous rule and judgment. Keil & Delitzsch provide their own translation of verse 3.

"A ruler over the human race will arise, a just ruler, and will exercise his dominion in the spirit of the fear of God."⁵

In other words, David is not talking about himself but has a strong hope—and this prophetic message—that someone will rise up and lead the world in righteousness. This world will be like a bright, clear day, free of haze and clouds, yet one where all of nature

⁵ Commentary on the Old Testament, Volume 2 by Keil and Delitzsch, p. 487.

thrives. David connected this promise to one made to his descendants. This is evident in the next several verses.

"5 Truly is not my house so with God? For He has made an everlasting covenant with me, Ordered in all things, and secured; For all my salvation and all my desire, Will He not indeed make it grow? 6 But the worthless, every one of them will be thrust away like thorns, Because they cannot be taken in hand; 7 But the man who touches them must be armed with iron and the shaft of a spear, and they will be completely burned with fire in their place." (2 Samuel 23:5-7).

David concludes this section by testifying about God's gracious covenant (2 Samuel 7) that He made with him and how the Lord will indeed secure this 'everlasting covenant.' The Lord accomplished this through Jesus Christ. Jesus, the descendant of David, is the one through whom this promise is fulfilled, and those who genuinely have faith in Christ are part of this great eternal kingdom, often called the kingdom of God. This is the promise the Lord made to David.

"When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. "He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever." (2 Samuel 7:12-13).

Even in his final days, his eyes weren't fixed on his rule but on the promised arrival of a greater ruler, one of his descendants.

➡ **Reflection:** Do we focus on our titles, wealth, positions, or on God's grace brought to us?

2) David's Great Companions (2 Samuel 23:8-39)

"These are the names of the mighty men whom David had: Josheb-basshebeth a Tahchemonite, chief of the captains, he was

called Adino the Eznite, because of eight hundred slain by him at one time; and after him was Eleazar the son of Dodo the Ahohite, one of the three mighty men with David when they defied the Philistines who were gathered there to battle and the men of Israel had withdrawn. He arose and struck the Philistines until his hand was weary and clung to the sword, and the LORD brought about a great victory that day; and the people returned after him only to strip the slain." (2 Samuel 23:8-10).

"Uriah the Hittite; thirty-seven in all." (2 Samuel 23:39).

David's greatness was not only due to God's work in his life but also to the courage of the men around him. Thirty-nine of these men are listed. Behind each achievement is a person of faith and bravery. Our lives are similar; our strength comes from the encouragement, guidance, care, and support of others. Some of their incredible feats are mentioned, like the man who fought so fiercely that he couldn't detach his hand from his sword. Behind each feat is a person of faith and bravery. All our lives are similar. Our strength comes from the encouragement, guidance, care, and help of others. It is only right that, while we are alive, we appreciate those around us. A spirit of gratitude helps prevent jealousy from damaging our relationships.

It's interesting that Joab was not mentioned, though he certainly was not forgotten. His two brothers, Abishai (18) and Asahel (24), were listed there. Joab was the commander of the entire army (2 Sam 20:23), but because of his plotting against the innocent Amasa (2 Sam 20:10) and his role in helping Absalom overthrow David's kingdom, he was blacklisted. His name is not included. Notice that this list is also in 1 Chronicles 11.

➡ **Reflection:** When was the last time you quietly thanked the Lord for everyone around you, whether at home, church, or work? What great things could you accomplish without them?

❖ Humble reminders (2 Samuel 23:39)

Scripture and history both reveal God's glorious truths. History shows God's sovereignty unfolding over time. As we come to know Him, His truth becomes part of our history. Uriah's name is cleverly placed at the very end of the list, where it's sure to be noticed. Uriah was a great man who attached himself to the Israelites (a Hittite by birth). David, through death, now joins with Uriah. By acknowledging Uriah's efforts here, it becomes almost like an apology David could make. David appreciated Uriah so much but let his selfishness override his respect for him to cover his own evil deed.

➡ **Reflection:** How are our envies and self-centered desires connected to how we value others?

Summary of 2 Samuel 23

Chapter 23 provides an impressive view of David's success. Outer accomplishments ultimately depend on character development and dedication to God. Personal blessings and commitment to God are emphasized through a powerful tribute to David's brave companions.

David's Great Failure (2 Sam 24:1-25)

The mention of Uriah (23:39) highlights David's personal failure and sets the stage for 2 Samuel 24, where David's failure to his people is revealed. David's failure before Uriah affected his family and reputation, but this reproach before God impacted tens of thousands of families across Israel. Seventy thousand Israelites died. Through this intense and escalating episode, we find personal hope when we humbly seek the Lord's mercy, as well as a long-term hope in God's promises of eternal life.

1) Taking a Census (2 Samuel 24:1-9)

"1 Now again the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and it incited David against them to say, "Go, number Israel and Judah." 2 And the king said to Joab the commander of the army who was with him, "Go about now through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, and register the people, that I may know the number of the people." 3 But Joab said to the king, "Now may the LORD your God add to the people a hundred times as many as they are, while the eyes of my lord the king still see; but why does my lord the king delight in this thing?" 4 Nevertheless, the king's word prevailed against Joab and against the commanders of the army. So Joab and the commanders of the army went out from the presence of the king, to register the people of Israel....

8 So when they had gone about through the whole land, they came to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days. 9 And Joab gave the number of the registration of the people to the king; and there were in Israel eight hundred thousand valiant men who drew the sword, and the men of Judah were five hundred thousand men. 10 Now David's heart troubled him after he had numbered the people. So David said to the LORD, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O LORD, please take away the iniquity of Thy servant, for I have acted very foolishly." (2 Samuel 24:1-10).

Several lessons can be learned from these important verses.

❖ Be careful of pride

David argued with his commander about whether it was proper to conduct the census. Unfortunately, David prevailed. "But nevertheless, the king's word prevailed against Joab..." (24:4). The project took over 9 months to complete. David's pride is clear in his persistence in carrying out a wrong decision over time.

The unnamed king in this section (24:2-9) was undoubtedly David. Joab was Israel's chief general. Out of respect for David, his name was not mentioned, but he undoubtedly debated with his general over whether taking a census was wise. "But nevertheless, the monarch's word prevailed against Joab..." (24:4).

Pride goeth before a fall. We see it everywhere around us. Even David, with a tender heart, again hardened his heart before God. Those close to God need to be extra vigilant, for Satan is especially crafty in catching God's people through pride. Was not Satan caught by it ([Ezekiel 28](#))?

➔ **Reflection:** What recent successes have you experienced in your life? Do you usually respond with extra thankfulness and devotion, or do you find yourself forgetting the Lord?

❖ **How does the anger of the Lord in 24:1 connect with David's decision?**

"Now again the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and it incited David against them to say, "Go, number Israel and Judah."" (2 Samuel 24:1).

It seems that it was the Lord who incited David to count the people, but the 'it' here refers to Satan. Refer to 1 Chronicles 21:1, "Then Satan stood up against Israel and moved David to number Israel." God does not tempt. Satan plants ideas in our minds to lead us to follow his suggestions, just as David did. We do not know the exact circumstances that upset God with Israel, but we can draw several lessons from the Scriptures that apply to this situation.

- God does not tempt.
- Satan is looking for an opportunity to bring destruction

- When God's people disobey Him, it opens a door for Satan to carry out his destructive work.
- Satan does his destructive work through people who fall for his temptations.
- People close to God are especially vulnerable to temptation.

❖ **What was wrong about taking a census?**

There are many different opinions about what happened here. Let me mention a few.

(1) Some do not believe that taking a census was the cause of the problem. Other issues were involved. But didn't Joab say that taking the census was wrong?

(2) David should have waited for God's instruction to conduct the census. However, Exodus 30:12 does not forbid taking a census but only specifies how it should be done. And why such a heavy penalty?

(3) We just don't know what went wrong. Could the waste of effort and time (9+ months) be the issue? Again, the punishment doesn't fit the crime.

(4) David had dishonest motives in counting the people. He wanted to see how large an army he had.

(5) The sin was connected to David's pride in a large empire (the numbers would support that).

All of these explanations fail to consider the serious consequences that follow.

❖ **The solution to why the consequence was so severe**

The problem wasn't the census itself, but how it was conducted. Remember when David previously brought the ark into the city

the wrong way and a few people died (2 Sam 6:7)? This time, he took a census against the Scriptures, and thousands died as the Law warned.

“When you take a census of the sons of Israel to number them, then each one of them shall give a ransom for himself to the LORD, when you number them, that there may be no plague among them when you number them” (Exodus 30:1).

The sin seems to be twofold.

(1) We see no sign of collecting money for the Lord as Exodus 30:12 requires for a ransom.

(2) By numbering the people, it increased God’s awareness of their sins.

Without that offering, God’s anger flared up against the people, as foretold. The Lord had clearly warned about the plague. Notice the consequences God warned His people of in Jeremiah. God would unleash His wrath like fire because they tolerated evil.

“O house of David, thus says the LORD: “Administer justice every morning; And deliver the person who has been robbed from the power of his oppressor, that My wrath may not go forth like fire and burn with none to extinguish it, because of the evil of their deeds” (Jeremiah 21:12).

➡ **Reflection:** One of man’s worst sins is justifying his evil. He believes he is right even though the Scriptures clearly condemn the action as evil. When will we learn? We are such excuse makers.

2) Consequences for Our Sins (2 Sam 24:10-15)

1 and 2 Samuel record David’s flaws but also his willingness to admit his faults. Sadly, he is a bit late this time. Just imagine if he had been willing to recognize this sin earlier! But don’t we do the

same? The Lord prompted Joab to warn David, but David ignored God's warning. Our tendency to overlook our sin early on is often linked to pride. The Lord prompted Joab to warn David, but David did not heed God's warning through Joab.

The consequences of David's sin here were different from Bathsheba's case. In Bathsheba's situation, David did not admit his sin until the prophet confronted him. In this case, David acknowledged his sin first, and then the prophet Gad came. Once David heard the number of people counted, he was troubled in his heart. He recognized his sin. David confessed his sin. These words clearly show that David sinned by taking the census.

At this time, Gad the prophet was sent to David, and God spoke to him. The Lord gave David a choice among three painful consequences.

- (1) Seven years of famine
- (2) Three months of defeat
- (3) Three days of pestilence

Each scenario depicted death on a large scale. How does one decide? In the end, he chose to submit to God's direct control of pestilence, since "for His mercies are great (24:14)." What do you think about God? Could God have spared the people? Why did He not just kill David? We do not know the answers to these questions, but with 2 Samuel 21 in mind, we become more aware of how sins bring about God's wrath. The Scriptures clearly testify to the Lord's hand in sending the pestilence.

"So the LORD sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning until the appointed time; and seventy thousand men of the people from Dan to Beersheba died" (2 Samuel 24:15).

The deaths of 70,000 people are not a game. It is a direct rebuke for improperly counting the people. Even though we do not see sin quickly judged at times, we should not underestimate God's wrath. It is true that the prophet did not come until David confessed, but that is no reason to hide sin. We should recognize that David's humbling of heart enabled him to make a choice and seek God's mercy. As bad as things were, they could have been worse. Jerusalem could have been plundered.

➔ **Reflection:** Do you have any unconfessed sin in your life? It's better to address it now and seek God's mercy than to face His judgment without mercy.

3) God's Mercy (2 Samuel 24:16-25)

❖ **David found the mercy that he had so desperately waited for (2 Samuel 24:16).**

"When the angel stretched out his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD relented from the calamity, and said to the angel who destroyed the people, "It is enough! Now relax your hand!" And the angel of the LORD was by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite" (2 Samuel 24:16).

The following is somewhat unclear. The timing is uncertain, but it appears a specific time limit has been set. "So the LORD sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning until the appointed time..." (2 Samuel 24:15). However, in 2 Samuel 24:25, we see that the Lord was moved by an appeal for the land.

"And David built there an altar to the LORD, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. Thus the LORD was moved by entreaty for the land, and the plague was held back from Israel" (2 Samuel 24:25).

It appears clear from David's heart (2 Samuel 24:17) that he was seeking God's mercy from the very beginning. When the angel approached Jerusalem, the judgment had already largely been carried out. At a certain point, God's mercy could be activated through David's prayer, and it was then that God revealed the angel to him. We are to conclude that God wanted David to respond in such a way as to plead with God so that He would stop. To support this purpose, the Lord showed David the angel striking down the people, and so David, humbled in heart, admitted blame and begged the Lord not to strike the people.

"Then David spoke to the LORD when he saw the angel who was striking down the people, and said, "Behold, it is I who have sinned, and it is I who have done wrong; but these sheep, what have they done? Please let Thy hand be against me and against my father's house." (2 Samuel 24:17).

It appears that this view of the angel striking people led David to a deeper confession. Was it because of this more sincere confession that God chose not to strike Jerusalem? We cannot be sure because David's prayer is recorded after the Lord's decision was already made. However, the angel was still striking people down (24:25), so there is some evidence that David's prayer came before and influenced at least part of God's decision.

➔ David found the mercy he had been desperately waiting for!

Never think your prayer is pointless. It's never too late to pray. There may still be judgment, but mercy can soften it. Seek God's mercy earnestly.

❖ The Altar on Mt. Moriah (24:18–25)

The place, the altar, and the occasion were all no accident. God showed abundant mercy amid judgment. The sacrifice led by the

prophet became a symbol representing the type of sacrifice that would later be offered at that same location. Christ would later give up his life on Mount Moriah. David insisted that he pay for the altar and sacrifice. He built the altar (and later the temple) there on Mt. Moriah.

“Then Solomon began to build the house of the LORD in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the LORD had appeared to his father David, at the place that David had prepared, on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite” (2 Chronicles 3:1).

Mount Moriah was, of course, the place Abraham was directed to offer up Isaac (Genesis 22). It also became the site where the temple would be constructed. Although David was not able to build it himself, he still spent his later years preparing for the temple. On Mount Moriah, Jesus was offered up as the sacrifice.

Only at the very end do we see God’s wrath diminish. It was prayer, the altar, and the sacrifice that calmed God’s anger (which confirms the core issue of taking a census). The plague was ended.

This aims to provide a glimpse into the work of Christ. Through Christ (the Messiah), God’s wrath is appeased, and we are set free. “And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.” (1 John 2:2). While this sacrifice managed to save some from God’s wrath, Christ’s sacrifice was a propitiation (a satisfying sacrifice) for people all around the world.

The placement of this final chapter and its last verse aims to draw our focus to the greater sacrifice and temple that will be established there in the future – specifically, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Summary of 1 & 2 Samuel

Israel has matured since the start of 1 Samuel. The people rejected the Lord as their king and desired a ruler of their own. Saul and David were not true solutions, however! God remained very patient with His people.

David was not truly qualified to be the great King who would lead the nation. His actions sometimes caused death. David's small altar reduced this one burst of God's wrath, but was it enough to prevent God's intense anger toward the nations? Certainly not. They looked for a Savior in the Messiah.

➡ Reflection: Share one warning and one encouragement you received from studying Samuel.

Study Questions: 2 Samuel 23

1. What do David's last words reveal about righteous leadership and the fear of God?
2. How does God's covenant with David shape the hope expressed in this chapter?
3. Why does the chapter honor David's mighty men alongside David himself?
4. What is significant about Uriah's name appearing at the end of the list?
5. How does genuine success depend on gratitude to God and appreciation for other people?
6. As you look back on your life, who has helped you accomplish what God gave you to do?

Study Questions: 2 Samuel 24

1. Why was David's census sinful, and what does it reveal about pride and misplaced confidence?

2. How did Joab warn David, and why did David persist?
3. How can Satan's involvement be acknowledged without removing David's responsibility?
4. How did David confess his sin, and what did the three judgments reveal?
5. Why did David choose to fall into the Lord's hand rather than man's?
6. How did the altar on Mount Moriah display mercy and point forward to the sacrifice of Christ?
7. What warning and what encouragement will you carry away from David's final failure?