



From
Priest
to
King

Samuel, Israel's last judge
the reign and decline of Saul
David, Israel's greatest king

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From the Book of 1st Samuel we discover Samuel, Israel's last Judge The Reign and Decline of Saul The Choice of David, Israel's Greatest King

Every book has a purpose. The purpose of 1st Samuel was to record the life of Samuel, Israel's last judge; the reign and decline of Saul, the first king; and the choice and preparation of David, Israel's greatest king.

The author is considered Samuel, but also includes writings from the prophets Nathan and Gad (1st Chron.29:29)

The book begins in the days of the judges and describes Israel's transition from a theocracy (led by God) to a monarchy (led by a king)

The key verse would be “And the LORD told him: ‘Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. . . . Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will do’ ” (1st Samuel 8:7, 9).

First Samuel is a book of great beginnings and tragic endings. It begins with Eli as high priest during the time of the judges. As a religious leader, Eli certainly must have begun his life with a close relationship to God. In his communication with Hannah, and in his training of her son Samuel, he demonstrated a clear understanding of God's purposes and call (1st Samuel 1; 1st Samuel 3). But his life ended in ignominy as his sacrilegious sons were judged by God and the sacred ark of the covenant fell into enemy hands (1st Samuel 4). Eli's death marked the decline of the influence of the priesthood and the rise of the prophets in Israel.

Samuel was dedicated to God's service by his mother, Hannah. He became one of Israel's greatest prophets. He was a man of prayer who finished the work of the judges, began the school of the prophets, and anointed Israel's first kings. But even Samuel was not immune to finishing poorly. Like Eli's family, Samuel's sons turned away from God; they took bribes and perverted justice. The people rejected the leadership of the judges and priests and clamored for a king “as all the other nations have” (1st Samuel 8:5).

Saul also started quickly. A striking figure, this handsome (1st Samuel 9:2) and humble (1st Samuel 9:21; 1st Samuel 10:22) man was God's choice as Israel's first king (1st Samuel 10:24). His early reign was marked by leadership (1st Samuel 11) and bravery (1st Samuel 14:46-48). But he disobeyed God (1st Samuel 15), became jealous and paranoid (1st Samuel 18-19), and finally had his kingship taken away from him by God (1st Samuel 16). Saul's life continued steadily downward. Obsessed with killing David (1st Samuel 20-30), he consulted a medium (1st Samuel 28) and finally committed suicide (1st Samuel 31).

Among the events of Saul's life is another great beginner—David. A man who followed God (1st

Samuel 13:14; 1st Samuel 16:7), David ministered to Saul (1st Samuel 16), killed Goliath (1st Samuel 17), and became a great warrior. However, we'll have to wait until the book of 2nd Samuel to see how David finished.

As you read 1st Samuel, note the transition from theocracy to monarchy, exult in the classic stories of David and Goliath, David and Jonathan, David and Abigail, and watch the rise of the influence of the prophets. But in the midst of reading all the history and adventure, determine to run your race as God's person from start to finish.

Eli and Samuel story is told in 1st Samuel 1:1-7:17.

We see a vivid contrast between young Samuel and Eli's sons. Eli's sons were selfish, but Samuel was helpful. Eli's sons defrauded people, but Samuel grew in wisdom and gave the people messages from God. As an adult, Samuel became a prophet, priest, and judge over Israel. A person's actions reflect his character. This was true of Samuel and Eli's sons. It is also true of us. Strive, like Samuel, to keep your heart pure before God.

1. Samuel's birth and childhood
2. War with the Philistines

Samuel and Saul's story is told in 1st Samuel 8:1-15:35)

Saul showed great promise. He was strong, tall, and modest. God's Spirit came upon him, and Samuel was his counselor. But Saul deliberately disobeyed God and became an evil king. We must not base our hopes or future on our potential. Instead, we must consistently obey God in all areas of life. God evaluates obedience, not potential.

1. Saul becomes king of Israel
2. God rejects Saul for disobedience

The story of Saul and David is covered in 1st Samuel 16:1-31:13.

David quickly killed Goliath, but waited patiently for God to deal with Saul. Although David was anointed to be Israel's next king, he had to wait years to realize this promise. The difficult circumstances in life and the times of waiting often refine, teach, and prepare us for the future responsibilities God has for us.

1. Samuel anoints David
2. David and Goliath
3. David and Jonathan become friends
4. Saul pursues David
5. Saul's defeat and death

Because Israel suffered from corrupt priests and judges, the people wanted a king. They wanted to be organized like the surrounding nations. Though it was against his original purpose, God

chose a king for them.

Establishing a monarchy did not solve Israel's problems. What God desires is the genuine devotion of each person's mind and heart to him. No government or set of laws can substitute for the rule of God in your heart and life.

Israel prospered as long as the people regarded God as their true king. When the leaders strayed from God's law, God intervened in their personal lives and overruled their actions. In this way, God maintained ultimate control over Israel's history.

God is always at work in this world, even when we can't see what he is doing. No matter what kinds of pressures we must endure or how many changes we must face, God is ultimately in control of our situation. Being confident of God's sovereignty, we can face the difficult situations in our lives with boldness.

God guided his people using different forms of leadership: judges, priests, prophets, kings. Those whom he chose for these different offices, such as Eli, Samuel, Saul, and David, portrayed different styles of leadership. Yet the success of each leader depended on his devotion to God, not his position, leadership style, wisdom, age, or strength.

When Eli, Samuel, Saul, and David disobeyed God, they faced tragic consequences. Sin affected what they accomplished for God and how some of them raised their children. Being a real leader means letting God guide all aspects of your activities, values, and goals, including the way you raise your children.

For God, "to obey is better than sacrifice" (1st Samuel 15:22). God wanted his people to obey, serve, and follow him with a whole heart rather than to maintain a superficial commitment based on tradition or ceremonial systems.

Although we are free from the sacrificial system of the Jewish law, we may still rely on outward observances to substitute for inward commitment. God desires that all our work and worship be motivated by genuine, heartfelt devotion to Him.

God faithfully kept the promises he made to Israel. He responded to his people with tender mercy and swift justice. In showing mercy, he faithfully acted in the best interest of his people. In showing justice, he was faithful to his word and perfect moral nature.

Because God is faithful, he can be counted on to be merciful toward us. Yet God is also just, and he will not tolerate rebellion against him. His faithfulness and unselfish love should inspire us to dedicate ourselves to him completely. We must never take his mercy for granted.

TIMELINE

Judges begin to rule 1375 B.C. (1220 B.C.)
Samuel born 1105 (1083)
Saul born 1080; Samson becomes judge 1075 (1083)
Saul becomes king 1050 (1045)
David born 1040
David anointed; Goliath slain 1025
David becomes king over Judah 1010
David becomes king over all Israel 1003
Solomon becomes king 970
The kingdom is divided 930

1st Samuel

Chapter 1

“There was a man named Elkanah who lived in Ramah in the hill country of Ephraim. He was the son of Jeroham and grandson of Elihu, from the family of Tohu and the clan of Zuph.”

The book of 1st Samuel begins in the days when the judges still ruled Israel, possibly during the closing years of Samson’s life. Samuel was Israel’s last judge and the first priest and prophet to serve during the time of a king. He was the best example of what a good judge should be, governing the people by God’s word and not by his own impulses. Samuel was the man who anointed Saul as Israel’s first king.

“Elkanah had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. Peninnah had children, while Hannah did not.”

Although many great Old Testament leaders (such as Abraham, Jacob, and David) had more than one wife, this was not God’s original intention for marriage. Genesis 2:24 states that in marriage, two people become one flesh. Why then did polygamy exist among God’s people? First, it was to produce more offspring to help in the man’s work and to assure the continuation of the man’s family line. Numerous children were a symbol of status and wealth. Second, in societies where many young men were killed in battle, polygamy became an accepted way of supporting women who otherwise would have remained unmarried and, very likely, destitute. Nevertheless, polygamy often caused serious family problems, as we see in this story of Hannah and Peninnah.

“Each year Elkanah and his family would travel to Shiloh to worship and sacrifice to the Lord Almighty at the Tabernacle. The priests of the Lord at that time were the two sons of Eli—Hophni and Phinehas.”

The tabernacle (Tent of Meeting) was located at Shiloh, the religious center of the nation (see Joshua 18:1). Three times a year all Israelite men were required to attend a religious feast held at the tabernacle: the Passover with the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles (Deut. 16:16). Elkanah made this pilgrimage regularly to fulfill God’s commands. (See Exodus 23:14-17 for the regulations concerning the pilgrimage, and see the note on Exodus 40:34 for more on the tabernacle.)

“On the day Elkanah presented his sacrifice, he would give portions of the sacrifice to Peninnah and each of her children. [5] But he gave Hannah a special portion because he loved her very much, even though the Lord had given her no children. [6] But Peninnah made fun of Hannah because the Lord had closed her womb.”

Hannah had been unable to conceive children, and in Old Testament times, a childless woman was considered a failure. Her barrenness was a social embarrassment for her husband. Children were a very important part of the society’s economic structure. They were a source of labor for the family, and it was their duty to care for their parents in their old age. If a wife could not bear children she was often obligated, by ancient Middle Eastern custom, to give one of her servant girls to her husband to bear children for her. Although Elkanah could have left Hannah (a

husband was permitted to divorce a barren wife), he remained lovingly devoted to her despite social criticism and his rights under civil law.

“Year after year it was the same—Peninnah would taunt Hannah as they went to the Tabernacle. Hannah would finally be reduced to tears and would not even eat.”

Part of God’s plan for Hannah involved postponing her years of childbearing. While Peninnah and Elkanah looked at Hannah’s outward circumstances, God was moving ahead with his plan. Think of those in your world who are struggling with God’s timing in answering their prayers and who need your love and help. By supporting those who are struggling, you may help them remain steadfast in their faith and confident in his timing to bring fulfillment to their lives.

“What's the matter, Hannah?" Elkanah would ask. "Why aren't you eating? Why be so sad just because you have no children? You have me—isn't that better than having ten sons?"

Hannah knew her husband loved her, but even his encouragement could not comfort her. She could not keep from listening to Peninnah’s jeers and letting Peninnah’s words erode her self-confidence. Although we cannot keep others from unjustly criticizing us, we can choose how we will react to their hurtful words. Rather than dwelling upon our problems, we can enjoy the loving relationships God has given us. By so doing, we can exchange self-pity for hope.

“Once when they were at Shiloh, Hannah went over to the Tabernacle after supper to pray to the Lord. Eli the priest was sitting at his customary place beside the entrance. Hannah was in deep anguish, crying bitterly as she prayed to the Lord^c.

Hannah had good reason to feel discouraged and bitter. She was unable to bear children; she shared her husband with a woman who ridiculed her (1st Samuel 1:7); her loving husband could not solve her problem (1st Samuel 1:8); and even the high priest misunderstood her motives (1st Samuel 1:14). But instead of retaliating or giving up hope, Hannah prayed. She brought her problem honestly before God

Each of us may face times of barrenness when nothing “comes to birth” in our work, service, or relationships. It is difficult to pray in faith when we feel so ineffective. But, as Hannah discovered, prayer opens the way for God to work (1st Samuel 1:19-20).

“And she made this vow: "O Lord Almighty, if you will look down upon my sorrow and answer my prayer and give me a son, then I will give him back to you. He will be yours for his entire lifetime, and as a sign that he has been dedicated to the Lord, his hair will never be cut."

Be careful what you promise in prayer because God may take you up on it. Hannah so desperately wanted a child that she was willing to strike a bargain with God. God took her up on her promise, and to Hannah’s credit, she did her part, even though it was painful” (1st Samuel 1:27-28).

Although we are not in a position to barter with God, he may still choose to answer a prayer that has an attached promise. When you pray, ask yourself, “Will I follow through on any promises I

make to God if he grants my request?" It is dishonest and dangerous to ignore a promise, especially to God. God keeps his promises, and he expects you to keep yours.

"As she was praying to the Lord, Eli watched her. Seeing her lips moving but hearing no sound, he thought she had been drinking. "Must you come here drunk?" he demanded. "Throw away your wine!"

"Oh no, sir!" she replied, "I'm not drunk! But I am very sad, and I was pouring out my heart to the Lord. Please don't think I am a wicked woman! For I have been praying out of great anguish and sorrow." "In that case," Eli said, "cheer up! May the God of Israel grant the request you have asked of him." "Oh, thank you, sir!" she exclaimed. Then she went back and began to eat again, and she was no longer sad.

Earlier Hannah had been discouraged to the point of being physically sick and unable to eat. At this point, she returned home well and happy. The change in her attitude may be attributed to three factors: (1) she honestly prayed to God (1st Samuel 1:11); (2) she received encouragement from Eli (1st Samuel 1:17); (3) she resolved to leave the problem with God (1st Samuel 1:18). This is the antidote for discouragement: tell God how you really feel and leave your problems with him. Then rely upon the support of good friends and counselors.

"The entire family got up early the next morning and went to worship the Lord once more. Then they returned home to Ramah. When Elkanah slept with Hannah, the Lord remembered her request, [20] and in due time she gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, for she said, "I asked the Lord for him."

"The next year Elkanah, Peninnah, and their children went on their annual trip to offer a sacrifice to the Lord. But Hannah did not go. She told her husband, "Wait until the baby is weaned. Then I will take him to the Tabernacle and leave him there with the Lord permanently." "Whatever you think is best," Elkanah agreed. "Stay here for now, and may the Lord help you keep your promise." So she stayed home and nursed the baby.

"When the child was weaned, Hannah took him to the Tabernacle in Shiloh. They brought along a three-year-old bull for the sacrifice and half a bushel of flour and some wine. After sacrificing the bull, they took the child to Eli. "Sir, do you remember me?" Hannah asked. "I am the woman who stood here several years ago praying to the Lord. I asked the Lord to give me this child, and he has given me my request. Now I am giving him to the Lord, and he will belong to the Lord his whole life." And they worshiped the Lord there."

To do what she promised (1st Samuel 1:11), Hannah gave up what she wanted most—her son—and presented him to Eli to serve in the house of the Lord. In dedicating her only son to God, Hannah was dedicating her entire life and future to God. Because Samuel's life was from God, Hannah was not really giving him up. Rather, she was returning him to God who had given Samuel to Hannah in the first place. These verses illustrate the kind of gifts we should give to God. Do your gifts cost you little (Sunday mornings, a comfortable tithe), or are they gifts of sacrifice? Are you presenting God with tokens, or are you presenting him with your entire life?

Samuel was probably three years old—the customary age for weaning—when his mother left him at the tabernacle. By saying, “I give him to the LORD,” Hannah meant that she was dedicating Samuel to God for lifetime service. She did not, of course, forget her much-wanted son. She visited him regularly. And each year she brought him a robe just like Eli’s (1st Samuel 2:19). In later years, Samuel lived in Ramah (1st Samuel 7:17), his parents’ hometown (1st Samuel 1:19-20).

1st Samuel Chapter 2

Hannah praised God for his answer to her prayer for a son. The theme of her poetic prayer is her confidence in God's sovereignty and her thankfulness for everything he had done. Mary, the mother of Jesus, modeled her own praise song, called the Magnificat, after Hannah's prayer (Luke 1:46-55). Like Hannah and Mary, we should be confident of God's ultimate control over the events in our lives, and we should be thankful for the ways God has blessed us. By praising God for all good gifts, we acknowledge his ultimate control over all the affairs of life.

Then Hannah prayed:

"My heart rejoices in the Lord!
Oh, how the Lord has blessed me!
Now I have an answer for my enemies,
as I delight in your deliverance.
No one is holy like the Lord!
There is no one besides you;
there is no Rock like our God."

Hannah praised God for being a Rock—firm, strong, and unchanging. In our fast-paced world, friends come and go, and circumstances change. It's difficult to find a solid foundation that will not change. Those who devote their lives to achievements, causes, or possessions have as their security that which is finite and changeable. The possessions that we work so hard to obtain will all pass away. But God is always present. Hope in him. He will never fail.

"Stop acting so proud and haughty!
Don't speak with such arrogance!
The Lord is a God who knows your deeds;
and he will judge you for what you have done.

No doubt as Hannah said these words, she was thinking of Peninnah's arrogance and chiding. Hannah did not have to get even with Peninnah. She knew that God is all-knowing, and that he will judge all sin and pride. Hannah wisely left judgment up to God. Resist the temptation to take justice into your own hands. God will weigh your deeds as well as those who have wronged you.

Those who were mighty are mighty no more;
and those who were weak are now strong.
Those who were well fed are now starving;
and those who were starving are now full.
The barren woman now has seven children;
but the woman with many children will have no more.
The Lord brings both death and life;
he brings some down to the grave but raises others up.

The Lord makes one poor and another rich;
he brings one down and lifts another up.
He lifts the poor from the dust—
yes, from a pile of ashes!
He treats them like princes,
placing them in seats of honor.

"For all the earth is the Lord's,
and he has set the world in order.
He will protect his godly ones,
but the wicked will perish in darkness.
No one will succeed by strength alone.
Those who fight against the Lord will be broken.
He thunders against them from heaven;
the Lord judges throughout the earth.
He gives mighty strength to his king;
he increases the might of his anointed one."

Because we live in a world where evil abounds and a nuclear holocaust always threatens, we may forget that God is in control. Hannah saw God as (1) solid as a rock (1st Samuel 2:2), (2) the one who knows what we do (1st Samuel 2:3), (3) sovereign over all the affairs of people (1st Samuel 2:4-8), and (4) the supreme judge who administers perfect justice (1st Samuel 2:10). Remembering God's sovereign control helps us put both world and personal events in perspective.

"Then Elkanah and Hannah returned home to Ramah without Samuel. And the boy became the Lord's helper, for he assisted Eli the priest."

Samuel "ministered before the LORD under Eli the priest." In other words, Samuel was Eli's helper or assistant. In this role, Samuel's responsibilities would have included opening the tabernacle doors each morning (1st Samuel 3:15), cleaning the furniture, and sweeping the floors. As he grew older, Samuel would have assisted Eli in offering sacrifices. The fact that he was wearing a linen ephod (a garment worn only by priests) shows that he was a priest-in-training (1st Samuel 2:18). Because Samuel was Eli's helper, he was God's helper too. When you serve others—even in carrying out ordinary tasks—you are serving God. Because ultimately we serve God, every job has dignity.

"Now the sons of Eli were scoundrels who had no respect for the Lord.. The law stipulated that the needs of all the Levites were to be met through the people's tithes (Numbers 18:20-24; Joshua 13:14, 33). Because Eli's sons were priests, they were to be taken care of this way. But Eli's sons took advantage of their position to satisfy their lust for power, possessions, and control. Their contempt and arrogance toward both people and worship undermined the integrity of the whole priesthood."

"Eli knew that his sons were evil, but he did little to correct or stop them, even when the integrity of God's sanctuary was threatened. As the high priest, Eli should have responded by executing

his sons (Numbers 15:22-31). No wonder he chose not to confront the situation. But by ignoring their selfish actions,”

“Eli let his sons ruin their own lives and the lives of many others. There are times when serious problems must be confronted, even if the process and consequences could be painful. or for their duties as priests. Whenever anyone offered a sacrifice, Eli's sons would send over a servant with a three-pronged fork. While the meat of the sacrificed animal was still boiling, the servant would stick the fork into the pot and demand that whatever it brought up be given to Eli's sons. All the Israelites who came to worship at Shiloh were treated this way.”

This fork was a utensil used in the tabernacle for offering sacrifices. Made of bronze (Exodus 27:3), it usually had three prongs to hook the meat that was to be offered on the altar. Eli's sons used the fork to take more meat from the pot than was due them

“Sometimes the servant would come even before the animal's fat had been burned on the altar. He would demand raw meat before it had been boiled so that it could be used for roasting. The man offering the sacrifice might reply, "Take as much as you want, but the fat must first be burned." Then the servant would demand, "No, give it to me now, or I'll take it by force. “So the sin of these young men was very serious in the Lord's sight, for they treated the Lord's offerings with contempt.

What were Eli's sons doing wrong? They were taking parts of the sacrifices *before* they were offered to God on the altar. They were also eating meat before the fat was burned off. This was against God's laws (Leviticus 3:3-5). In effect, Eli's sons were treating God's offerings with contempt. Offerings were given to show honor and respect to God while seeking forgiveness for sins, but through their irreverence, Eli's sons were actually sinning while making the offerings. To add to their sins, they were also sleeping with the women who served there (1st Samuel 2:22).

Like Eli's sons, some religious leaders look down on the faith of ordinary people and treat their offerings to God casually or even with contempt. God harshly judges those who lead his people astray or scorn what is devoted to him (Numbers 18:32).

“Now Samuel, though only a boy, was the Lord's helper. He wore a linen tunic just like that of a priest.”

“Samuel wore a linen ephod. *Ephods*, long sleeveless vests made of plain linen, were worn by all priests. The high priest's ephod carried special significance. It was embroidered with a variety of bright colors. Attached to it was the breastplate, a bib-like garment with gold embroidered shoulder straps. Twelve precious gemstones were attached to the breastplate, each stone representing one of the tribes of Israel. A pouch on the ephod held the Urim and the Thummim, two small objects used to determine God's will in certain national matters“.

“Each year his mother made a small coat for him and brought it to him when she came with her husband for the sacrifice. Before they returned home, Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife and say, "May the Lord give you other children to take the place of this one she gave to the Lord.”

And the Lord gave Hannah three sons and two daughters. Meanwhile, Samuel grew up in the presence of the Lord”

God honored the desires of faithful Hannah. We never hear about Peninnah or her children again, but Samuel was used mightily by God. God also gave Hannah five children in addition to Samuel. God often blesses us in ways we do not expect. Hannah never expected to have a child at her age, much less six children! Don’t resent God’s timing. His blessings might not be immediate, but they will come if we are faithful to do what he says in his Word.

“Now Eli was very old, but he was aware of what his sons were doing to the people of Israel. He knew, for instance, that his sons were seducing the young women who assisted at the entrance of the Tabernacle. Eli said to them, "I have been hearing reports from the people about the wicked things you are doing. Why do you keep sinning? You must stop, my sons! The reports I hear among the Lord's people are not good. If someone sins against another person, God can mediate for the guilty party. But if someone sins against the Lord, who can intercede?" But Eli's sons wouldn't listen to their father, for the Lord was already planning to put them to death.”

“Eli’s sons knew better, but they continued to disobey God deliberately by cheating, seducing, and robbing the people. Therefore, God planned to kill them. Any sin is wrong, but sin carried out deliberately and deceitfully is the worst kind. When we sin out of ignorance, we deserve punishment. But when we sin intentionally, the consequences will be more severe. Don’t ignore God’s warnings about sin. Abandon sin before it becomes a way of life.”

Does a loving God really will or want to put people to death? Consider the situation in the tabernacle. A person made an offering in order to have his sins forgiven, and Eli’s sons stole the offering and made a sham of the person’s repentant attitude. God, in his love for Israel, could not permit this situation to continue. He allowed Eli’s sons to die as a result of their own boastful presumption. They took the ark into battle, thinking it would protect them. But God withdrew his protection. Meanwhile, as young Samuel grew taller, he also continued to gain favor with the Lord and with the people.

“One day a prophet came to Eli and gave him this message from the Lord: "Didn't I reveal myself to your ancestors when the people of Israel were slaves in Egypt? I chose your ancestor Aaron from among all his relatives to be my priest, to offer sacrifices on my altar, to burn incense, and to wear the priestly garments as he served me. And I assigned the sacrificial offerings to you priests. So why do you scorn my sacrifices and offerings? Why do you honor your sons more than me—for you and they have become fat from the best offerings of my people! “

Eli had a difficult time rearing his sons. He apparently did not take any strong disciplinary action with them when he became aware of their wrongdoing. But Eli was not just a father trying to handle his rebellious sons; he was the high priest ignoring the sins of priests under his jurisdiction. As a result, the Lord took the necessary disciplinary action that Eli would not.

Eli was guilty of honoring his sons above God by letting them continue in their sinful ways. Is there a situation in your life, family, or work that you allow to continue even though you know it

is wrong? If so, you may become as guilty as those engaged in the wrong act.

"Therefore, the Lord, the God of Israel, says: The terrible things you are doing cannot continue! I had promised that your branch of the tribe of Levi would always be my priests. But I will honor only those who honor me, and I will despise those who despise me. [31] I will put an end to your family, so it will no longer serve as my priests. All the members of your family will die before their time. None will live to a ripe old age. You will watch with envy as I pour out prosperity on the people of Israel. But no members of your family will ever live out their days. Those who are left alive will live in sadness and grief, and their children will die a violent death. And to prove that what I have said will come true, I will cause your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, to die on the same day!"

"Then I will raise up a faithful priest who will serve me and do what I tell him to do. I will bless his descendants, and his family will be priests to my anointed kings forever. [36] Then all of your descendants will bow before his descendants, begging for money and food. 'Please,' they will say, 'give us jobs among the priests so we will have enough to eat.' "

For the fulfillment of this prediction see 1 Kings 2:26-27. This is where Solomon removed Abiathar from his position, thus ending Eli's line. Then God raised up Zadok, a priest under David and then high priest under Solomon. Zadok's line was probably still in place as late as the days of Ezra.

1st Samuel Chapter 3

Although God had spoken directly and audibly with Moses and Joshua, his word became rare during the three centuries of rule by judges. By Eli's time, no prophets were speaking God's messages to Israel. Why? Look at the attitude of Eli's sons. They either refused to listen to God or allowed greed to get in the way of any communication with him.

Listening and responding is vital in a relationship with God. Although God does not always use the sound of a human voice, he always speaks clearly through his Word. To receive his messages, we must be ready to listen and to act upon what he tells us. Like Samuel, be ready to say "Here I am" when God calls you to action.

"Meanwhile, the boy Samuel was serving the Lord by assisting Eli. Now in those days messages from the Lord were very rare, and visions were quite uncommon. One night Eli, who was almost blind by now, had just gone to bed. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was sleeping in the Tabernacle near the Ark of God."

The ark of God was kept in the Most Holy Place, the innermost room of the tabernacle where only the high priest could enter once a year. In front of the Most Holy Place was the Holy Place, a small room where the other sacred furniture of the tabernacle was kept (the altar of incense, the bread of the Presence, the lampstand). Just outside the Holy Place was a court with small rooms where the priests were to stay. Samuel probably slept here with the other priests, only a few yards away from the ark.

"Suddenly, the Lord called out, "Samuel! Samuel!" "Yes?" Samuel replied. "What is it?" He jumped up and ran to Eli. "Here I am. What do you need?"

"I didn't call you," Eli replied. "Go on back to bed." So he did.

"Then the Lord called out again, "Samuel!"

"Again Samuel jumped up and ran to Eli. "Here I am," he said. "What do you need?"

"I didn't call you, my son," Eli said. "Go on back to bed." Samuel did not yet know the Lord because he had never had a message from the Lord before. So now the Lord called a third time, and once more Samuel jumped up and ran to Eli. "Here I am," he said. "What do you need?"

Then Eli realized it was the Lord who was calling the boy. [9] So he said to Samuel, "Go and lie down again, and if someone calls again, say, 'Yes, Lord, your servant is listening.' So Samuel went back to bed.

One would naturally expect an audible message from God to be given to the priest Eli and not to the child Samuel. Eli was older and more experienced, and he held the proper position. But God's chain of command is based on faith, not on age or position. In finding faithful followers, God may use unexpected channels. Be prepared for the Lord to work at any place, at any time, and through anyone he chooses.

And the Lord came and called as before, "Samuel! Samuel!"

And Samuel replied, "Yes, your servant is listening."

Then the Lord said to Samuel, "I am about to do a shocking thing in Israel. I am going to carry out all my threats against Eli and his family. I have warned him continually that judgment is coming for his family, because his sons are blaspheming God and he hasn't disciplined them"

Eli had spent his entire life in service to God. His responsibility was to oversee all the worship in Israel. But in pursuing this great mission he neglected the responsibilities in his own home. Don't let your desire to do God's work cause you to neglect your family. If you do, your mission may degenerate into a quest for personal importance, and your family will suffer the consequences of your neglect.

"So I have vowed that the sins of Eli and his sons will never be forgiven by sacrifices or offerings."

Atoned for means "forgiven." God was saying that the sin of Eli's sons could not be covered by sacrifice and that they would be punished.

Samuel stayed in bed until morning, then got up and opened the doors of the Tabernacle as usual. He was afraid to tell Eli what the Lord had said to him. But Eli called out to him, "Samuel, my son."

"Here I am," Samuel replied.

"What did the Lord say to you? Tell me everything. And may God punish you if you hide anything from me!" So Samuel told Eli everything; he didn't hold anything back. "It is the Lord's will," Eli replied. "Let him do what he thinks best."

"As Samuel grew up, the Lord was with him, and everything Samuel said was wise and helpful. All the people of Israel from one end of the land to the other knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the Lord".

The phrase "from Dan to Beersheba" was often used to describe the boundaries of the promised land. Dan was one of the northernmost cities in the land, and Beersheba one of the cities farthest south. In this context, it was a way of emphasizing that *everyone* in Israel knew that Samuel was called to be a prophet.

"The Lord continued to appear at Shiloh and gave messages to Samuel there at the Tabernacle."

1st Samuel Chapter 4

“And Samuel's words went out to all the people of Israel.”

At that time Israel was at war with the Philistines. The Israelite army was camped near Ebenezer, and the Philistines were at Aphek. The Philistines attacked and defeated the army of Israel, killing four thousand men. After the battle was over, the army of Israel retreated to their camp, and their leaders asked, "Why did the Lord allow us to be defeated by the Philistines?" Then they said, "Let's bring the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord from Shiloh. If we carry it into battle with us, it will save us from our enemies."

“So they sent men to Shiloh to bring back the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim. Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli, helped carry the Ark of God to where the battle was being fought. When the Israelites saw the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord coming into the camp, their shout of joy was so loud that it made the ground shake!

The ark of the covenant contained the Ten Commandments given by God to Moses. The ark was supposed to be kept in the Most Holy Place, a sacred part of the tabernacle that only the high priest could enter once a year. Hophni and Phinehas desecrated the room by unlawfully entering it and removing the ark.

The Israelites rightly recognized the great holiness of the ark, but they thought that the ark itself—the wood and metal box—was their source of power. They began to use it as a good luck charm, expecting it to protect them from their enemies. A symbol of God does not guarantee his presence and power. Their attitude toward the ark came perilously close to idol worship. When the ark was captured by their enemies, they thought that Israel's glory was gone (1st Samuel 4:19-22) and that God had deserted them (1st Samuel 7:1-2). God uses his power according to his own wisdom and will. He responds to the faith of those who seek him.

“The LORD Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim” conveys that God's presence rested on the ark of the covenant between the two golden cherubim (or angels) attached to its lid. The people believed that the ark would bring victory when Hophni and Phinehas carried it into battle.

"What's going on?" the Philistines asked. "What's all the shouting about in the Hebrew camp?" When they were told it was because the Ark of the Lord had arrived, they panicked. "The gods have come into their camp!" they cried. "This is a disaster! We have never had to face anything like this before! Who can save us from these mighty gods of Israel? They are the same gods who destroyed the Egyptians with plagues when Israel was in the wilderness.

The Philistines were afraid because they remembered stories about God's intervention for Israel when they left Egypt. But Israel had turned away from God and was clinging to only a form of godliness, a symbol of former victories.

People (and churches) often try to live on the memories of God's blessings. The Israelites wrongly assumed that because God had given them victory in the past, he would do it again,

even though they had strayed far from him. Today, as in Bible times, spiritual victories come through a continually renewed relationship with God. Don't live off the past. Keep your relationship with God new and fresh

“Fight as you never have before, Philistines! If you don't, we will become the Hebrews' slaves just as they have been ours!”

“So the Philistines fought desperately, and Israel was defeated again. The slaughter was great; thirty thousand Israelite men died that day. The survivors turned and fled to their tents. The Ark of God was captured, and Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, were killed“.

“A man from the tribe of Benjamin ran from the battlefield and arrived at Shiloh later that same day. He had torn his clothes and put dust on his head to show his grief.

This event fulfills the prophecy in 1st Samuel 2:34 stating that Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, would die “on the same day.”

At this time, the city of Shiloh was Israel's religious center (Joshua 18:1; 1st Samuel 4:3). The tabernacle was permanently set up there. Because Israel did not have a civil capital—a seat of national government—Shiloh was the natural place for a messenger to deliver the sad news from the battle. Many scholars believe that it was during this battle that Shiloh was destroyed (Jeremiah 7:12; Jeremiah 26:2-6; also see the note on 1st Samuel 7:1).

“Eli was waiting beside the road to hear the news of the battle, for his heart trembled for the safety of the Ark of God. When the messenger arrived and told what had happened, an outcry resounded throughout the town. "What is all the noise about?" Eli asked. The messenger rushed over to Eli, who was ninety-eight years old and blind. He said to Eli, "I have just come from the battlefield—I was there this very day.”

"What happened?" Eli demanded.”

"Israel has been defeated," the messenger replied. "Thousands of Israelite troops are dead on the battlefield. Your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were killed, too. And the Ark of God has been captured." “When the messenger mentioned what had happened to the Ark, Eli fell backward from his seat beside the gate. He broke his neck and died, for he was old and very fat. He had led Israel for forty years.”

Eli was Israel's judge and high priest. His death marked the end of the dark period of the judges when most of the nation ignored God. Although Samuel was also a judge, his career saw the transition from Israel's rule by judges to the nation's monarchy. He began the great revival that Israel would experience for the next century. The Bible does not say who became the next high priest (Samuel was not eligible because he was not a direct descendant of Aaron), but Samuel acted as high priest at this time by offering the important sacrifices throughout Israel.

“Eli's daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, was pregnant and near her time of delivery. When she heard that the Ark of God had been captured and that her husband and father-in-law were dead, her labor pains suddenly began. She died in childbirth, but before she passed away the

midwives tried to encourage her. "Don't be afraid," they said. "You have a baby boy!" But she did not answer or respond in any way.

She named the child Ichabod—"Where is the glory?"—murmuring, "Israel's glory is gone." She named him this because the Ark of God had been captured and because her husband and her father-in-law were dead. Then she said, "The glory has departed from Israel, for the Ark of God has been captured."

This incident illustrates the spiritual darkness and decline of Israel. This young boy, Ichabod, was supposed to succeed his father Phinehas in the priesthood, but his father had been killed because he was an evil man who desecrated the tabernacle. The terror of God's leaving his people overshadowed the joy of childbirth. When sin dominates our lives, even God-given joys and pleasures seem empty.

1st Samuel Chapter 5

After the Philistines captured the Ark of God, they took it from the battleground at Ebenezer to the city of Ashdod.

Dagon was the chief god of the Philistines, whom they believed sent rain and assured a bountiful harvest. But the Philistines, like most of their pagan neighbors, worshiped many gods. The more gods they could have on their side, the more secure they felt. That was why they wanted the ark, thinking that if it helped the Israelites, it could help them too. But when the people living nearby began to get sick and die, the Philistines realized that the ark was not a good omen. It was a source of greater power than they had ever seen—power they could not control.

They carried the Ark of God into the temple of Dagon and placed it beside the idol of Dagon. But when the citizens of Ashdod went to see it the next morning, Dagon had fallen with his face to the ground in front of the Ark of the Lord! So they set the idol up again. But the next morning the same thing happened—the idol had fallen face down before the Ark of the Lord again. This time his head and hands had broken off and were lying in the doorway. Only the trunk of his body was left intact. That is why to this day neither the priests of Dagon nor anyone who enters the temple of Dagon will step on its threshold. Then the Lord began to afflict the people of Ashdod and the nearby villages with a plague of tumors. When the people realized what was happening, they cried out, "We can't keep the Ark of the God of Israel here any longer! He is against us! We will all be destroyed along with our god Dagon."

Although the Philistines had just witnessed a great victory by Israel's God over their god, Dagon, they didn't act upon that insight until they were afflicted with tumors (possibly bubonic plague). Similarly, today many people don't respond to Biblical truth until they experience pain. Are you willing to listen to God for truth's sake, or do you turn to him only when you are hurting?

"So they called together the rulers of the five Philistine cities and asked, "What should we do with the Ark of the God of Israel?"

The rulers discussed it and replied, "Move it to the city of Gath." So they moved the Ark of the God of Israel to Gath.

The Philistines were governed by five rulers, or lords. Each lord lived in a different city—Gath, Ekron, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gaza. The ark was taken to three of these capital cities, and each time it brought great trouble and chaos to the citizens"

"But when the Ark arrived at Gath, the Lord began afflicting its people, young and old, with a plague of tumors, and there was a great panic. So they sent the Ark of God to the city of Ekron, but when the people of Ekron saw it coming they cried out, "They are bringing the Ark of the God of Israel here to kill us, too!" So the people summoned the rulers again and begged them, "Please send the Ark of the God of Israel back to its own country, or it will kill us all." For the plague from God had already begun, and great fear was sweeping across the city. Those who did

not die were afflicted with tumors and there was weeping everywhere.”

1st Samuel Chapter 6

“The Ark of the Lord remained in Philistine territory seven months in all. Then the Philistines called in their priests and diviners and asked them, “What should we do about the Ark of the Lord? Tell us how to return it to its own land.”

“Send the Ark of the God of Israel back, along with a gift,” they were told. “Send a guilt offering so the plague will stop. Then, if the plague doesn't stop, you will know that God didn't send the plague after all.”

What was this guilt offering supposed to accomplish? This was a normal reaction to trouble in the Canaanite religion. The Philistines thought their problems were the result of their gods being angry. They recognized their guilt in taking the ark and now were trying everything they could to placate Israel's God. The diviners (1st Samuel 6:2) probably helped choose the gift they thought would placate Yahweh. But the offering consisted of images of tumors and rats, not the kind of guilt offering prescribed in God's laws (Leviticus 5:14-6:7; Leviticus 7:1-10). How easy it is to design our own methods of acknowledging God rather than serving him in the way he requires.

“What sort of guilt offering should we send?” they asked. And they were told, “Since the plague has struck both you and your five rulers, make five gold tumors and five gold rats, just like those that have ravaged your land. Make these things to show honor to the God of Israel. Perhaps then he will stop afflicting you, your gods, and your land. Don't be stubborn and rebellious as Pharaoh and the Egyptians were. They wouldn't let Israel go until God had ravaged them with dreadful plagues. Now build a new cart, and find two cows that have just had calves. Make sure the cows have never been yoked to a cart. Hitch the cows to the cart, but shut their calves away from them in a pen. Put the Ark of the Lord on the cart, and beside it place a chest containing the gold rats and gold tumors. Then let the cows go wherever they want. If they cross the border of our land and go to Beth-shemesh, we will know it was the Lord who brought this great disaster upon us. If they don't, we will know that the plague was simply a coincidence and was not sent by the Lord at all.”

The Philistine priests and diviners devised a test to see if God was really the one who had caused all their recent troubles. Two cows who had just given birth were hitched to a cart and sent toward Israel's border carrying the ark of the covenant. For a cow to leave her nursing calf, she would have to go against all her motherly instincts. Only God, who has power over the natural order, could cause this to happen. God sent the cows to Israel, not to pass the Philistines' test, but to show them his mighty power.

The Philistines acknowledged the existence of the Hebrew God, but only as one of many deities whose favor they sought. Thinking of God in this way made it easy for them to ignore his demand that people worship him alone. Many people “worship” God this way. They see God as just one ingredient in a successful life. But God is far more than an ingredient—he is the source of life itself. Are you a “Philistine,” seeing God's favor as only an ingredient of the good life?

“So these instructions were carried out. Two cows with newborn calves were hitched to the cart, and their calves were shut up in a pen. Then the Ark of the Lord and the chest containing the gold rats and gold tumors were placed on the cart. And sure enough, the cows went straight along the road toward Beth-shemesh, lowing as they went. The Philistine rulers followed them as far as the border of Beth-shemesh“

“The people of Beth-shemesh were harvesting wheat in the valley, and when they saw the Ark, they were overjoyed! The cart came into the field of a man named Joshua and stopped beside a large rock. So the people broke up the wood of the cart for a fire and killed the cows and sacrificed them to the Lord as a burnt offering. Several men of the tribe of Levi lifted the Ark of the Lord and the chest containing the gold rats and gold tumors from the cart and placed them on the large rock. Many burnt offerings and sacrifices were offered to the Lord that day by the people of Beth-shemesh. The five Philistine rulers watched all this and then returned to Ekron that same day“

“The five gold tumors that were sent by the Philistines as a guilt offering to the Lord were gifts from the rulers of Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron. [18] The five gold rats represented the five Philistine cities and their surrounding villages, which were controlled by the five rulers. The large rock at Beth-shemesh, where they set the Ark of the Lord, still stands in the field of Joshua as a reminder of what happened there.

“But the Lord killed seventy men from Beth-shemesh because they looked into the Ark of the Lord. And the people mourned greatly because of what the Lord had done.”

Why were people killed for looking into the ark? The Israelites had made an idol of the ark. They had tried to harness God’s power, to use it for their own purposes (victory in battle). But the Lord of the universe cannot be controlled by humans. To protect the Israelites from his power, he had warned them not even to look at the sacred sanctuary objects in the Most Holy Place or they would die (Numbers 4:20). Only Levites were allowed to move the ark. Because of their disobedience, God carried out his promised judgment.

God could not allow the people to think they could use his power for their own ends. He could not permit them to disregard his warnings and come into his presence lightly. He did not want the cycle of disrespect, disobedience, and defeat to start all over again. God did not kill the men of Beth Shemesh to be cruel. He killed them because overlooking their presumptuous sin would encourage the whole nation of Israel to ignore God.

"Who is able to stand in the presence of the Lord, this holy God?" they cried out. "Where can we send the Ark from here?" So they sent messengers to the people at Kiriath-jearim and told them, "The Philistines have returned the Ark of the Lord. Please come here and get it!"

1st Samuel Chapter 7

“So the men of Kiriath-jearim came to get the Ark of the Lord. They took it to the hillside home of Abinadab and ordained Eleazar, his son, to be in charge of it.”

The ark was taken to Kiriath Jearim, a city near the battlefield, for safekeeping, and Eleazar was given the task of caring for it. Why wasn't it taken back to the tabernacle at Shiloh? Shiloh had probably been defeated and destroyed by the Philistines in an earlier battle (1st Samuel 4:1-18; Jeremiah 26:2-6) because of the evil deeds of its priests (1st Samuel 2:12-17). Apparently, the tabernacle and its furniture were saved because we read that the tabernacle was set up in Nob during Saul's reign (1st Samuel 21:1-6) and in Gibeon during the reigns of David and Solomon (1 Chron. 16:39; 1 Chron. 21:29-30; 2 Chron. 1). Shiloh, however, is never again mentioned in the historical books of the Old Testament. Samuel's new home became Ramah (1st Samuel 7:15-17; 1st Samuel 8:4), his birthplace (further evidence of Shiloh's destruction).

“The Ark remained in Kiriath-jearim for a long time—twenty years in all. During that time, all Israel mourned because it seemed that the Lord had abandoned them.

Then Samuel said to all the people of Israel, "If you are really serious about wanting to return to the Lord, get rid of your foreign gods and your images of Ashtoreth. Determine to obey only the Lord; then he will rescue you from the Philistines."

Israel mourned and sorrow gripped the nation for 20 years. The ark was put away like an unwanted box in an attic, and it seemed as if the Lord had abandoned his people. Samuel, now a grown man, roused them to action by saying that if they were truly sorry, they should do something about it. How easy it is for us to complain about our problems, even to God, while we refuse to act, change, and do what he requires. We don't even take the advice he has already given us. Do you ever feel as if God has abandoned you? Check to see if there is anything he has already told you to do. You may not receive new guidance from God until you have acted on his previous directions.

Samuel urged the Israelites to get rid of their foreign gods. Idols today are much more subtle than gods of wood and stone, but they are just as dangerous. Whatever holds first place in our lives or controls us is our god. Money, success, material goods, pride, or anything else can be an idol if it takes the place of God in our lives. The Lord alone is worthy of our service and worship, and we must let nothing rival him. If we have “foreign gods,” we need to ask God to help us dethrone them, making the true God our first priority.

“So the Israelites destroyed their images of Baal and Ashtoreth and worshiped only the Lord.”

Baal was believed to be the son of El, chief deity of the Canaanites. Baal was regarded as the god of thunder and rain, thus he controlled vegetation and agriculture. Ashtoreth was a goddess of love and war (she was called Ishtar in Babylon and Astarte or Aphrodite in Greece). She represented fertility. The Canaanites believed that by the sexual union of Baal and Ashtoreth, the earth would be magically rejuvenated and made fertile.

“Then Samuel told them, "Come to Mizpah, all of you. I will pray to the Lord for you."

Mizpah held special significance for the Israelite nation. It was there that the Israelites had gathered to mobilize against the tribe of Benjamin (Judges 20:1). Samuel was appointed to be leader (1st Samuel 7:6), and Saul, Israel's first king, was identified and presented to the people (1st Samuel 10:17ff).

“So they gathered there and, in a great ceremony, drew water from a well and poured it out before the Lord. They also went without food all day and confessed that they had sinned against the Lord. So it was at Mizpah that Samuel became Israel's judge“

Pouring water on the ground “before the LORD” was a sign of repenting from sin, turning from idols, and determining to obey God alone.

Samuel became the last in the long line of Israel's judges (leaders), a line that began when Israel first conquered the promised land. For a list of these judges, see the chart in Judges 3:11. A judge was both a political and a religious leader. God was Israel's true leader, while the judge was to be God's spokesman to the people and administrator of justice throughout the land. While some of Israel's judges relied more on their own judgment than on God's, Samuel's obedience and dedication to God made him one of the greatest judges in Israel's history. (For more on Samuel as a judge, see the note on •1st Samuel 4:18.)

“When the Philistine rulers heard that all Israel had gathered at Mizpah, they mobilized their army and advanced. The Israelites were badly frightened when they learned that the Philistines were approaching. [8] "Plead with the Lord our God to save us from the Philistines!" they begged Samuel. [9] So Samuel took a young lamb and offered it to the Lord as a whole burnt offering. He pleaded with the Lord to help Israel, and the Lord answered.”

“But the Lord spoke with a mighty voice of thunder from heaven, and the Philistines were thrown into such confusion that the Israelites defeated them. The men of Israel chased them from Mizpah to Beth-car, slaughtering them all along the way.”

“Samuel then took a large stone and placed it between the towns of Mizpah and Jeshanah. He named it Ebenezer—“the stone of help”—for he said, "Up to this point the Lord has helped us!”

The Israelites had great difficulty with the Philistines, but God rescued them. In response, the people set up a stone as a memorial of God's great help and deliverance. During tough times, we may need to remember the crucial turning points in our past to help us through the present. Memorials can help us remember God's past victories and gain confidence and strength for the present.

“So the Philistines were subdued and didn't invade Israel again for a long time. And throughout Samuel's lifetime, the Lord's powerful hand was raised against the Philistines. The Israelite towns near Ekron and Gath that the Philistines had captured were restored to Israel, along with the rest of the territory that the Philistines had taken. And there was also peace between Israel and the Amorites in those days.”

“Samuel continued as Israel's judge for the rest of his life. Each year he traveled around, setting up his court first at Bethel, then at Gilgal, and then at Mizpah. He judged the people of Israel at each of these places. Then he would return to his home at Ramah, and he would hear cases there, too. And Samuel built an altar to the Lord at Ramah.”

1st Samuel Chapter 8

“As Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons to be judges over Israel. Joel and Abijah, his oldest sons, held court in Beersheba. But they were not like their father, for they were greedy for money. They accepted bribes and perverted justice.”

Samuel judges Israel well, saves them from the Philistines, and leads them back to God. But when he retires, the nation does not want another judge. Instead they demand to be given a king in order to be like the nations around them. Although God is unhappy with their request, he tells Samuel to anoint Saul as Israel’s first king. Saul is a skillful soldier who successfully leads the nation into many battles against their enemies. But in God’s eyes Saul is a failure because he constantly disobeys and does things his own way. God eventually rejected Saul as king. Sometimes we want to go our own way rather than follow the ways of God. This will always end in ruin as it did for Saul.

As an old man, Samuel appointed his sons to be judges over Israel in his place. But they turned out to be corrupt, much like Eli’s sons (1st Samuel 2:12). We don’t know why Samuel’s sons went wrong, but we do know that Eli was held responsible for his own sons’ corruption (1st Samuel 2:29-34).

It is impossible to know if Samuel was a bad parent. His children were old enough to be on their own. We must be careful not to blame ourselves for the sins of our children. On the other hand, parenthood is an awesome responsibility, and nothing is more important than molding and shaping our children’s lives.

If your grown children are not following God, realize that you can’t control them any longer. Don’t blame yourself for something that is no longer your responsibility. But if your children are still in your care, know that what you do and teach can profoundly affect your children and lasts a life time.

“Finally, the leaders of Israel met at Ramah to discuss the matter with Samuel. [5] "Look," they told him, "you are now old, and your sons are not like you. Give us a king like all the other nations have."

Samuel was very upset with their request and went to the Lord for advice.

The people clamored for a king, thinking that a new system of government would bring about a change in the nation. But because their basic problem was disobedience to God, their other problems would only continue under the new administration. What they needed was a unified faith, not a uniform rule.

Had the Israelites submitted to God’s leadership, they would have thrived beyond their expectations (Deut. 28:1). Our obedience is weak if we ask God to lead our family or personal life but continue to live by the world’s standards and values. Faith in God must touch all the practical areas of life.

"Do as they say," the Lord replied, "for it is me they are rejecting, not you. They don't want me to be their king any longer. [8] Ever since I brought them from Egypt they have continually forsaken me and followed other gods. And now they are giving you the same treatment. Do as they ask, but solemnly warn them about how a king will treat them."

Israel wanted a king for several reasons: (1) Samuel's sons were not fit to lead Israel. (2) The 12 tribes of Israel continually had problems working together because each tribe had its own leader and territory. It was hoped that a king would unite the tribes into one nation and one army. (3) The people wanted to be like the neighboring nations. This is exactly what God didn't want. Having a king would make it easy to forget that God was their real leader. It was not wrong for Israel to want a king; God had mentioned the possibility in Deut. 17:14-20. Yet, in reality, the people were rejecting God as their leader. The Israelites wanted laws, an army, and a human monarch in the place of God. They wanted to run the nation through human strength, even though only God's strength could make them flourish in the hostile land of Canaan.

So Samuel passed on the Lord's warning to the people. "This is how a king will treat you," Samuel said. "The king will draft your sons into his army and make them run before his chariots. Some will be commanders of his troops, while others will be slave laborers. Some will be forced to plow in his fields and harvest his crops, while others will make his weapons and chariot equipment. The king will take your daughters from you and force them to cook and bake and make perfumes for him. He will take away the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his own servants. He will take a tenth of your harvest and distribute it among his officers and attendants. He will want your male and female slaves and demand the finest of your cattle and donkeys for his own use. He will demand a tenth of your flocks, and you will be his slaves. When that day comes, you will beg for relief from this king you are demanding, but the Lord will not help you."

But the people refused to listen to Samuel's warning. 'Even so, we still want a king,' they said. 'We want to be like the nations around us. Our king will govern us and lead us into battle.' "So Samuel told the Lord what the people had said, and the Lord replied, 'Do as they say, and give them a king.' Then Samuel agreed and sent the people home."

Samuel carefully explained all the negative consequences of having a king, but the Israelites refused to listen. When you have an important decision to make, weigh the positives and negatives carefully, considering everyone who might be affected by your choice. When you want something badly enough, it is difficult to see the potential problems. But don't discount the negatives. Unless you have a plan to handle each one, they will cause you great difficulty later.

Israel was called to be a holy nation, separate from and unique among all others (Leviticus 20:26). The Israelites' motive in asking for a king was to be like the nations around them. This was in total opposition to God's original plan. It was not their desire for a king that was wrong, but their reasons for wanting a king.

Often we let others' values and actions dictate our attitudes and behavior. Have you ever made a wrong choice because you wanted to be like everyone else? Be careful that the values of your friends or "heroes" don't pull you away from what God says is right. When God's people want to

be like unbelievers, they are heading for spiritual disaster.

1st Samuel

Chapter 9

“Kish was a rich, influential man from the tribe of Benjamin. He was the son of Abiel and grandson of Zeror, from the family of Becorath and the clan of Aphiah. His son Saul was the most handsome man in Israel—head and shoulders taller than anyone else in the land.”

The story of Saul is told in this chapter. As we review his life we can learn many lessons:

First impressions can be deceiving, especially when the image created by a person’s appearance is contradicted by his or her qualities and abilities. Saul presented the ideal visual image of a king, but the tendencies of his character often went contrary to God’s commands for a king. Saul was God’s chosen leader, but this did not mean he was capable of being king on his own.

During his reign, Saul had his greatest successes when he obeyed God. His greatest failures resulted from acting on his own. Saul had the raw materials to be a good leader—appearance, courage, and action. Even his weaknesses could have been used by God if Saul had recognized them and left them in God’s hands. His own choices cut him off from God and eventually alienated him from his own people.

From Saul we learn that while our strengths and abilities make us useful, it is our weaknesses that make us usable. Our skills and talents make us tools, but our failures and shortcomings remind us that we need a Craftsman in control of our lives. Whatever we accomplish on our own is only a hint of what God could do through our lives. Does he control your life?

“One day Kish's donkeys strayed away, and he told Saul, "Take a servant with you, and go look for them.”

Saul was sent by his father on an important mission—to find their stray donkeys. Donkeys were all-purpose animals, the “pick-up trucks” of Bible times. Used for transportation, hauling, and farming, they were considered necessities. Even the poorest family owned one. To own many donkeys was a sign of wealth, and to lose them was a disaster. Saul’s father was wealthy, and his many donkeys were evidence of that wealth.

Often we think that events just happen to us, but as we learn from this story about Saul, God may use common occurrences to lead us where he wants. It is important to evaluate all situations as potential “divine appointments” designed to shape our lives. Think of all the good and bad circumstances that have affected you lately. Can you see God’s purpose in them? Perhaps he is building a certain quality in you or leading you to serve him in a new area.

“So Saul took one of his servants and traveled all through the hill country of Ephraim, the land of Shalishah, the Shaalim area, and the entire land of Benjamin, but they couldn't find the donkeys anywhere. Finally, they entered the region of Zuph, and Saul said to his servant, "Let's go home. By now my father will be more worried about us than about the donkeys!" But the servant said, "I've just thought of something! There is a man of God who lives here in this town. He is held in

high honor by all the people because everything he says comes true. Let's go find him. Perhaps he can tell us which way to go."

The city where the servant said the prophet lived was probably Ramah, where Samuel moved after the Philistine battle near Shiloh (1st Samuel 7:17). Saul's lack of knowledge about Samuel showed his ignorance of spiritual matters. Saul and Samuel even lived in the same territory, Benjamin.

"But we don't have anything to offer him," Saul replied. "Even our food is gone, and we don't have a thing to give him." "Well," the servant said, "I have one small silver piece. We can at least offer it to him and see what happens!" (In those days if people wanted a message from God, they would say, "Let's go and ask the seer," for prophets used to be called seers.) "All right," Saul agreed, "let's try it!" So they started into the town where the man of God was.

"As they were climbing a hill toward the town, they met some young women coming out to draw water. So Saul and his servant asked, "Is the seer here today?" "Yes," they replied. "Stay right on this road. He is at the town gates. He has just arrived to take part in a public sacrifice up on the hill. Hurry and catch him before he goes up the hill to eat. The guests won't start until he arrives to bless the food." So they entered the town, and as they passed through the gates, Samuel was coming out toward them to climb the hill. Now the Lord had told Samuel the previous day, "About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin. Anoint him to be the leader of my people, Israel. He will rescue them from the Philistines, for I have looked down on my people in mercy and have heard their cry."

When Samuel noticed Saul, the Lord said, "That's the man I told you about! He will rule my people." Just then Saul approached Samuel at the gateway and asked, "Can you please tell me where the seer's house is?" "I am the seer!" Samuel replied. "Go on up the hill ahead of me to the place of sacrifice, and we'll eat there together. In the morning I will tell you what you want to know and send you on your way."

And don't worry about those donkeys that were lost three days ago, for they have been found. And I am here to tell you that you and your family are the focus of all Israel's hopes." Saul replied, "But I'm only from Benjamin, the smallest tribe in Israel, and my family is the least important of all the families of that tribe! Why are you talking like this to me?" Then Samuel brought Saul and his servant into the great hall and placed them at the head of the table, honoring them above the thirty special guests. Samuel then instructed the cook to bring Saul the finest cut of meat, the piece that had been set aside for the guest of honor. So the cook brought it in and placed it before Saul. "Go ahead and eat it," Samuel said. "I was saving it for you even before I invited these others!" So Saul ate with Samuel."

"After the feast, when they had returned to the town, Samuel took Saul up to the roof of the house and prepared a bed for him there. At daybreak the next morning, Samuel called up to Saul, "Get up! It's time you were on your way." So Saul got ready, and he and Samuel left the house together. When they reached the edge of town, Samuel told Saul to send his servant on ahead. After the servant was gone, Samuel said, "Stay here, for I have received a special message for you from God."

1st Samuel

Chapter 10

Then Samuel took a flask of olive oil and poured it over Saul's head. He kissed Saul on the cheek and said, "I am doing this because the Lord has appointed you to be the leader of his people Israel."

When an Israelite king took office he was not only crowned, he was anointed. The coronation was the political act of establishing the king as ruler; the anointing was the religious act of making the king God's representative to the people. A king was always anointed by a priest or prophet. The special anointing oil was a mixture of olive oil, myrrh, and other expensive spices. It was poured over the king's head to symbolize the presence and power of the Holy Spirit of God in his life. This anointing ceremony was to remind the king of his great responsibility to lead his people by God's wisdom and not his own.

When you leave me today, you will see two men beside Rachel's tomb at Zelzah, on the border of Benjamin. They will tell you that the donkeys have been found and that your father is worried about you and is asking, 'Have you seen my son?' "When you get to the oak of Tabor, you will see three men coming toward you who are on their way to worship God at Bethel. One will be bringing three young goats, another will have three loaves of bread, and the third will be carrying a skin of wine. They will greet you and offer you two of the loaves, which you are to accept.

"When you arrive at Gibeah of God, where the garrison of the Philistines is located, you will meet a band of prophets coming down from the altar on the hill. They will be playing a harp, a tambourine, a flute, and a lyre, and they will be prophesying. At that time the Spirit of the Lord will come upon you with power, and you will prophesy with them. You will be changed into a different person.

How could Saul be so filled with the Spirit and yet later commit such evil acts? Throughout the Old Testament, God's Spirit "came upon" a person temporarily so that God could use him or her for great acts. This happened frequently to Israel's judges when they were called by God to rescue the nation (Judges 3:8-10). This was not always a permanent, abiding influence, but sometimes a temporary manifestation of the Holy Spirit. Yet, at times in the Old Testament, the Spirit even came upon unbelievers to enable them to do unusual tasks (Numbers 24; 2 Chron. 36:22-23). The Holy Spirit gave the person power to do what God asked, but it did not always produce the other fruits of the Spirit, such as self-control. Saul, in his early years as king, was a different person (1st Samuel 10:1-10) as a result of the Holy Spirit's work in him. But as Saul's power grew, so did his pride. After a while he refused to seek God; the Spirit left him (1st Samuel 16:14); and his good attitude melted away.

After these signs take place, do whatever you think is best, for God will be with you. Then go down to Gilgal ahead of me and wait for me there seven days. I will join you there to sacrifice burnt offerings and peace offerings. When I arrive, I will give you further instructions."

As Saul turned and started to leave, God changed his heart, and all Samuel's signs were fulfilled

that day. When Saul and his servant arrived at Gibeah, they saw the prophets coming toward them. Then the Spirit of God came upon Saul, and he, too, began to prophesy. When his friends heard about it, they exclaimed, "What? Is Saul a prophet? How did the son of Kish become a prophet?"

A prophet is someone who speaks God's words. While God told many prophets to predict certain events, what God wanted most was for them to instruct and inspire people to live in faithfulness to God. When Saul's friends heard inspired words coming from Saul they exclaimed, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" This was an expression of surprise at worldly Saul's becoming religious. It is equivalent to "What? Has he got religion?"

But one of the neighbors responded, "It doesn't matter who his father is; anyone can become a prophet." So that is the origin of the saying "Is Saul a prophet?" When Saul had finished prophesying, he climbed the hill to the altar. "Where in the world have you been?" Saul's uncle asked him.

"We went to look for the donkeys," Saul replied, "but we couldn't find them. So we went to the prophet Samuel to ask him where they were." "Oh? And what did he say?" his uncle asked. "He said the donkeys had been found," Saul replied. But Saul didn't tell his uncle that Samuel had anointed him to be king.

Later Samuel called all the people of Israel to meet before the Lord at Mizpah. [18] And he gave them this message from the Lord, the God of Israel: "I brought you from Egypt and rescued you from the Egyptians and from all of the nations that were oppressing you. But though I have done so much for you, you have rejected me and said, 'We want a king instead!' Now, therefore, present yourselves before the Lord by tribes and clans."

Israel's true king was God, but the nation demanded another. Imagine wanting a human being instead of God as guide and leader! Throughout history, men and women have rejected God, and they continue to do it today. Are you rejecting God by pushing him aside and acknowledging someone or something else as your "king" or top priority? Learn from these stories of Israel's kings, and don't push God aside.

The Israelites chose their first king by casting lots or by using the Urim and Thummim, two plates or flat stones carried by the high priest. The fact that Saul was chosen may seem like luck, but it was really the opposite. God had instructed the Israelites to make the Urim and Thummim for the specific purpose of consulting him in times such as this (Exodus 28:30; Numbers 27:12-21). By using the Urim and Thummim, the Israelites were taking the decision out of their own hands and turning it over to God. Only the high priest could use the Urim and Thummim, which were designed to give only yes or no answers. So Samuel called the tribal leaders together before the Lord, and the tribe of Benjamin was chosen.

Then he brought each family of the tribe of Benjamin before the Lord, and the family of the Matrites was chosen. And finally Saul son of Kish was chosen from among them. But when they looked for him, he had disappeared! So they asked the Lord, "Where is he?" And the Lord replied, "He is hiding among the baggage."

When the Israelites assembled to choose a king, Saul already knew he was the one (1st Samuel 10:1). Instead of coming forward, however, he hid among the baggage. Often we hide from important responsibilities because we are afraid of failure, afraid of what others will think, or perhaps unsure about how to proceed. Prepare now to step up to your future responsibilities. Count on God's provision rather than your feelings of adequacy.

So they found him and brought him out, and he stood head and shoulders above anyone else. Then Samuel said to all the people, "This is the man the Lord has chosen as your king. No one in all Israel is his equal!" And all the people shouted, "Long live the king!" Then Samuel told the people what the rights and duties of a king were. He wrote them down on a scroll and placed it before the Lord. Then Samuel sent the people home again.

The kings of Israel, unlike kings of other nations, had specific regulations outlined for them (Deut. 17:14-20). Pagan kings were considered gods; they made their own laws and answered to no one. By contrast, Israel's king had to answer to a higher authority—the Lord of heaven and earth. The Israelites now had a king like everyone else, just as they wanted. But Samuel, in his charge to both the king and the people, wanted to make sure that the rule of Israel's king would be different from that of his pagan counterparts. "Deposited it before the LORD" means that Samuel put the book, as a witness to the agreement, in a special place at Mizpah.

When Saul returned to his home at Gibeah, a band of men whose hearts God had touched became his constant companions. But there were some wicked men who complained, "How can this man save us?" And they despised him and refused to bring him gifts. But Saul ignored them.

Some men became Saul's constant companions, while others despised him. Criticism will always be directed toward those who lead because they are out in front. At this time, Saul took no notice of those who seemed to be against him, although later he would become consumed with jealousy (1st Samuel 19:1-3; 1st Samuel 26:17-21). As you lead, listen to constructive criticism, but don't spend valuable time and energy worrying about those who may oppose you. Instead, focus your attention on those who are ready and willing to help.

1st Samuel

Chapter 11

About a month later, King Nahash of Ammon led his army against the Israelite city of Jabesh-gilead. But the citizens of Jabesh asked for peace. "Make a treaty with us, and we will be your servants," they pleaded.

At this time, Israel was very susceptible to invasion by marauding tribes such as these Ammonites from east of the Jordan River. Saul's leadership in battle against this warlike tribe helped unify the nation and proved that he was a worthy military ruler. Saul's kingship was solidified when he saved the nation from disgrace and spared the people who had criticized him.

"All right," Nahash said, "but only on one condition. I will gouge out the right eye of every one of you as a disgrace to all Israel!" "Give us seven days to send messengers throughout Israel!" replied the leaders of Jabesh. "If none of our relatives will come to save us, we will agree to your terms."

Why would Nahash give the city of Jabesh Gilead seven days to find an army to help them? Because Israel was still disorganized, Nahash was betting that no one would come to the city's aid. He was hoping to take the city without a fight and avoid a battle. He also may not have been prepared to attack the city because a siege against its walls could last weeks or months.

When the messengers came to Gibeah, Saul's hometown, and told the people about their plight, everyone broke into tears. Saul was plowing in the field, and when he returned to town, he asked, "What's the matter? Why is everyone crying?" So they told him about the message from Jabesh. And the Spirit of God came upon Saul when he heard those tidings, and his anger was kindled greatly.

Anger is a powerful emotion. Often it may drive people to hurt others with words or physical violence. But anger directed at sin and the mistreatment of others is not wrong. Saul was angered by the Ammonites' threat to humiliate and mistreat his fellow Israelites. The Holy Spirit used Saul's anger to bring justice and freedom. When injustice or sin makes you angry, ask God how you can channel that anger in constructive ways to help bring about a positive change.

He took two oxen and cut them into pieces and sent the messengers to carry them throughout Israel with this message: "This is what will happen to the oxen of anyone who refuses to follow Saul and Samuel into battle!" And the Lord made the people afraid of Saul's anger, and all of them came out together as one. When Saul mobilized them at Bezek, he found that there were 300,000 men of Israel, in addition to 30,000 from Judah.

Judah, one of the 12 tribes of Israel, is often mentioned separately from the other 11. There are several reasons for this. Judah was the largest tribe (Numbers 1:20-46), and it was the tribe from which most of Israel's kings would come (Genesis 49:8-12). Later, Judah would be one of the few tribes to return to God after a century of captivity under a hostile foreign power. Judah would also be the tribe through which the Messiah would come (Micah 5:2).

So Saul sent the messengers back to Jabesh-gilead to say, "We will rescue you by noontime tomorrow!" What joy there was throughout the city when that message arrived! The men of Jabesh then told their enemies, "Tomorrow we will come out to you, and you can do to us as you wish." But before dawn the next morning, Saul arrived, having divided his army into three detachments. He launched a surprise attack against the Ammonites and slaughtered them the whole morning. The remnant of their army was so badly scattered that no two of them were left together.

Then the people exclaimed to Samuel, "Now where are those men who said Saul shouldn't rule over us? Bring them here, and we will kill them!" But Saul replied, "No one will be executed today, for today the Lord has rescued Israel!"

Then Samuel said to the people, "Come, let us all go to Gilgal to reaffirm Saul's kingship." So they went to Gilgal, and in a solemn ceremony before the Lord they crowned him king. Then they offered peace offerings to the Lord, and Saul and all the Israelites were very happy.

Saul had been anointed by Samuel at Ramah (1st Samuel 10:1); then Saul was publically chosen at Mizpah (1st Samuel 10:17-27); his defeat of the Ammonites confirmed his kingship in the people's minds; at this time, all the people confirm his rule

The Israelites sacrificed fellowship offerings to God as they made Saul their first king. The instructions for giving these offerings are given in Leviticus 3. The fellowship offering was an expression of gratitude and thanksgiving to God, symbolizing the peace that comes to those who know him and who live in accordance with his commands. Although God did not want his people to have a human king, the people were demonstrating through their offerings that he was still their true King. Unfortunately, this attitude did not last, just as God had predicted (1st Samuel 8:7-19).

1st Samuel

Chapter 12

Then Samuel addressed the people again: "I have done as you asked and given you a king. I have selected him ahead of my own sons, and I stand here, an old, gray-haired man. I have served as your leader since I was a boy. Now tell me as I stand before the Lord and before his anointed one—whose ox or donkey have I stolen? Have I ever cheated any of you? Have I ever oppressed you? Have I ever taken a bribe? Tell me and I will make right whatever I have done wrong."

Samuel continued to serve the people as their priest, prophet, and judge, but Saul exercised more and more political and military control over the tribes (see 1st Samuel 7:15).

In his farewell speech, Samuel asked the Israelites to point out any wrongs he had committed during his time as Israel's judge. By doing so, Samuel was reminding them that he could be trusted to tell the truth. He was also reminding them that having a king was their idea, not his. Samuel was setting the stage for the miraculous thunderstorm recorded in 1st Samuel 12:16-19, so that the people could not blame him when God punished them for their selfish motives.

[4] "No," they replied, "you have never cheated or oppressed us in any way, and you have never taken even a single bribe."

[5] "The Lord and his anointed one are my witnesses," Samuel declared, "that you can never accuse me of robbing you."

"Yes, it is true," they replied.

[6] "It was the Lord who appointed Moses and Aaron," Samuel continued. "He brought your ancestors out of the land of Egypt. [7] Now stand here quietly before the Lord as I remind you of all the great things the Lord has done for you and your ancestors.

[8] "When the Israelites were in Egypt and cried out to the Lord, he sent Moses and Aaron to rescue them from Egypt and to bring them into this land. [9] But the people soon forgot about the Lord their God, so he let them be conquered by Sisera, the general of Hazor's army, and by the Philistines and the king of Moab.

[10] "Then they cried to the Lord again and confessed, 'We have sinned by turning away from the Lord and worshipping the images of Baal and Ashtoreth. But we will worship you and you alone if you will rescue us from our enemies.'

"The Baals and the Ashtoreths" were pagan gods. See the note on 1st Samuel 7:4 for more information

[11] Then the Lord sent Gideon, Barak, Jephthah, and Samuel to save you, and you lived in safety.

Jerub-Baal was the name given to Gideon when he demolished the altar of Baal (see Judges 6:32).

"But when you were afraid of Nahash, the king of Ammon, you came to me and said that you wanted a king to reign over you, even though the Lord your God was already your king. All

right, here is the king you have chosen. Look him over. You asked for him, and the Lord has granted your request. "Now if you will fear and worship the Lord and listen to his voice, and if you do not rebel against the Lord's commands, and if you and your king follow the Lord your God, then all will be well. But if you rebel against the Lord's commands and refuse to listen to him, then his hand will be as heavy upon you as it was upon your ancestors.

God granted the nation's request for a king, but his commands and requirements remained the same. God was to be their true King, and both Saul and the people were to be subject to his laws. No person is ever exempt from God's laws. No human action is outside his jurisdiction. God is the true King of every area of life. We must recognize his kingship and pattern our relationships, worklife, and homelife according to his principles.

"Now stand here and see the great thing the Lord is about to do. You know that it does not rain at this time of the year during the wheat harvest. I will ask the Lord to send thunder and rain today. Then you will realize how wicked you have been in asking the Lord for a king!"

The wheat harvest came near the end of the dry season during the months of May and June. Because rain rarely fell during this period, a great thunderstorm was considered a miraculous event. It was not a beneficial miracle, however, because rain during the wheat harvest could damage the crops and cause them to rot quickly. This unusual occurrence showed God's displeasure with Israel's demand for a king.

So Samuel called to the Lord, and the Lord sent thunder and rain. And all the people were terrified of the Lord and of Samuel. "Pray to the Lord your God for us, or we will die!" they cried out to Samuel. "For now we have added to our sins by asking for a king."

"Don't be afraid," Samuel reassured them. "You have certainly done wrong, but make sure now that you worship the Lord with all your heart and that you don't turn your back on him in any way. Don't go back to worshipping worthless idols that cannot help or rescue you—they really are useless! The Lord will not abandon his chosen people, for that would dishonor his great name. He made you a special nation for himself.

Why did God make Israel "his people"? God did not choose them because they deserved it (Deut. 7:7-8), but in order that they might become his channel of blessing to all people through the Messiah (Genesis 12:1-3). Because God chose the people of Israel, he would never abandon them; but because they were his special nation, he would often punish them for their disobedience in order to bring them back to a right relationship with him.

"As for me, I will certainly not sin against the Lord by ending my prayers for you. And I will continue to teach you what is good and right."

Is failing to pray for others a sin? Samuel's words seem to indicate that it is. His actions illustrate two of God's people's responsibilities: (1) they should pray consistently for others (Ephes. 6:18), and (2) they should teach others the right way to God (2 Tim. 2:2). Samuel disagreed with the Israelites' demand for a king, but he assured them that he would continue to pray for them and teach them. We may disagree with others, but we should not stop praying for them

But be sure to fear the Lord and sincerely worship him. Think of all the wonderful things he has done for you.

This is the second time in his farewell speech that Samuel reminded the people to take time to consider what great things God had done for them (see 1st Samuel 12:7). Taking time for reflection allows us to focus our attention upon God's goodness and strengthens our faith. Sometimes we are so progress and future-oriented that we fail to take time to recall all that God has already done. Remember what God has done for you so that you may move ahead with gratitude.

But if you continue to sin, you and your king will be destroyed."

1st Samuel

Chapter 13

Saul was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned for forty-two years. Saul selected three thousand special troops from the army of Israel and sent the rest of the men home. He took two thousand of the chosen men with him to Micmash and the hill country of Bethel. The other thousand went with Saul's son Jonathan to Gibeah in the land of Benjamin.

Soon after this, Jonathan attacked and defeated the garrison of Philistines at Geba. The news spread quickly among the Philistines that Israel was in revolt, so Saul sounded the call to arms throughout Israel. He announced that the Philistine garrison at Geba had been destroyed, and he warned the people that the Philistines now hated the Israelites more than ever. So the entire Israelite army mobilized again and met Saul at Gilgal.

Jonathan attacked and destroyed the Philistine outpost, but Saul took all the credit for it. Although this was normal in that culture, it didn't make his action right. Saul's growing pride started out small—taking credit for a battle that was won by his son. Left unchecked, his pride grew into an ugly obsession; thus it destroyed him, tore his family apart, and threatened the well-being of the nation. Taking credit for the accomplishments of others indicates that pride is controlling your life. When you notice pride taking a foothold, take immediate steps to put it in check by giving credit to those who deserve it.

The Philistines mustered a mighty army of three thousand chariots, six thousand horsemen, and as many warriors as the grains of sand along the seashore! They camped at Micmash east of Beth-aven. When the men of Israel saw the vast number of enemy troops, they lost their nerve entirely and tried to hide in caves, holes, rocks, tombs, and cisterns.

When we forget who is on our side or see only our own resources, we tend to panic at the sight of the opposition. The Israelites became terrified and hid when they saw the mighty Philistine army. They forgot that God was on their side and that he couldn't be defeated. As you face problems and temptations, focus your attention on God and his resources, trusting him to help you (Romans 8:31-37). Some of them crossed the Jordan River and escaped into the land of Gad and Gilead.

Meanwhile, Saul stayed at Gilgal, and his men were trembling with fear. Saul waited there seven days for Samuel, as Samuel had instructed him earlier, but Samuel still didn't come. Saul realized that his troops were rapidly slipping away. So he demanded, "Bring me the burnt offering and the peace offerings!" And Saul sacrificed the burnt offering himself.

Rather than waiting for a priest, Saul offered the sacrifice himself. This was against God's laws (Deut. 12:5-14) and against the specific instructions of Samuel (1st Samuel 10:8). Under pressure from the approaching Philistines, he took matters into his own hands and disobeyed God. He was doing a good thing (offering a sacrifice to God before a crucial battle), but he did it in the wrong way. Like Saul, our true spiritual character is revealed under pressure. The methods we use to accomplish our goals are as important as the attainment of those goals

Just as Saul was finishing with the burnt offering, Samuel arrived. Saul went out to meet and welcome him, but Samuel said, "What is this you have done?" Saul replied, "I saw my men scattering from me, and you didn't arrive when you said you would, and the Philistines are at Micmash ready for battle. So I said, 'The Philistines are ready to march against us, and I haven't even asked for the Lord's help!' So I felt obliged to offer the burnt offering myself before you came." "How foolish!" Samuel exclaimed. "You have disobeyed the command of the Lord your God. Had you obeyed, the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever."

It is difficult to trust God when you feel your resources slipping away. When Saul felt that time was running out, he became impatient with God's timing. In thinking that the ritual was all he needed, he substituted the ritual for faith in God. When faced with a difficult decision, don't allow impatience to drive you to disobey God. When you know what God wants, follow his plan regardless of the consequences. God often uses delays to test our obedience and patience.

Saul had plenty of excuses for his disobedience. But Samuel zeroed in on the real issue: "You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you." Like Saul, we often gloss over our mistakes and sins, trying to justify and spiritualize our actions because of our "special" circumstances. Our excuses, however, are nothing more than disobedience. God knows our true motives. He forgives, restores, and blesses only when we are honest about our sins. By trying to hide his sins behind excuses, Saul lost his kingship (1st Samuel 13:14).

But now your dynasty must end, for the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart. The Lord has already chosen him to be king over his people, for you have not obeyed the Lord's command."

Samuel then left Gilgal and went on his way, but the rest of the troops went with Saul to meet the army. They went up from Gilgal to Gibeah in the land of Benjamin. When Saul counted the men who were still with him, he found only six hundred left! Saul and Jonathan and the troops with them were staying at Geba, near Gibeah, in the land of Benjamin. The Philistines set up their camp at Micmash. Three raiding parties soon left the camp of the Philistines. One went north toward Ophrah in the land of Shual, another went west to Beth-horon, and the third moved toward the border above the valley of Zeboim near the wilderness. There were no blacksmiths in the land of Israel in those days. The Philistines wouldn't allow them for fear they would make swords and spears for the Hebrews. So whenever the Israelites needed to sharpen their plowshares, picks, axes, or sickles, they had to take them to a Philistine blacksmith. (The schedule of charges was as follows: a quarter of an ounce of silver for sharpening a plowshare or a pick, and an eighth of an ounce for sharpening an ax, a sickle, or an ox goad.) So none of the people of Israel had a sword or spear, except for Saul and Jonathan. The pass at Micmash had meanwhile been secured by a contingent of the Philistine army.

Israel was in no position to conquer anyone. The army had no iron weapons, and there were no facilities for turning their tools into weapons. In fact, if an Israelite wanted to sharpen his tools, he had to pay a Philistine blacksmith to do it because the Philistines had a carefully guarded monopoly on iron and blacksmithing. And they charged high prices for sharpening farm implements. The Philistines' tight control over the technology, along with their surprise raids, demoralized the Israelites and kept them in subjection.

Against such superiority, the Israelites were at a serious disadvantage. How could they hope to rout their oppressors? Only with God's help. God wanted to give Israel victory without swords, so they would realize their true source of strength.

1st Samuel

Chapter 14

In this chapter we read about the miserable job Saul did as leader: he had no communication with Jonathan (1st Samuel 14:1, 17); he made a foolish curse (1st Samuel 14:24); and he ignored the well-being of his own soldiers (1st Samuel 14:31). Saul's poor leadership was not a result of personality traits but of decaying spiritual character. What we do is often a direct result of our spiritual condition. We cannot ignore the importance of spiritual character in effective leadership.

One day Jonathan said to the young man who carried his armor, "Come on, let's go over to where the Philistines have their outpost." But Jonathan did not tell his father what he was doing.

Why would Jonathan go alone to attack the Philistines? Jonathan may have been weary of the long, hopeless standoff in the battle; he trusted God to give the victory and wanted to act on that trust. He also knew that the number of Philistines was no problem for God. Perhaps he didn't tell his father about his mission because he thought Saul would not let him go.

Meanwhile, Saul and his six hundred men were camped on the outskirts of Gibeah, around the pomegranate tree at Migron. (Among Saul's men was Ahijah the priest, who was wearing the linen ephod. Ahijah was the son of Ahitub, Ichabod's brother. Ahitub was the son of Phinehas and the grandson of Eli, the priest of the Lord who had served at Shiloh.)

No one realized that Jonathan had left the Israelite camp. To reach the Philistine outpost, Jonathan had to go down between two rocky cliffs that were called Bozez and Seneh. The cliff on the north was in front of Micmash, and the one on the south was in front of Geba. "Let's go across to see those pagans," Jonathan said to his armor bearer. "Perhaps the Lord will help us, for nothing can hinder the Lord. He can win a battle whether he has many warriors or only a few!"

Jonathan and his armor-bearer weren't much of a force to attack the huge Philistine army. But while everyone else was afraid, they trusted God, knowing that the size of the enemy army would not restrict God's ability to help them. God honored the faith and brave action of these two men with a tremendous victory.

Have you ever felt surrounded by the "enemy" or faced overwhelming odds? God is never intimidated by the size of the enemy or the complexity of a problem. With him, there are always enough resources to resist the pressures and win the battle. If God has called you to action, then bravely commit what resources you have to God, and rely upon him to lead you to victory.

"Do what you think is best," the youth replied. "I'm with you completely, whatever you decide."
"All right then," Jonathan told him. "We will cross over and let them see us. If they say to us, 'Stay where you are or we'll kill you,' then we will stop and not go up to them. But if they say, 'Come on up and fight,' then we will go up. That will be the Lord's sign that he will help us defeat them."

When the Philistines saw them coming, they shouted, "Look! The Hebrews are crawling out of their holes!" Then they shouted to Jonathan, "Come on up here, and we'll teach you a lesson!"

Jonathan and his armor-bearer weren't much of a force to attack the huge Philistine army. But while everyone else was afraid, they trusted God, knowing that the size of the enemy army would not restrict God's ability to help them. God honored the faith and brave action of these two men with a tremendous victory.

Have you ever felt surrounded by the "enemy" or faced overwhelming odds? God is never intimidated by the size of the enemy or the complexity of a problem. With him, there are always enough resources to resist the pressures and win the battle. If God has called you to action, then bravely commit what resources you have to God, and rely upon him to lead you to victory.

"Come on, climb right behind me," Jonathan said to his armor bearer, "for the Lord will help us defeat them!" So they climbed up using both hands and feet, and the Philistines fell back as Jonathan and his armor bearer killed them right and left. They killed about twenty men in all, and their bodies were scattered over about half an acre. Suddenly, panic broke out in the Philistine army, both in the camp and in the field, including even the outposts and raiding parties. And just then an earthquake struck, and everyone was terrified.

Saul's lookouts in Gibeah saw a strange sight—the vast army of Philistines began to melt away in every direction. "Find out who isn't here," Saul ordered. And when they checked, they found that Jonathan and his armor bearer were gone. [18] Then Saul shouted to Ahijah, "Bring the ephod here!" For at that time Ahijah was wearing the ephod in front of the Israelites. But while Saul was talking to the priest, the shouting and confusion in the Philistine camp grew louder and louder. So Saul said to Ahijah, "Never mind; let's get going!"

"Withdraw your hand" refers to the use of the Urim and Thummim. They were withdrawn from the linen ephod (vest) as a way to determine God's will (see the note on 1st Samuel 10:20). Saul was rushing the formalities of getting an answer from God so he could hurry and get into battle to take advantage of the confusion of the Philistines.

Then Saul and his six hundred men rushed out to the battle and found the Philistines killing each other. There was terrible confusion everywhere. Even the Hebrews who had gone over to the Philistine army revolted and joined in with Saul, Jonathan, and the rest of the Israelites. Likewise, the men who were hiding in the hills joined the chase when they saw the Philistines running away. So the Lord saved Israel that day, and the battle continued to rage even out beyond Beth-aven.

Now the men of Israel were worn out that day, because Saul had made them take an oath, saying, "Let a curse fall on anyone who eats before evening—before I have full revenge on my enemies." So no one ate a thing all day,

Saul made an oath without thinking through the implications. The results? (1) His men were too tired to fight; (2) they were so hungry they ate meat that still contained blood, which was against God's law (1st Samuel 14:32); (3) Saul almost killed his own son (1st Samuel 14:42-44).

Saul's impulsive oath sounded heroic, but it had disastrous side effects. If you are in the middle

of a conflict, guard against impulsive statements that you may be forced to honor.

Even though they found honeycomb on the ground in the forest. They didn't even touch the honey because they all feared the oath they had taken. But Jonathan had not heard his father's command, and he dipped a stick into a piece of honeycomb and ate the honey. After he had eaten it, he felt much better. But one of the men saw him and said, "Your father made the army take a strict oath that anyone who eats food today will be cursed. That is why everyone is weary and faint."

"My father has made trouble for us all!" Jonathan exclaimed. "A command like that only hurts us. See how much better I feel now that I have eaten this little bit of honey. [30] If the men had been allowed to eat freely from the food they found among our enemies, think how many more we could have killed!"

But hungry as they were, they chased and killed the Philistines all day from Micmash to Aijalon, growing more and more faint. [32] That evening they flew upon the battle plunder and butchered the sheep, cattle, and calves, but they ate them without draining the blood. [33] Someone reported to Saul, "Look, the men are sinning against the Lord by eating meat that still has blood in it."

"That is very wrong," Saul said. "Find a large stone and roll it over here. Then go out among the troops and tell them, 'Bring the cattle and sheep here to kill them and drain the blood. Do not sin against the Lord by eating meat with the blood still in it.' " So that night all the troops brought their animals and slaughtered them there."

One of the oldest and strongest Hebrew food laws was the prohibition against eating meat containing the animal's blood (Leviticus 7:26-27). This law began in Noah's day (Genesis 9:4) and was still observed by the early Christians (Acts 15:27-29). It was wrong to eat blood because blood represented life and life belonged to God. (For a further explanation, see Leviticus 17:10-14.)

And Saul built an altar to the Lord, the first one he had ever built. Then Saul said, "Let's chase the Philistines all night and destroy every last one of them." His men replied, "We'll do whatever you think is best." But the priest said, "Let's ask God first."

After being king for several years, Saul finally built his first altar to God, but only as a last resort. Throughout Saul's reign he consistently approached God only after he had tried everything else. This was in sharp contrast to the priest, who suggested that God be consulted *first*. How much better if Saul had gone to God first, building an altar as his first official act as king. God is too great to be an afterthought. When we turn to him first, we will never have to turn to him as a last resort.

So Saul asked God, "Should we go after the Philistines? Will you help us defeat them?" But God made no reply that day.

Then Saul said to the leaders, "Something's wrong! I want all my army commanders to come

here. We must find out what sin was committed today. I vow by the name of the Lord who rescued Israel that the sinner will surely die, even if it is my own son Jonathan!" But no one would tell him what the trouble was.

This is the second of Saul's foolish curses. Saul made the first of his two oaths (1st Samuel 14:24-26) because he was overly anxious to defeat the Philistines and wanted to give his soldiers an incentive to finish the battle quickly. In the Bible, God never asked people to make oaths or vows, but if they did, he expected them to keep them (Leviticus 5:4; Numbers 30).

Saul's curse was not something God would have condoned, but still it was an oath. And Jonathan, although he didn't know about Saul's oath, was nevertheless guilty of breaking it. Like Jephthah (Judges 11), Saul made an oath that risked the life of his own child. Fortunately, the people intervened and spared Jonathan's life.

Saul had issued a ridiculous command and had driven his men to sin, but still he wouldn't back down even if he had to kill his son. When we make ridiculous statements, it is difficult to admit we are wrong. Sticking to the story, just to save face, only compounds the problem. It takes more courage to admit a mistake than to hold resolutely to an error.

Then Saul said, "Jonathan and I will stand over here, and all of you stand over there." And the people agreed. Then Saul prayed, "O Lord, God of Israel, please show us who is guilty and who is innocent. Are Jonathan and I guilty, or is the sin among the others?" And Jonathan and Saul were chosen as the guilty ones, and the people were declared innocent.

Then Saul said, "Now choose between me and Jonathan." And Jonathan was shown to be the guilty one. "Tell me what you have done," Saul demanded of Jonathan. "I tasted a little honey," Jonathan admitted. "It was only a little bit on the end of a stick. Does that deserve death?"

Jonathan's spiritual character was in striking contrast to Saul's. Jonathan admitted what he had done; he did not try to make excuses. Even though he was unaware of Saul's oath, Jonathan was willing to accept the consequences of his actions. When you do wrong, even unintentionally, respond like Jonathan, not like Saul.

"Yes, Jonathan," Saul said, "you must die! May God strike me dead if you are not executed for this."

But the people broke in and said to Saul, "Should Jonathan, who saved Israel today, die? Far from it! As surely as the Lord lives, not one hair on his head will be touched, for he has been used of God to do a mighty miracle today." So the people rescued Jonathan, and he was not put to death.

Saul made another foolish statement, this time because he was more concerned about saving face than being right. To spare Jonathan's life would require him to admit he had acted foolishly, an embarrassment for a king. Saul was really more interested in protecting his image than in enforcing his vow. Fortunately, the people came to Jonathan's rescue. Don't be like Saul. Admit your mistakes, and show that you are more interested in doing what is right than in looking good.

Then Saul called back the army from chasing the Philistines, and the Philistines returned home.

Now when Saul had secured his grasp on Israel's throne, he fought against his enemies in every direction—against Moab, Ammon, Edom, the kings of Zobah, and the Philistines. And wherever he turned, he was victorious.

Why was Saul so successful right after he had disobeyed God and been told that his reign would end (1st Samuel 13:13-14)? Sometimes ungodly people win battles. Victory is neither guaranteed nor limited to the righteous. God provides according to his will. God might have given Saul success for the sake of the people, not for Saul. He may have left Saul on the throne for a while to utilize his military talents so that David, Israel's next king, could spend more time focusing on the nation's spiritual battles. Regardless of God's reasons for delaying Saul's demise, his reign ended exactly the way God had foretold. The timing of God's plans and promises are known only to him. Our task is to commit our ways to God and then trust him for the outcome.

He did great deeds and conquered the Amalekites, saving Israel from all those who had plundered them.

Saul's sons included Jonathan, Ishbosheth, and Malkishua. He also had two daughters: Merab, who was older, and Michal. [50] Saul's wife was Ahinoam, the daughter of Ahimaaz. The commander of Saul's army was his cousin Abner, his uncle Ner's son. Abner's father, Ner, and Saul's father, Kish, were brothers; both were sons of Abiel.

The Israelites fought constantly with the Philistines throughout Saul's lifetime. So whenever Saul saw a young man who was brave and strong, he drafted him into his army.

1st Samuel

Chapter 15

One day Samuel said to Saul, "I anointed you king of Israel because the Lord told me to. Now listen to this message from the Lord! This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'I have decided to settle accounts with the nation of Amalek for opposing Israel when they came from Egypt. Now go and completely destroy the entire Amalekite nation—men, women, children, babies, cattle, sheep, camels, and donkeys.' "

Why did God command such utter destruction? The Amalekites were a band of guerrilla terrorists. They lived by attacking other nations and carrying off their wealth and their families. They were the first to attack the Israelites as they entered the promised land, and they continued to raid Israelite camps at every opportunity. God knew that the Israelites could never live peacefully in the promised land as long as the Amalekites existed. He also knew that their corrupt, idolatrous religious practices threatened Israel's relationship with him. The only way to protect the Israelites' bodies and souls was to utterly destroy the people of this warlike nation and all their possessions, including their idols.

So Saul mobilized his army at Telaim. There were 200,000 troops in addition to 10,000 men from Judah. Then Saul went to the city of Amalek and lay in wait in the valley. [6] Saul sent this message to the Kenites: "Move away from where the Amalekites live or else you will die with them. For you were kind to the people of Israel when they came up from Egypt." So the Kenites packed up and left.

Then Saul slaughtered the Amalekites from Havilah all the way to Shur, east of Egypt. He captured Agag, the Amalekite king, but completely destroyed everyone else. Saul and his men spared Agag's life and kept the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs—everything, in fact, that appealed to them. They destroyed only what was worthless or of poor quality.

Saul and his men did not destroy all the plunder from the battle as God commanded (1st Samuel 15:3). The law of devoting something—setting it aside—entirely for destruction was well known to the Israelites. Anything under God's ban was to be completely destroyed (Deut. 20:16-18). This was set up in order to prevent idolatry from taking hold in Israel because many of the valuables were idols. To break this law was punishable by death (Joshua 7). It showed disrespect and disregard for God because it directly violated his command.

When we gloss over sin in order to protect what we have or for material gain, we aren't being shrewd; we are disobeying God's law. Selective obedience is just another form of disobedience.

Then the Lord said to Samuel, "I am sorry that I ever made Saul king, for he has not been loyal to me and has again refused to obey me." Samuel was so deeply moved when he heard this that he cried out to the Lord all night.

When God said he was grieved that he had made Saul king, was he saying he had made a mistake?

God's comment was an expression of sorrow, not an admission of error (Genesis 6:5-7). An omniscient God cannot make a mistake; therefore, God did not change his mind. He did, however, change his attitude toward Saul when Saul changed. Saul's heart no longer belonged to God, but to his own interests.

Early the next morning Samuel went to find Saul. Someone told him, "Saul went to Carmel to set up a monument to himself; then he went on to Gilgal."

Saul built a monument in honor of himself. What a contrast to Moses and Joshua, who gave all the credit to God.

When Samuel finally found him, Saul greeted him cheerfully. "May the Lord bless you," he said. "I have carried out the Lord's command!"

"Then what is all the bleating of sheep and lowing of cattle I hear?" Samuel demanded.

Saul thought he had won a great victory over the Amalekites, but God saw it as a great failure because Saul had disobeyed him and then lied to Samuel about the results of the battle. Saul may have thought his lie wouldn't be detected, or that what he did was not wrong. Saul was deceiving himself.

Dishonest people soon begin to believe the lies they construct around themselves. Then they lose the ability to tell the difference between truth and lies. By believing your own lies you deceive yourself, you will alienate yourself from God, and you will lose credibility in all your relationships. In the long run, honesty wins out.

"It's true that the army spared the best of the sheep and cattle," Saul admitted. "But they are going to sacrifice them to the Lord your God. We have destroyed everything else." Then Samuel said to Saul, "Stop! Listen to what the Lord told me last night!"

"What was it?" Saul asked. And Samuel told him, "Although you may think little of yourself, are you not the leader of the tribes of Israel? The Lord has anointed you king of Israel. And the Lord sent you on a mission and told you, 'Go and completely destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, until they are all dead.' [19] Why haven't you obeyed the Lord? Why did you rush for the plunder and do exactly what the Lord said not to do?"

"But I did obey the Lord," Saul insisted. "I carried out the mission he gave me. I brought back King Agag, but I destroyed everyone else. Then my troops brought in the best of the sheep and cattle and plunder to sacrifice to the Lord your God in Gilgal." But Samuel replied, "What is more pleasing to the Lord: your burnt offerings and sacrifices or your obedience to his voice? Obedience is far better than sacrifice. Listening to him is much better than offering the fat of rams. Rebellion is as bad as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as bad as worshiping idols. So because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you from being king."

This is the first of numerous places in the Bible where the theme "to obey is better than sacrifice" is stated (Psalm 40:6-8; Psalm 51:16-17; Proverbs 21:3; Isaiah 1:11-17; Jeremiah 7:21-23; Hosea

6:6; Micah 6:6-8; Matthew 12:7; Mark 12:33; Hebrews 10:8-9). Was Samuel saying that sacrifice is unimportant? No, he was urging Saul to look at his reasons for making the sacrifice rather than at the sacrifice itself. A sacrifice was a ritual transaction between man and God that physically demonstrated a relationship between them. But if the person's heart was not truly repentant or if he did not truly love God, the sacrifice was a hollow ritual. Religious ceremonies or rituals are empty unless they are performed with an attitude of love and obedience. "Being religious" (going to church, serving on a committee, giving to charity) is not enough if we do not act out of devotion and obedience to God.

Rebellion and arrogance are serious sins. They involve far more than being independent and strong-minded. Scripture equates them with divination (witchcraft) and idolatry, sins worthy of death (Exodus 22:18; Leviticus 20:6; Deut. 13:12-15; Deut. 18:10; Micah 5:10-14)

Saul became both rebellious and arrogant, so it is little wonder that God finally rejected him and took away his kingdom. Rebellion against God is perhaps the most serious sin of all because as long as a person rebels, he or she closes the door to forgiveness and restoration with God.

Then Saul finally admitted, "Yes, I have sinned. I have disobeyed your instructions and the Lord's command, for I was afraid of the people and did what they demanded. [25] Oh, please, forgive my sin now and go with me to worship the Lord." But Samuel replied, "I will not return with you! Since you have rejected the Lord's command, he has rejected you from being the king of Israel."

Saul's excuses had come to an end. It was the time of reckoning. God wasn't rejecting Saul as a person; the king could still seek forgiveness and restore his relationship with God, but it was too late to get his kingdom back. If you do not act responsibly with what God has entrusted to you, eventually you will run out of excuses. All of us must one day give an account for our actions (Romans 14:12; Rev. 22:12).

As Samuel turned to go, Saul grabbed at him to try to hold him back and tore his robe. And Samuel said to him, "See? The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to someone else—one who is better than you. And he who is the Glory of Israel will not lie, nor will he change his mind, for he is not human that he should change his mind!"

Then Saul pleaded again, "I know I have sinned. But please, at least honor me before the leaders and before my people by going with me to worship the Lord your God."

Saul was more concerned about what others would think of him than he was about the status of his relationship with God (1st Samuel 15:24). He begged Samuel to go with him to worship as a public demonstration that Samuel still supported him. If Samuel had refused, the people probably would have lost all confidence in Saul.

So Samuel finally agreed and went with him, and Saul worshiped the Lord.

Then Samuel said, "Bring King Agag to me." Agag arrived full of smiles, for he thought, "Surely the worst is over, and I have been spared!" [But Samuel said, "As your sword has killed the sons

of many mothers, now your mother will be childless." And Samuel cut Agag to pieces before the Lord at Gilgal. Then Samuel went home to Ramah, and Saul returned to his house at Gibeah. Samuel never went to meet with Saul again, but he mourned constantly for him. And the Lord was sorry he had ever made Saul king of Israel.

1st Samuel

Chapter 16

Finally, the Lord said to Samuel, "You have mourned long enough for Saul. I have rejected him as king of Israel. Now fill your horn with olive oil and go to Bethlehem. Find a man named Jesse who lives there, for I have selected one of his sons to be my new king."

While Saul is still on the throne, Samuel anoints David as Israel's next king. Young David then bravely conquers Goliath, the Philistine champion, and establishes a lifelong friendship with Jonathan, Saul's son. When Saul realizes that David will become king one day, he grows very jealous and tries to kill David on several occasions. David escapes into Philistine territory until Saul is killed in battle. When treated unjustly, we should not take matters into our own hands. God, who is faithful and just, sees all that is happening and will judge all evil.

But Samuel asked, "How can I do that? If Saul hears about it, he will kill me." "Take a heifer with you," the Lord replied, "and say that you have come to make a sacrifice to the Lord. Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you which of his sons to anoint for me."

So Samuel did as the Lord instructed him. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the leaders of the town became afraid. "What's wrong?" they asked. "Do you come in peace?"

"Yes," Samuel replied. "I have come to sacrifice to the Lord. Purify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." Then Samuel performed the purification rite for Jesse and his sons and invited them, too.

Samuel "consecrated" Jesse and his sons to prepare them to come before God in worship or to offer a sacrifice

When they arrived, Samuel took one look at Eliab and thought, "Surely this is the Lord's anointed!" But the Lord said to Samuel, "Don't judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected him. The Lord doesn't make decisions the way you do! People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at a person's thoughts and intentions."

Saul was tall and handsome; he was an impressive-looking man. Samuel may have been trying to find someone who looked like Saul to be Israel's next king, but God warned him against judging by appearance alone. When people judge by outward appearance, they may overlook quality individuals who lack the particular physical qualities society currently admires. Appearance doesn't reveal what people are really like or what their true value is. Fortunately, God judges by faith and character, not appearances. And because only God can see on the inside, only he can accurately judge people. Most people spend hours each week maintaining their outward appearance; they should do even more to develop their inner character. While everyone can see your face, only you and God know what your heart really looks like. What steps are you taking to improve your heart's attitude?

Then Jesse told his son Abinadab to step forward and walk in front of Samuel. But Samuel said, "This is not the one the Lord has chosen." [9] Next Jesse summoned Shammah, but Samuel said, "Neither is this the one the Lord has chosen." [10] In the same way all seven of Jesse's sons were

presented to Samuel. But Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen any of these." [11] Then Samuel asked, "Are these all the sons you have?"

"There is still the youngest," Jesse replied. "But he's out in the fields watching the sheep." "Send for him at once," Samuel said. "We will not sit down to eat until he arrives." So Jesse sent for him. He was ruddy and handsome, with pleasant eyes. And the Lord said, "This is the one; anoint him." So as David stood there among his brothers, Samuel took the olive oil he had brought and poured it on David's head. And the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him from that day on. Then Samuel returned to Ramah.

David was anointed king, but it was done in secret; he was not publicly anointed until much later (2 Samuel 2:4; 2 Samuel 5:3). Saul was still legally the king, but God was preparing David for his future responsibilities. The anointing oil poured over David's head stood for holiness. It was used to set people or objects apart for God's service. Each king and high priest of Israel was anointed with oil. This commissioned him as God's representative to the nation. Although God rejected Saul's kingship by not allowing any of his descendants to sit on Israel's throne, Saul himself remained in his position until his death.

Now the Spirit of the Lord had left Saul, and the Lord sent a tormenting spirit that filled him with depression and fear.

What was this evil spirit the Lord sent? Perhaps Saul was simply depressed. Or perhaps the Holy Spirit had left Saul, and God allowed an evil spirit (a demon) to torment him as judgment for his disobedience (this would demonstrate God's power over the spirit world—1 Kings 22:19-23). Either way, Saul was driven to insanity, which led him to attempt to murder David.

Some of Saul's servants suggested a remedy. "It is clear that a spirit from God is tormenting you," they said. "Let us find a good musician to play the harp for you whenever the tormenting spirit is bothering you. The harp music will quiet you, and you will soon be well again."

Harpes were popular musical instruments in Saul's day, and their music is still known for its soothing qualities. The simplest harps were merely two pieces of wood fastened at right angles to each other. The strings were stretched across the wood to give the harp a triangular shape. Simple strings could be made of twisted grasses, but better strings were made of dried animal intestine. Harps could have up to 40 strings and were louder than the smaller three or four-stringed instruments called lyres. David, known for his shepherding skills and bravery, was also an accomplished harpist and musician who would eventually write many of the psalms found in the Bible.

"All right," Saul said. "Find me someone who plays well and bring him here." One of the servants said to Saul, "The son of Jesse is a talented harp player. Not only that; he is brave and strong and has good judgment. He is also a fine-looking young man, and the Lord is with him." So Saul sent messengers to Jesse to say, "Send me your son David, the shepherd." Jesse responded by sending David to Saul, along with a young goat and a donkey loaded down with food and wine. So David went to Saul and served him. Saul liked David very much, and David became one of Saul's armor bearers."

When Saul asked David to be in his service, he obviously did not know that David had been secretly anointed king (1st Samuel 16:12). Saul's invitation presented an excellent opportunity for the young man and future king to gain firsthand information about leading a nation ("David went back and forth from Saul," 1st Samuel 17:15).

Sometimes our plans—even the ones we think God has approved—have to be put on hold indefinitely. Like David, we can use this waiting time profitably. We can choose to learn and grow in our present circumstances, whatever they may be.

Then Saul sent word to Jesse asking, "Please let David join my staff, for I am very pleased with him." And whenever the tormenting spirit from God troubled Saul, David would play the harp. Then Saul would feel better, and the tormenting spirit would go away.

1st Samuel

Chapter 17

The Philistines now mustered their army for battle and camped between Socoh in Judah and Azekah at Ephes-dammim. Saul countered by gathering his troops near the valley of Elah. So the Philistines and Israelites faced each other on opposite hills, with the valley between them. Then Goliath, a Philistine champion from Gath, came out of the Philistine ranks to face the forces of Israel. He was a giant of a man, measuring over nine feet tall! He wore a bronze helmet and a coat of mail that weighed 125 pounds. He also wore bronze leggings, and he slung a bronze javelin over his back. The shaft of his spear was as heavy and thick as a weaver's beam, tipped with an iron spearhead that weighed fifteen pounds. An armor bearer walked ahead of him carrying a huge shield.

In the days of the exodus, most of the Israelites had been afraid to enter the promised land because of the giants living there (Numbers 13:32-33). King Og of Bashan needed a bed over 13 feet long (Deut. 3:11). Now Goliath, over nine feet tall, taunted Israel's soldiers and appeared invincible to them. Saul, the tallest of the Israelites, may have been especially worried because he was obviously the best match for Goliath. In God's eyes, however, Goliath was no different than anyone else.

Goliath stood and shouted across to the Israelites, "Do you need a whole army to settle this? Choose someone to fight for you, and I will represent the Philistines. We will settle this dispute in single combat! [9] If your man is able to kill me, then we will be your slaves. But if I kill him, you will be our slaves!

An army often avoided the high cost of battle by pitting its strongest warrior against the strongest warrior of the enemy. This avoided great bloodshed because the winner of the fight was considered the winner of the battle. Goliath had the definite advantage against David from a human standpoint. But Goliath didn't realize that in fighting David, he also had to fight God.

I defy the armies of Israel! Send me a man who will fight with me!" When Saul and the Israelites heard this, they were terrified and deeply shaken.

Now David was the son of a man named Jesse, an Ephrathite from Bethlehem in the land of Judah. Jesse was an old man at that time, and he had eight sons in all. Jesse's three oldest sons—Eliab, Abinadab, and Shammah—had already joined Saul's army to fight the Philistines. David was the youngest of Jesse's sons. Since David's three oldest brothers were in the army, they stayed with Saul's forces all the time. But David went back and forth between working for Saul and helping his father with the sheep in Bethlehem. For forty days, twice a day, morning and evening, the Philistine giant strutted in front of the Israelite army.

Why would this go on for 40 days without one side attacking the other? They were camped on opposite sides of a valley with steep walls. Whoever would rush down the valley and up the steep cliffs would be at a disadvantage at the beginning of the battle and probably suffer great casualties. Each side was waiting for the other to attack first.

One day Jesse said to David, "Take this half-bushel of roasted grain and these ten loaves of bread to your brothers. And give these ten cuts of cheese to their captain. See how your brothers are getting along, and bring me back a letter from them." David's brothers were with Saul and the Israelite army at the valley of Elah, fighting against the Philistines.

So David left the sheep with another shepherd and set out early the next morning with the gifts. He arrived at the outskirts of the camp just as the Israelite army was leaving for the battlefield with shouts and battle cries. Soon the Israelite and Philistine forces stood facing each other, army against army. David left his things with the keeper of supplies and hurried out to the ranks to greet his brothers. As he was talking with them, he saw Goliath, the champion from Gath, come out from the Philistine ranks, shouting his challenge to the army of Israel.

As soon as the Israelite army saw him, they began to run away in fright. [25] "Have you seen the giant?" the men were asking. "He comes out each day to challenge Israel. And have you heard about the huge reward the king has offered to anyone who kills him? The king will give him one of his daughters for a wife, and his whole family will be exempted from paying taxes!"

David talked to some others standing there to verify the report. "What will a man get for killing this Philistine and putting an end to his abuse of Israel?" he asked them. "Who is this pagan Philistine anyway, that he is allowed to defy the armies of the living God?"

What a difference perspective can make. Most of the onlookers saw only a giant. David, however, saw a mortal man defying almighty God. He knew he would not be alone when he faced Goliath; God would fight with him. He looked at his situation from God's point of view. Viewing impossible situations from God's point of view helps us put giant problems in perspective. Once we see clearly, we can fight more effectively.

And David received the same reply as before: "What you have been hearing is true. That is the reward for killing the giant." But when David's oldest brother, Eliab, heard David talking to the men, he was angry. "What are you doing around here anyway?" he demanded. "What about those few sheep you're supposed to be taking care of? I know about your pride and dishonesty. You just want to see the battle!"

"What have I done now?" David replied. "I was only asking a question!" He walked over to some others and asked them the same thing and received the same answer. Then David's question was reported to King Saul, and the king sent for him.

"Don't worry about a thing," David told Saul. "I'll go fight this Philistine!"

Criticism couldn't stop David. While the rest of the army stood around, he knew the importance of taking action. With God to fight for him, there was no reason to wait. People may try to discourage you with negative comments or mockery, but continue to do what you know is right. By doing what is right, you will be pleasing God, whose opinion matters most.

"Don't be ridiculous!" Saul replied. "There is no way you can go against this Philistine. You are only a boy, and he has been in the army since he was a boy!" But David persisted. "I have been

taking care of my father's sheep," he said. "When a lion or a bear comes to steal a lamb from the flock, I go after it with a club and take the lamb from its mouth. If the animal turns on me, I catch it by the jaw and club it to death. I have done this to both lions and bears, and I'll do it to this pagan Philistine, too, for he has defied the armies of the living God! The Lord who saved me from the claws of the lion and the bear will save me from this Philistine!"

Saul finally consented. "All right, go ahead," he said. "And may the Lord be with you!"

Then Saul gave David his own armor—a bronze helmet and a coat of mail. David put it on, strapped the sword over it, and took a step or two to see what it was like, for he had never worn such things before. "I can't go in these," he protested. "I'm not used to them." So he took them off again. He picked up five smooth stones from a stream and put them in his shepherd's bag. Then, armed only with his shepherd's staff and sling, he started across to fight Goliath.

Goliath walked out toward David with his shield bearer ahead of him, sneering in contempt at this ruddy-faced boy. "Am I a dog," he roared at David, "that you come at me with a stick?" And he cursed David by the names of his gods. "Come over here, and I'll give your flesh to the birds and wild animals!" Goliath yelled.

David shouted in reply, "You come to me with sword, spear, and javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord Almighty—the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. [46] Today the Lord will conquer you, and I will kill you and cut off your head. And then I will give the dead bodies of your men to the birds and wild animals, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel! And everyone will know that the Lord does not need weapons to rescue his people. It is his battle, not ours. The Lord will give you to us!"

As Goliath moved closer to attack, David quickly ran out to meet him. Reaching into his shepherd's bag and taking out a stone, he hurled it from his sling and hit the Philistine in the forehead. The stone sank in, and Goliath stumbled and fell face downward to the ground. So David triumphed over the Philistine giant with only a stone and sling. And since he had no sword, he ran over and pulled Goliath's sword from its sheath. David used it to kill the giant and cut off his head.

When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they turned and ran. Then the Israelites gave a great shout of triumph and rushed after the Philistines, chasing them as far as Gath and the gates of Ekron. The bodies of the dead and wounded Philistines were strewn all along the road from Shaaraim, as far as Gath and Ekron. Then the Israelite army returned and plundered the deserted Philistine camp. (David took Goliath's head to Jerusalem, but he stored the Philistine's armor in his own tent.)

As Saul watched David go out to fight Goliath, he asked Abner, the general of his army, "Abner, whose son is he?" "I really don't know," Abner said. "Well, find out!" the king told him.

After David had killed Goliath, Abner brought him to Saul with the Philistine's head still in his hand. "Tell me about your father, my boy," Saul said. And David replied, "His name is Jesse, and we live in Bethlehem."

1st Samuel

Chapter 18

After David had finished talking with Saul, he met Jonathan, the king's son. There was an immediate bond of love between them, and they became the best of friends. From that day on Saul kept David with him at the palace and wouldn't let him return home. And Jonathan made a special vow to be David's friend, and he sealed the pact by giving him his robe, tunic, sword, bow, and belt.

Their friendship of David and Jonathan is one of the deepest and closest recorded in the Bible: (1) they based their friendship on commitment to God, not just each other; (2) they let nothing come between them, not even career or family problems; (3) they drew closer together when their friendship was tested; (4) they remained friends to the end. Jonathan, the prince of Israel, later realized that David, and not he, would be the next king (1st Samuel 23:17). But that did not weaken his love for David. Jonathan would much rather lose the throne of Israel than lose his closest friend.

Whatever Saul asked David to do, David did it successfully. So Saul made him a commander in his army, an appointment that was applauded by the fighting men and officers alike. But something happened when the victorious Israelite army was returning home after David had killed Goliath. Women came out from all the towns along the way to celebrate and to cheer for King Saul, and they sang and danced for joy with tambourines and cymbals. This was their song:

"Saul has killed his thousands,
and David his ten thousands!"

This made Saul very angry. "What's this?" he said. "They credit David with ten thousands and me with only thousands. Next they'll be making him their king!" So from that time on Saul kept a jealous eye on David.

Saul's appreciation for David turned to jealousy as people began to applaud David's exploits. In a jealous rage, Saul attempted to murder David by hurling his spear at him (1st Samuel 18:11-12).

Jealousy may not seem to be a major sin, but in reality, it is one step short of murder. Jealousy starts as you resent a rival; it leads to your wishing he or she were removed; then it manifests itself in your seeking ways to harm that person in word or action. Beware of letting jealousy get a foothold in your life.

The very next day, in fact, a tormenting spirit from God overwhelmed Saul, and he began to rave like a madman. David began to play the harp, as he did whenever this happened. But Saul, who had a spear in his hand, suddenly hurled it at David, intending to pin him to the wall. But David jumped aside and escaped. This happened another time, too, for Saul was afraid of him, and he was jealous because the Lord had left him and was now with David. Saul tried to kill David

because he was jealous of David's popularity, yet David continued to protect and comfort Saul. Perhaps people have been jealous of you and have even attacked you in some way. They may be intimidated by your strengths, which make them conscious of their own shortcomings. It would be natural to strike back or to avoid them. A better response is to befriend them (Matthew 5:43-44) and to ask God for the strength to continue to love them, as David kept on loving Saul.

Finally, Saul banned him from his presence and appointed him commander over only a thousand men, but David faithfully led his troops into battle. David continued to succeed in everything he did, for the Lord was with him. When Saul recognized this, he became even more afraid of him. [16] But all Israel and Judah loved David because he was so successful at leading his troops into battle.

One day Saul said to David, "I am ready to give you my older daughter, Merab, as your wife. But first you must prove yourself to be a real warrior by fighting the Lord's battles." For Saul thought to himself, "I'll send him out against the Philistines and let them kill him rather than doing it myself." Who am I, and what is my family in Israel that I should be the king's son-in-law?" David exclaimed. "My father's family is nothing!"

While Saul's popularity made him proud and arrogant, David remained humble (1st Samuel 18:23), even when the entire nation praised him. Although David succeeded in almost everything he tried and became famous throughout the land, he refused to use his popular support to his advantage against Saul. Don't allow popularity to twist your perception of your own importance. It's comparatively easy to be humble when you're not on center stage, but how will you react to praise and honor?

So when the time came for the wedding, Saul gave Merab in marriage to Adriel, a man from Meholah. In the meantime, Saul's daughter Michal had fallen in love with David, and Saul was delighted when he heard about it. "Here's another chance to see him killed by the Philistines!" Saul said to himself. But to David he said, "I have a way for you to become my son-in-law after all!"

Then Saul told his men to say confidentially to David, "The king really likes you, and so do we. Why don't you accept the king's offer and become his son-in-law?" When Saul's men said these things to David, he replied, "How can a poor man from a humble family afford the bride price for the daughter of a king?"

When Saul's men reported this back to the king, he told them, "Tell David that all I want for the bride price is one hundred Philistine foreskins! Vengeance on my enemies is all I really want." But what Saul had in mind was that David would be killed in the fight.

David was delighted to accept the offer. So before the time limit expired, he and his men went out and killed two hundred Philistines and presented all their foreskins to the king. So Saul gave Michal to David to be his wife. When the king realized how much the Lord was with David and how much Michal loved him, he became even more afraid of him, and he remained David's enemy for the rest of his life. Whenever the Philistine army attacked, David was more successful against them than all the rest of Saul's officers. David's name was famous throughout the land.

1st Samuel

Chapter 18

Saul now urged his servants and his son Jonathan to assassinate David. But Jonathan, because of his close friendship with David, told him what his father was planning. "Tomorrow morning," he warned him, "you must find a hiding place out in the fields.

Is it ever right to disobey your father, as Jonathan did here? It is clearly a principle of Scripture that when a father instructs a son to break God's laws, the son should obey God rather than man. This principle assumes that the son is old enough to be accountable and to see through any deception. A son's role is to be respectful, helpful, and obedient to his father (Ephes. 6:1-3), but not to follow commands or advice that violate God's laws.

"I'll ask my father to go out there with me, and I'll talk to him about you. Then I'll tell you everything I can find out." The next morning Jonathan spoke with his father about David, saying many good things about him. "Please don't sin against David," Jonathan pleaded. "He's never done anything to harm you. He has always helped you in any way he could. Have you forgotten about the time he risked his life to kill the Philistine giant and how the Lord brought a great victory to Israel as a result? You were certainly happy about it then. Why should you murder an innocent man like David? There is no reason for it at all!"

So Saul listened to Jonathan and vowed, "As surely as the Lord lives, David will not be killed." Afterward Jonathan called David and told him what had happened. Then he took David to see Saul, and everything was as it had been before. War broke out shortly after that, and David led his troops against the Philistines. He attacked them with such fury that they all ran away. But one day as Saul was sitting at home, the tormenting spirit from the Lord suddenly came upon him again. As David played his harp for the king, Saul hurled his spear at David in an attempt to kill him. But David dodged out of the way and escaped into the night, leaving the spear stuck in the wall.

Then Saul sent troops to watch David's house. They were told to kill David when he came out the next morning. But Michal, David's wife, warned him, "If you don't get away tonight, you will be dead by morning." So she helped him climb out through a window, and he escaped. Then she took an idol and put it in his bed, covered it with blankets, and put a cushion of goat's hair at its head. When the troops came to arrest David, she told them he was sick and couldn't get out of bed.

"Then bring him to me in his bed," Saul ordered, "so I can kill him as he lies there!" And he sent them back to David's house. But when they came to carry David out, they discovered that it was only an idol in the bed with a cushion of goat's hair at its head.

"Why have you tricked me and let my enemy escape?" Saul demanded of Michal. "I had to," Michal replied. "He threatened to kill me if I didn't help him." So David got away and went to Ramah to see Samuel, and he told him all that Saul had done to him. Then Samuel took David

with him to live at Naioth. When the report reached Saul that David was at Naioth in Ramah, he sent troops to capture him. But when they arrived and saw Samuel and the other prophets prophesying, the Spirit of God came upon Saul's men, and they also began to prophesy. When Saul heard what had happened, he sent other troops, but they, too, prophesied! The same thing happened a third time! Finally, Saul himself went to Ramah and arrived at the great well in Secu. "Where are Samuel and David?" he demanded.

"They are at Naioth in Ramah," someone told him. But on the way to Naioth the Spirit of God came upon Saul, and he, too, began to prophesy! He tore off his clothes and lay on the ground all day and all night, prophesying in the presence of Samuel. The people who were watching exclaimed, "What? Is Saul a prophet, too?"

This was the second time that Saul surprised everyone by joining a group of prophets and prophesying. The first time (1st Samuel 10) happened right after he was anointed king and did not want to accept the responsibility. This time Saul was consumed with jealousy over David's growing popularity, but the Spirit of God immobilized him so he was unable to harm David. In both cases, Saul spoke God's words (he "prophesied"), although he was far from thinking God's thoughts.

1st Samuel Chapter 20

David now fled from Naioth in Ramah and found Jonathan. "What have I done?" he exclaimed. "What is my crime? How have I offended your father that he is so determined to kill me?" "That's not true!" Jonathan protested. "I'm sure he's not planning any such thing, for he always tells me everything he's going to do, even the little things. I know he would not hide something like this from me. It just isn't so!"

Then David took an oath before Jonathan and said, "Your father knows perfectly well about our friendship, so he has said to himself, 'I won't tell Jonathan—why should I hurt him?' But I swear to you that I am only a step away from death! I swear it by the Lord and by your own soul!" "Tell me what I can do!" Jonathan exclaimed. David replied, "Tomorrow we celebrate the new moon festival. I've always eaten with your father on this occasion, but tomorrow I'll hide in the field and stay there until the evening of the third day."

At the beginning of each month, the Israelites gathered to celebrate the New Moon festival. While this was mainly a time to be enjoyed, it was also a way to dedicate the next month to God. Other nations had celebrations during the full moon and worshiped the moon itself. The Israelites, however, celebrated their festival at the time of the new moon, when the moon was not visible in the sky. This was an added precaution against false worship. Nothing in the creation is to be worshiped—only the Creator.

If your father asks where I am, tell him I asked permission to go home to Bethlehem for an annual family sacrifice. [7] If he says, 'Fine!' then you will know all is well. But if he is angry and loses his temper, then you will know he was planning to kill me. [8] Show me this kindness as my sworn friend—for we made a covenant together before the Lord—or kill me yourself if I have sinned against your father. But please don't betray me to him!"

"Never!" Jonathan exclaimed. "You know that if I had the slightest notion my father was planning to kill you, I would tell you at once." Then David asked, "How will I know whether or not your father is angry?" "Come out to the field with me," Jonathan replied. And they went out there together. Then Jonathan told David, "I promise by the Lord, the God of Israel, that by this time tomorrow, or the next day at the latest, I will talk to my father and let you know at once how he feels about you. If he speaks favorably about you, I will let you know.

But if he is angry and wants you killed, may the Lord kill me if I don't warn you so you can escape and live. May the Lord be with you as he used to be with my father. And may you treat me with the faithful love of the Lord as long as I live. But if I die, treat my family with this faithful love, even when the Lord destroys all your enemies."

Jonathan asked David to keep a promise to treat his children kindly in the future. Years later David took great pains to fulfill this promise: he invited Jonathan's son Mephibosheth into his

palace to live (2 Samuel 9).

So Jonathan made a covenant with David, saying, "May the Lord destroy all your enemies!" And Jonathan made David reaffirm his vow of friendship again, for Jonathan loved David as much as he loved himself.

Then Jonathan said, "Tomorrow we celebrate the new moon festival. You will be missed when your place at the table is empty. The day after tomorrow, toward evening, go to the place where you hid before, and wait there by the stone pile. I will come out and shoot three arrows to the side of the stone pile as though I were shooting at a target. Then I will send a boy to bring the arrows back. If you hear me tell him, 'They're on this side,' then you will know, as surely as the Lord lives, that all is well, and there is no trouble. But if I tell him, 'Go farther—the arrows are still ahead of you,' then it will mean that you must leave immediately, for the Lord is sending you away. And may the Lord make us keep our promises to each other, for he has witnessed them."

So David hid himself in the field, and when the new moon festival began, the king sat down to eat. He sat at his usual place against the wall, with Jonathan sitting opposite him and Abner beside him. But David's place was empty. Saul didn't say anything about it that day, for he said to himself, "Something must have made David ceremonially unclean. Yes, that must be why he's not here."

Because the New Moon festival involved making a sacrifice to God (Numbers 28:11-15), those attending the feast had to be ceremonially clean according to God's laws (Exodus 19:10; Leviticus 15; Numbers 19:11-22; also see the note on Joshua 3:5). This cleansing involved washing the body and clothes before approaching God to offer a sacrifice. The outward cleansing was a symbol of the inward desire for a purified heart and right relationship with God. Today our hearts are purified by faith in God through the death of Jesus Christ on our behalf (Hebrews 10:10, 22) and by reading and heeding God's Word (John 17:17).

But when David's place was empty again the next day, Saul asked Jonathan, "Why hasn't the son of Jesse been here for dinner either yesterday or today?" Jonathan replied, "David earnestly asked me if he could go to Bethlehem. He wanted to take part in a family sacrifice. His brother demanded that he be there, so I told him he could go. That's why he isn't here."

Saul boiled with rage at Jonathan. "You stupid son of a whore!" he swore at him. "Do you think I don't know that you want David to be king in your place, shaming yourself and your mother? As long as that son of Jesse is alive, you'll never be king. Now go and get him so I can kill him!" "But what has he done?" Jonathan demanded. "Why should he be put to death?"

Saul was still trying to secure his throne for future generations even though he had already been told his dynasty would end with him (1st Samuel 13:13-14). Even worse, he was trying to do this by sinful human means, because he knew he would get no help from God. Jonathan could have made a move to become the next king by killing his rival, but he bypassed this opportunity because of his love for both God and David (1st Samuel 23:16-18).

Then Saul hurled his spear at Jonathan, intending to kill him. So at last Jonathan realized that his father was really determined to kill David. Jonathan left the table in fierce anger and refused to eat all that day, for he was crushed by his father's shameful behavior toward David.

The next morning, as agreed, Jonathan went out into the field and took a young boy with him to gather his arrows. "Start running," he told the boy, "so you can find the arrows as I shoot them." So the boy ran, and Jonathan shot an arrow beyond him. When the boy had almost reached the arrow, Jonathan shouted, "The arrow is still ahead of you. Hurry, hurry, don't wait." So the boy quickly gathered up the arrows and ran back to his master. He, of course, didn't understand what Jonathan meant; only Jonathan and David knew.

Then Jonathan gave his bow and arrows to the boy and told him to take them back to the city. As soon as the boy was gone, David came out from where he had been hiding near the stone pile. Then David bowed to Jonathan with his face to the ground. Both of them were in tears as they embraced each other and said good-bye, especially David. At last Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, for we have made a pact in the Lord's name. We have entrusted each other and each other's children into the Lord's hands forever." Then David left, and Jonathan returned to the city.

1st Samuel

Chapter 21

David went to the city of Nob to see Ahimelech the priest. Ahimelech trembled when he saw him. "Why are you alone?" he asked. "Why is no one with you?"

This is the first time Ahimelech is mentioned. Either he was the Ahijah mentioned in 1st Samuel 14:3, 18, or, more likely, he was Ahijah's successor. In either case, Ahimelech had to go against the law to give the consecrated bread to David because the bread was supposed to be given only to the priests (Leviticus 24:5-9). But Ahimelech put David's need and life ahead of religious ceremony and fed him the consecrated food. This upheld a higher law of love (Leviticus 19:18). Centuries later, Jesus would refer to this incident to show that God's laws should not be applied without compassion. To do good and to save life is God's greater law (Matthew 12:1-8; Luke 6:1-5)

"The king has sent me on a private matter," David said. "He told me not to tell anyone why I am here. I have told my men where to meet me later.

David lied to protect himself from Saul (1st Samuel 21:10). Some excuse this lie because a war was going on, and it is the duty of a good soldier to deceive the enemy. But nowhere is David's lie condoned. In fact, the opposite is true because his lie led to the death of 85 priests (1st Samuel 22:9-19). David's small lie seemed harmless enough, but it led to tragedy. The Bible makes it very clear that lying is wrong (Leviticus 19:11). Lying, like every other sin, is serious in God's sight and may lead to all sorts of harmful consequences. Don't minimize or categorize sins. All sins must be avoided whether or not we can foresee their potential consequences

Now, what is there to eat? Give me five loaves of bread or anything else you have."

"We don't have any regular bread," the priest replied. "But there is the holy bread, which I guess you can have if your young men have not slept with any women recently." "Don't worry," David replied. "I never allow my men to be with women when they are on a campaign. And since they stay clean even on ordinary trips, how much more on this one!"

The men's bodies were ceremonially clean because they had not had sexual intercourse during this journey. Therefore, the priest allowed them to eat the consecrated bread.

So, since there was no other food available, the priest gave him the holy bread—the Bread of the Presence that was placed before the Lord in the Tabernacle. It had just been replaced that day with fresh bread.

Once a week on the Sabbath, a priest entered the Holy Place in the tabernacle and placed 12 freshly baked loaves of bread on a small table. This bread, called the bread of the Presence, symbolized God's presence among his people as well as his loving care that met their physical needs. The bread that was replaced was to be eaten only by the priests on duty.

Now Doeg the Edomite, Saul's chief herdsman, was there that day for ceremonial purification.

David asked Ahimelech, "Do you have a spear or sword? The king's business was so urgent that I didn't even have time to grab a weapon!" "I only have the sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the valley of Elah," the priest replied. "It is wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. Take that if you want it, for there is nothing else here." "There is nothing like it!" David replied. "Give it to me!"

An ephod was a vest worn by the priest (see the note on 1st Samuel 2:18 for a more detailed explanation). David didn't know Goliath's sword was there probably because David was a young man when he killed the giant and he had spent much of his time at home.

So David escaped from Saul and went to King Achish of Gath. [11] But Achish's officers weren't happy about his being there. "Isn't this David, the king of the land?" they asked. "Isn't he the one the people honor with dances, singing, 'Saul has killed his thousands, and David his ten thousands'?"

David heard these comments and was afraid of what King Achish might do to him. So he pretended to be insane, scratching on doors and drooling down his beard. Finally, King Achish said to his men, "Must you bring me a madman? We already have enough of them around here! Why should I let someone like this be my guest?"

Gath was one of the five major Philistine cities. Why did the Philistines accept their archenemy, David, into their camp? The Philistines may have been initially happy to accept a defector who was a high military leader. Any enemy of Saul would have been a friend of theirs. They could not have known that David had been anointed Israel's next king (1st Samuel 16:13). Soon, however, the Philistines became nervous about David's presence. After all, he had slain thousands of their own people (1st Samuel 18:7). David then protected himself by acting insane because it was the custom not to harm mentally unstable people.

1st Samuel

Chapter 22

So David left Gath and escaped to the cave of Adullam. Soon his brothers and other relatives joined him there. Then others began coming—men who were in trouble or in debt or who were just discontented—until David was the leader of about four hundred men.

Gath was one of the five major Philistine cities. Why did the Philistines accept their archenemy, David, into their camp? The Philistines may have been initially happy to accept a defector who was a high military leader. Any enemy of Saul would have been a friend of theirs. They could not have known that David had been anointed Israel's next king (1st Samuel 16:13). Soon, however, the Philistines became nervous about David's presence. After all, he had slain thousands of their own people (1st Samuel 18:7). David then protected himself by acting insane because it was the custom not to harm mentally unstable people.

Later David went to Mizpeh in Moab, where he asked the king, "Would you let my father and mother live here under royal protection until I know what God is going to do for me?" The king agreed, and David's parents stayed in Moab while David was living in his stronghold. One day the prophet Gad told David, "Leave the stronghold and return to the land of Judah." So David went to the forest of Hereth. The news of his arrival in Judah soon reached Saul. At the time, the king was sitting beneath a tamarisk tree on the hill at Gibeah, holding his spear and surrounded by his officers.

"Listen here, you men of Benjamin!" Saul shouted when he heard the news. "Has David promised you fields and vineyards? Has he promised to make you commanders in his army? Is that why you have conspired against me? For not one of you has ever told me that my own son is on David's side. You're not even sorry for me. Think of it! My own son—encouraging David to try and kill me!"

Apparently Saul's key officers were from the tribe of Benjamin, just as he was. David was from the neighboring tribe of Judah. Saul was appealing to tribal loyalty to maintain his hold on the throne.

Then Doeg the Edomite, who was standing there with Saul's men, spoke up. "When I was at Nob," he said, "I saw David talking to Ahimelech the priest. Ahimelech consulted the Lord to find out what David should do. Then he gave David food and the sword of Goliath the Philistine."

King Saul immediately sent for Ahimelech and all his family, who served as priests at Nob. When they arrived, Saul shouted at him, "Listen to me, you son of Ahitub!" "What is it, my king?" Ahimelech asked. "Why have you and David conspired against me?" Saul demanded. "Why did you give him food and a sword? Why have you inquired of God for him? Why did you encourage him to revolt against me and to come here and attack me?"

"But sir," Ahimelech replied, "is there anyone among all your servants who is as faithful as David, your son-in-law? Why, he is the captain of your bodyguard and a highly honored member of your household! This was certainly not the first time I had consulted God for him! Please don't accuse me and my family in this matter, for I knew nothing of any plot against you."

You will surely die, Ahimelech, along with your entire family!" the king shouted. [17] And he ordered his bodyguards, "Kill these priests of the Lord, for they are allies and conspirators with David! They knew he was running away from me, but they didn't tell me!" But Saul's men refused to kill the Lord's priests.

Then the king said to Doeg, "You do it." So Doeg turned on them and killed them, eighty-five priests in all, all still wearing their priestly tunics.

Why would Saul have his own priests killed? Saul suspected a conspiracy among Jonathan, David, and the priests. His suspicion came from Doeg's report of seeing David talking to Ahimelech, the high priest, and receiving food and a weapon from him (1st Samuel 22:9-10). Saul's action showed his mental and emotional instability and how far he had strayed from God. Then he went to Nob, the city of the priests, and killed the priests' families—men and women, children and babies, and all the cattle, donkeys, and sheep.

By destroying everything in Nob, Saul was placing the city under the ban (declaring it to be utterly destroyed) described in Deut. 13:12-17, which was supposed to be used only in cases of idolatry and rebellion against God. But it was Saul, not the priests, who had rebelled against God.

Why did God allow 85 innocent priests to be killed? Their deaths served to dramatize to the nation how a king could become an evil tyrant. Where were Saul's advisers? Where were the elders of Israel? Sometimes God allows evil to develop to teach us not to let evil systems flourish. Serving God is not a ticket to wealth, success, or health. God does not promise to protect good people from evil in this world, but he does promise that ultimately all evil will be abolished. Those who have remained faithful through their trials will experience great rewards in the age to come (Matthew 5:11-12; Rev. 21:1-7; Rev. 22:1-21)

Only Abiathar, one of the sons of Ahimelech, escaped and fled to David. [21] When he told David that Saul had killed the priests of the Lord, [22] David exclaimed, "I knew it! When I saw Doeg there that day, I knew he would tell Saul. Now I have caused the death of all your father's family. [23] Stay here with me, and I will protect you with my own life, for the same person wants to kill us both."

1st Samuel

Chapter 23

Through the Urim and Thummim that Abiathar the priest brought (1st Samuel 23:6), David sought the Lord's guidance *before* he took action. He listened to God's directions and then proceeded accordingly. Rather than trying to find God's will *after* the fact or having to ask God to undo the results of our hasty decisions, we should take time to discern God's will beforehand. We can hear him speak through the counsel of others, his Word, and the leading of his Spirit in our hearts, as well as through circumstances.

One day news came to David that the Philistines were at Keilah stealing grain from the threshing floors. Threshing floors were open, circular areas where the grain kernels were separated from their husks. (In order to separate the grain from the husk, farmers would toss their grain into the air. The wind would blow the husks away, leaving only the grain. This process is called *winnowing*.) By looting the threshing floors, the Philistines were robbing Keilah's citizens of all their food supplies. (For more on threshing, see the note on •Ruth 3:2.)

David asked the Lord, "Should I go and attack them?" "Yes, go and save Keilah," the Lord told him. But David's men said, "We're afraid even here in Judah. We certainly don't want to go to Keilah to fight the whole Philistine army!" So David asked the Lord again, and again the Lord replied, "Go down to Keilah, for I will help you conquer the Philistines."

So David and his men went to Keilah. They slaughtered the Philistines and took all their livestock and rescued the people of Keilah. Abiathar the priest went to Keilah with David, taking the ephod with him to get answers for David from the Lord.

An ephod was a sleeveless linen vest worn by priests. The high priest's ephod was brightly colored and had a breastplate with 12 gemstones representing each tribe. The Urim and Thummim were kept in a pouch of the high priest's ephod. (See the note on •1st Samuel 2:18 for a more detailed explanation of the ephod.)

Saul soon learned that David was at Keilah. "Good!" he exclaimed. "We've got him now! God has handed him over to me, for he has trapped himself in a walled city!"

When Saul heard that David was trapped in a walled town (one with gates and bars), he thought God was putting David at his mercy. Saul wanted to kill David so badly that he would have interpreted any sign as God's approval to move ahead with his plan. Had Saul known God better, he would have known what God wanted and would not have misread the situation as God's approval for murder.

Not every opportunity is sent from God. We may want something so much that we assume any opportunity to obtain it is of divine origin. As we see from Saul's case, however, this may not be true. An opportunity to do something against God's will can never be from God because God does not tempt us. When opportunities come your way, double-check your motives. Make sure you are following God's desires, and not just your own.

So Saul mobilized his entire army to march to Keilah and attack David and his men. [9] But David learned of Saul's plan and told Abiathar the priest to bring the ephod and ask the Lord what he should do. [10] And David prayed, "O Lord, God of Israel, I have heard that Saul is planning to come and destroy Keilah because I am here. [11] Will the men of Keilah surrender me to him? And will Saul actually come as I have heard? O Lord, God of Israel, please tell me."

And the Lord said, "He will come." Again David asked, "Will these men of Keilah really betray me and my men to Saul?" And the Lord replied, "Yes, they will betray you."

So David and his men—about six hundred of them now—left Keilah and began roaming the countryside. Word soon reached Saul that David had escaped, so he didn't go to Keilah after all. David now stayed in the strongholds of the wilderness and in the hill country of Ziph. Saul hunted him day after day, but God didn't let him be found.

One day near Horesh, David received the news that Saul was on the way to Ziph to search for him and kill him. Jonathan went to find David and encouraged him to stay strong in his faith in God. "Don't be afraid," Jonathan reassured him. "My father will never find you! You are going to be the king of Israel, and I will be next to you, as my father is well aware." So the two of them renewed their covenant of friendship before the Lord. Then Jonathan returned home, while David stayed at Horesh.

This may have been the last time David and Jonathan were together. As true friends they were more than just companions who enjoyed each other's company. They encouraged each other's faith in God and trusted each other with their deepest thoughts and closest confidences. These are the marks of true friendship.

But now the men of Ziph went to Saul in Gibeah and betrayed David to him. "We know where David is hiding," they said. "He is in the strongholds of Horesh on the hill of Hakilah, which is in the southern part of Jeshimon. Come down whenever you're ready, O king, and we will catch him and hand him over to you!"

"The Lord bless you," Saul said. "At last someone is concerned about me! Go and check again to be sure of where he is staying and who has seen him there, for I know that he is very crafty. Discover his hiding places, and come back with a more definite report. Then I'll go with you. And if he is in the area at all, I'll track him down, even if I have to search every hiding place in Judah!"

So the men of Ziph returned home ahead of Saul. Meanwhile, David and his men had moved into the wilderness of Maon in the Arabah Valley south of Jeshimon. When David heard that Saul and his men were searching for him, he went even farther into the wilderness to the great rock, and he remained there in the wilderness of Maon. But Saul kept after him. He and David were now on opposite sides of a mountain. Just as Saul and his men began to close in on David and his men, an urgent message reached Saul that the Philistines were raiding Israel again. So Saul quit the chase and returned to fight the Philistines. Ever since that time, the place where David was camped has been called the Rock of Escape. David then went to live in the strongholds of Engedi.

1st Samuel

Chapter 24

After Saul returned from fighting the Philistines, he was told that David had gone into the wilderness of En-gedi. So Saul chose three thousand special troops from throughout Israel and went to search for David and his men near the rocks of the wild goats. At the place where the road passes some sheepfolds, Saul went into a cave to relieve himself. But as it happened, David and his men were hiding in that very cave!

David and his 600 men found the Desert of En Gedi a good place to hide because of the many caves in the area. These caves were used by local people for housing and as tombs. For David's men they were places of refuge. These caves can still be seen today. Some are large enough to hold thousands of people.

Now's your opportunity!" David's men whispered to him. "Today is the day the Lord was talking about when he said, 'I will certainly put Saul into your power, to do with as you wish.' " Then David crept forward and cut off a piece of Saul's robe.

Scripture does not record that God made any such statement to David or his men. The men were probably offering their own interpretation of some previous event such as David's anointing (1st Samuel 16:13) or Jonathan's prediction that David would become king (1st Samuel 23:17). When David's men saw Saul entering their cave, they wrongly assumed that this was an indication from God that they should act.

But then David's conscience began bothering him because he had cut Saul's robe. "The Lord knows I shouldn't have done it," he said to his men. "It is a serious thing to attack the Lord's anointed one, for the Lord himself has chosen him."

David had great respect for Saul, in spite of the fact that Saul was trying to kill him. Although Saul was sinning and rebelling against God, David still respected the position he held as God's anointed king. David knew he would one day be king, and he also knew it was not right to strike down the man God had placed on the throne. If he assassinated Saul, he would be setting a precedent for his own opponents to remove him some day.

Romans 13:1-7 teaches that God has placed the government and its leaders in power. We may not know why, but, like David, we are to respect the positions and roles of those to whom God has given authority. There is one exception, however. Because God is our highest authority, we should not allow a leader to pressure us to violate God's law.

So David sharply rebuked his men and did not let them kill Saul. After Saul had left the cave and gone on his way, [8] David came out and shouted after him, "My lord the king!" And when Saul looked around, David bowed low before him.

Then he shouted to Saul, "Why do you listen to the people who say I am trying to harm you? This very day you can see with your own eyes it isn't true. For the Lord placed you at my mercy back there in the cave, and some of my men told me to kill you, but I spared you. For I said, 'I

will never harm him—he is the Lord's anointed one.' Look, my father, at what I have in my hand. It is a piece of your robe! I cut it off, but I didn't kill you. This proves that I am not trying to harm you and that I have not sinned against you, even though you have been hunting for me to kill me. The Lord will decide between us. Perhaps the Lord will punish you for what you are trying to do to me, but I will never harm you.

As that old proverb says, 'From evil people come evil deeds.' So you can be sure I will never harm you. Who is the king of Israel trying to catch anyway? Should he spend his time chasing one who is as worthless as a dead dog or a flea? May the Lord judge which of us is right and punish the guilty one. He is my advocate, and he will rescue me from your power!"

Saul called back, "Is that really you, my son David?" Then he began to cry. and he said to David, "You are a better man than I am, for you have repaid me good for evil. Yes, you have been wonderfully kind to me today, for when the Lord put me in a place where you could have killed me, you didn't do it. Who else would let his enemy get away when he had him in his power? May the Lord reward you well for the kindness you have shown me today.

The means we use to accomplish a goal are just as important as the goal we are trying to accomplish. David's goal was to become king, so his men urged him to kill Saul when he had the chance. David's refusal was not an example of cowardice but of courage—the courage to stand against the group and do what he knew was right. Don't compromise your moral standards by giving in to group pressure or taking the easy way out

And now I realize that you are surely going to be king, and Israel will flourish under your rule. Now, swear to me by the Lord that when that happens you will not kill my family and destroy my line of descendants!" So David promised, and Saul went home. But David and his men went back to their stronghold.

David kept his promise—he never took revenge on Saul's family or descendants. Most of Saul's sons were killed later, however, by the Philistines (1st Samuel 31:2) and the Gibeonites (2 Samuel 21:1-14). David had promised to be kind to the descendants of Saul's son Jonathan (1st Samuel 20:14-15), and he kept this promise when he invited Mephibosheth to live in his palace (2 Samuel 9).

I Samuel

Chapter 25

Now Samuel died, and all Israel gathered for his funeral. They buried him near his home at Ramah. Then David moved down to the wilderness of Maon.

Saul was king, but Samuel had been the nation's spiritual leader. As a young boy and an older man, Samuel was always careful to listen to (1st Samuel 3:10; 1st Samuel 9:14-17) and obey (1st Samuel 3:21; 1st Samuel 10:1-2) the Lord. With Samuel gone, Israel would be without this spiritual leadership until David became king. (For more on Samuel, read his Profile.)

There was a wealthy man from Maon who owned property near the village of Carmel. He had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats, and it was sheep-shearing time. This man's name was Nabal, and his wife, Abigail, was a sensible and beautiful woman. But Nabal, a descendant of Caleb, was mean and dishonest in all his dealings.

When David heard that Nabal was shearing his sheep, he sent ten of his young men to Carmel. He told them to deliver this message: "Peace and prosperity to you, your family, and everything you own! I am told that you are shearing your sheep and goats. While your shepherds stayed among us near Carmel, we never harmed them, and nothing was ever stolen from them. Ask your own servants, and they will tell you this is true. So would you please be kind to us, since we have come at a time of celebration? Please give us any provisions you might have on hand." David's young men gave this message to Nabal and waited for his reply.

"Who is this fellow David?" Nabal sneered. "Who does this son of Jesse think he is? There are lots of servants these days who run away from their masters. Should I take my bread and water and the meat I've slaughtered for my shearers and give it to a band of outlaws who come from who knows where?"

Nabal rudely refused David's request to feed his 600 men. If we sympathize with Nabal, it is because customs are so different today. First, simple hospitality demanded that travelers—any number of them—be fed. Nabal was very rich and could have easily afforded to meet David's request. Second, David wasn't asking for a handout. He and his men had been protecting Nabal's work force, and part of Nabal's prosperity was due to David's vigilance. We should be generous with those who protect us and help us prosper, even if we are not obligated to do so by law or custom.

So David's messengers returned and told him what Nabal had said. "Get your swords!" was David's reply as he strapped on his own. Four hundred men started off with David, and two hundred remained behind to guard their equipment.

Meanwhile, one of Nabal's servants went to Abigail and told her, "David sent men from the wilderness to talk to our master, and he insulted them. But David's men were very good to us, and we never suffered any harm from them. Nothing was stolen from us the whole time they were with us. In fact, day and night they were like a wall of protection to us and the sheep.

You'd better think fast, for there is going to be trouble for our master and his whole family. He's so ill-tempered that no one can even talk to him!"

Abigail lost no time. She quickly gathered two hundred loaves of bread, two skins of wine, five dressed sheep, nearly a bushel of roasted grain, one hundred raisin cakes, and two hundred fig cakes. She packed them on donkeys and said to her servants, "Go on ahead. I will follow you shortly." But she didn't tell her husband what she was doing.

As she was riding her donkey into a mountain ravine, she saw David and his men coming toward her. David had just been saying, "A lot of good it did to help this fellow. We protected his flocks in the wilderness, and nothing he owned was lost or stolen. But he has repaid me evil for good. May God deal with me severely if even one man of his household is still alive tomorrow morning!"

When Abigail saw David, she quickly got off her donkey and bowed low before him. She fell at his feet and said, "I accept all blame in this matter, my lord. Please listen to what I have to say. I know Nabal is a wicked and ill-tempered man; please don't pay any attention to him. He is a fool, just as his name suggests. But I never even saw the messengers you sent.

David was in no mood to listen when he set out for Nabal's property (1st Samuel 25:13, 22). Nevertheless, he stopped to hear what Abigail had to say. If he had ignored her, he would have been guilty of taking vengeance into his own hands. No matter how right we think we are, we must always be careful to stop and listen to others. The extra time and effort can save us pain and trouble in the long run.

"Now, my lord, as surely as the Lord lives and you yourself live, since the Lord has kept you from murdering and taking vengeance into your own hands, let all your enemies be as cursed as Nabal is. And here is a present I have brought to you and your young men. Please forgive me if I have offended in any way. The Lord will surely reward you with a lasting dynasty, for you are fighting the Lord's battles. And you have not done wrong throughout your entire life.

"Even when you are chased by those who seek your life, you are safe in the care of the Lord your God, secure in his treasure pouch! But the lives of your enemies will disappear like stones shot from a sling! When the Lord has done all he promised and has made you leader of Israel, don't let this be a blemish on your record. Then you won't have to carry on your conscience the staggering burden of needless bloodshed and vengeance. And when the Lord has done these great things for you, please remember me!"

David replied to Abigail, "Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, who has sent you to meet me today! Thank God for your good sense! Bless you for keeping me from murdering the man and carrying out vengeance with my own hands. For I swear by the Lord, the God of Israel, who has kept me from hurting you, that if you had not hurried out to meet me, not one of Nabal's men would be alive tomorrow morning."

Then David accepted her gifts and told her, "Return home in peace. We will not kill your husband." When Abigail arrived home, she found that Nabal had thrown a big party and was

celebrating like a king. He was very drunk, so she didn't tell him anything about her meeting with David until the next morning.

Because Nabal was drunk, Abigail waited until morning to tell him what she had done. Abigail knew that Nabal, in his drunkenness, may not have understood her or may have reacted foolishly. When discussing difficult matters with people, especially family members, timing is everything. Ask God for wisdom to know the best time for confrontation and for bringing up touchy subjects.

The next morning when he was sober, she told him what had happened. As a result he had a stroke, and he lay on his bed paralyzed. About ten days later, the Lord struck him and he died.

When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, "Praise the Lord, who has paid back Nabal and kept me from doing it myself. Nabal has received the punishment for his sin." Then David wasted no time in sending messengers to Abigail to ask her to become his wife. When the messengers arrived at Carmel, they told Abigail, "David has sent us to ask if you will marry him."

She bowed low to the ground and responded, "Yes, I am even willing to become a slave to David's servants!" Quickly getting ready, she took along five of her servant girls as attendants, mounted her donkey, and went with David's messengers. And so she became his wife. David also married Ahinoam from Jezreel, making both of them his wives. Saul, meanwhile, had given his daughter Michal, David's wife, to a man from Gallim named Palti son of Laish.

1st Samuel

Chapter 26

Now some messengers from Ziph came back to Saul at Gibeah to tell him, "David is hiding on the hill of Hakilah, which overlooks Jeshimon." So Saul took three thousand of his best troops and went to hunt him down in the wilderness of Ziph. Saul camped along the road beside the hill of Hakilah, near Jeshimon, where David was hiding. But David knew of Saul's arrival, so he sent out spies to watch his movements. David slipped over to Saul's camp one night to look around. Saul and his general, Abner son of Ner, were sleeping inside a ring formed by the slumbering warriors. "Will anyone volunteer to go in there with me?" David asked Ahimelech the Hittite and Abishai son of Zeruah, Joab's brother

"I'll go with you," Abishai replied. So David and Abishai went right into Saul's camp and found him asleep, with his spear stuck in the ground beside his head. Abner and the warriors were lying asleep around him. "God has surely handed your enemy over to you this time!" Abishai whispered to David. "Let me thrust that spear through him. I'll pin him to the ground, and I won't need to strike twice!" No!" David said. "Don't kill him. For who can remain innocent after attacking the Lord's anointed one?"

Abishai showed great courage when he volunteered to go into Saul's camp with David. In the heat of emotion, Abishai wanted to kill Saul, but David restrained him. Although Abishai was only trying to protect David, his leader, David could not hurt Saul because of his respect for Saul's authority and position as God's anointed king. Abishai may have disagreed with David, but he also respected the one in authority over him. Eventually he became the greatest warrior in David's army (2 Samuel 23:18-19).

The strongest moral decisions are the ones we make before temptation strikes. David was determined to follow God and this carried over into his decision not to murder God's anointed king, Saul, even when his men and the circumstances seemed to make it a feasible option. Who would you have been like in such a situation—David or David's men? To be like David and follow God, we must realize that we can't do wrong in order to execute justice. Even when our closest friends counsel us to do something that seems right, we must always put God's commands first.

Why did David refuse to kill Saul? God had placed Saul in power and had not yet removed him. David did not want to run ahead of God's timing. We are in similar situations when we have leaders in church or government who are unfaithful or incompetent. It may be easy for us to criticize or move against a leader oblivious to God's hidden purposes and timing. Determining not to do wrong, David left Saul's destiny in God's hands. While we should not ignore sin or sit back and allow evil leaders to carry on their wickedness, neither should we take actions that are against God's laws. We should work for righteousness while trusting God.

Surely the Lord will strike Saul down someday, or he will die in battle or of old age. [11] But the Lord forbid that I should kill the one he has anointed! But I'll tell you what—we'll take his spear and his jug of water and then get out of here!"

So David took the spear and jug of water that were near Saul's head. Then he and Abishai got away without anyone seeing them or even waking up, because the Lord had put Saul's men into a deep sleep. David climbed the hill opposite the camp until he was at a safe distance. Then he shouted down to Abner and Saul, "Wake up, Abner!"

"Who is it?" Abner demanded. "Well, Abner, you're a great man, aren't you?" David taunted. "Where in all Israel is there anyone as mighty? So why haven't you guarded your master the king when someone came to kill him? This isn't good at all! I swear by the Lord that you and your men deserve to die, because you failed to protect your master, the Lord's anointed! Look around! Where are the king's spear and the jug of water that were beside his head?"

David could have killed Saul and Abner, but he would have disobeyed God and set into motion unknown consequences. Instead, he took a spear and water jug, showing that he could have killed the king, but had not done it. And he made the point that he had great respect for both God and God's anointed king. When you need to make a point, look for creative, God-honoring ways to do so. It will have a more significant impact.

Saul recognized David's voice and called out, "Is that you, my son David?" And David replied, "Yes, my lord the king. Why are you chasing me? What have I done? What is my crime? But now let my lord the king listen to his servant. If the Lord has stirred you up against me, then let him accept my offering. But if this is simply a human scheme, then may those involved be cursed by the Lord. For you have driven me from my home, so I can no longer live among the Lord's people and worship as I should. Must I die on foreign soil, far from the presence of the Lord? Why has the king of Israel come out to search for a single flea? Why does he hunt me down like a partridge on the mountains?"

Then Saul confessed, "I have sinned. Come back home, my son, and I will no longer try to harm you, for you valued my life today. I have been a fool and very, very wrong."

"Here is your spear, O king," David replied. "Let one of your young men come over and get it. The Lord gives his own reward for doing good and for being loyal, and I refused to kill you even when the Lord placed you in my power, for you are the Lord's anointed one. Now may the Lord value my life, even as I have valued yours today. May he rescue me from all my troubles."

And Saul said to David, "Blessings on you, my son David. You will do heroic deeds and be a great conqueror." Then David went away, and Saul returned home.

Saul had opportunities to kill David, but he never did. Why? First, every time David and Saul were face to face, David did something generous for Saul. The king did not want to respond to David's kindness with cruelty in front of all his men. Second, David had a large following in Israel. By killing him, Saul would risk his hold on the kingdom. Third, God had appointed David to become king of Israel and was protecting him.

1st Samuel

Chapter 27

But David kept thinking to himself, "Someday Saul is going to get me. The best thing for me to do is escape to the Philistines. Then Saul will stop hunting for me, and I will finally be safe." So David took his six hundred men and their families and went to live at Gath under the protection of King Achish. David brought his two wives along with him—Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail of Carmel, Nabal's widow.

For the second time, David sought refuge from Saul in Philistine territory (1st Samuel 21:10-15). The once-great conqueror of Philistines now had permission to live under the protection of King Achish of Gath. Previously David had acted insane in front of this king. Evidently Achish had forgotten that incident or had overlooked it in light of David's current situation. Achish certainly would have known about the split between Saul and David and would have been glad to shelter this Israelite traitor. In return, Achish would have expected military support from David and his 600 warriors. David further strengthened his position with Achish by leading Achish to believe that he was conducting raids on Israel and by pretending loyalty to the Philistine ruler.

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Word soon reached Saul that David had fled to Gath, so he stopped hunting for him.

Saul finally stopped pursuing David. His army was not strong enough to invade Philistine territory just to seek one man. Besides, the immediate threat to Saul's throne was gone while David was out of the country.

One day David said to Achish, "If it is all right with you, we would rather live in one of the country towns instead of here in the royal city." So Achish gave him the town of Ziklag (which still belongs to the kings of Judah to this day), and they lived there among the Philistines for a year and four months.

Gath was one of five principal cities in Philistia, and Achish was one of five co-rulers. David may have wanted to move out of this important city to avoid potential skirmishes or attacks upon his family. He may also have wanted to escape the close scrutiny of the Philistine officials. Achish let David move to Ziklag, where he lived until Saul's death

David and his men spent their time raiding the Geshurites, the Girzites, and the Amalekites—people who had lived near Shur, along the road to Egypt, since ancient times. David didn't leave

one person alive in the villages he attacked. He took the sheep, cattle, donkeys, camels, and clothing before returning home to see King Achish.

David probably conducted these guerrilla-style raids because these three tribes were known for their surprise attacks and cruel treatment of innocent people. These desert tribes were a danger not just to the Philistines, but especially to the Israelites, the people David would one day lead.

"Where did you make your raid today?" Achish would ask. And David would reply, "Against the south of Judah, the Jerahmeelites, and the Kenites."

No one was left alive to come to Gath and tell where he had really been. This happened again and again while he was living among the Philistines. Achish believed David and thought to himself, "By now the people of Israel must hate him bitterly. Now he will have to stay here and serve me forever!"

Was David wrong in falsely reporting his activities to Achish? No doubt David was lying, but he may have felt his strategy was justified in a time of war against a pagan enemy. David knew he would one day be Israel's king. The Philistines were still his enemies, but this was an excellent place to hide from Saul. When Achish asked David to go into battle against Israel, David agreed, once again pretending loyalty to the Philistines (1st Samuel 28:1ff). Whether he would have actually fought Saul's army we can't know, but we can be sure that his ultimate loyalty was to God and not to Achish or Saul.

1st Samuel

Chapter 28

About that time the Philistines mustered their armies for another war with Israel. King Achish told David, "You and your men will be expected to join me in battle." "Very well!" David agreed. "Now you will see for yourself what we can do. Then Achish told David, "I will make you my personal bodyguard for life."

Achish's request put David in a difficult position. To refuse to help Achish fight the Israelites would give away David's loyalty to Israel and endanger the lives of his soldiers and family. But to fight his own people would hurt the very people he loved and would soon lead. David, however, never had to solve his dilemma because God protected him. The other Philistine leaders objected to his presence in battle; thus, he did not have to fight his countrymen.

Meanwhile, Samuel had died, and all Israel had mourned for him. He was buried in Ramah, his hometown. And Saul had banned all mediums and psychics from the land of Israel.

The Philistines set up their camp at Shunem, and Saul and the armies of Israel camped at Gilboa. When Saul saw the vast Philistine army, he became frantic with fear. He asked the Lord what he should do, but the Lord refused to answer him, either by dreams or by sacred lots or by the prophets. Saul then said to his advisers, "Find a woman who is a medium, so I can go and ask her what to do."

His advisers replied, "There is a medium at Endor." So Saul disguised himself by wearing ordinary clothing instead of his royal robes. Then he went to the woman's home at night, accompanied by two of his men. "I have to talk to a man who has died," he said. "Will you call up his spirit for me?"

It was Saul who had banned all mediums and spiritists (those who consult with the dead) from Israel, but in desperation he turned to one for counsel. Although he had removed the sin of witchcraft from the land, he did not remove it from his heart. We may make a great show of denouncing sin, but if our hearts do not change, the sins will return. Knowing what is right and condemning what is wrong does not take the place of *doing* what is right.

The Urim, along with the Thummim, was used by the high priest to determine God's guidance in certain matters. (See the notes on 1st Samuel 2:18 and 1st Samuel 10:20 for further information on the use of the Urim and Thummim.)

Saul was overwhelmed at the sight of the Philistine army, and so he turned to the occult. Let life's difficulties and obstacles push you in God's direction and make you depend upon him. As we see from Saul's story, turning to anything or anyone else leads only to disaster.

God had strictly forbidden the Israelites to have anything to do with divination, sorcery, witchcraft, mediums, spiritists, or anyone who consults the dead (Deut. 18:9-14). In fact,

sorcerers were to be put to death (Exodus 22:18). Occult practices were carried on in the name of pagan gods, and people turned to the occult for answers that God would not give.

Practitioners of the occult have Satan and demons as the source of their information; God does not reveal his will to them. Instead he speaks through his own channels: the Bible, his Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

"Are you trying to get me killed?" the woman demanded. "You know that Saul has
But Saul took an oath in the name of the Lord and promised, "As surely as the Lord lives, nothing bad will happen to you for doing this."

Finally, the woman said, "Well, whose spirit do you want me to call up?" "Call up Samuel," Saul replied. When the woman saw Samuel, she screamed, "You've deceived me! You are Saul!"

Did Samuel really come back from the dead at the medium's call? The medium shrieked at the appearance of Samuel—she knew too well that the spirits she usually contacted were either contrived or satanic. Somehow Samuel's appearance revealed to her that she was dealing with a power far greater than she had known. She did not call up Samuel by trickery or by the power of Satan; God brought Samuel back to give Saul a prediction regarding his fate, a message Saul already knew. This in no way justifies efforts to contact the dead or communicate with persons or spirits from the past. God is against all such practices (Galatians 5:19-21).

"Don't be afraid!" the king told her. "What do you see?" "I see a god coming up out of the earth," she said. "What does he look like?" Saul asked. "He is an old man wrapped in a robe," she replied. Saul realized that it was Samuel, and he fell to the ground before him.

Why have you disturbed me by calling me back?" Samuel asked. "Because I am in deep trouble," Saul replied. "The Philistines are at war with us, and God has left me and won't reply by prophets or dreams. So I have called for you to tell me what to do."

God did not answer Saul's appeals because Saul had not followed God's previous directions. Sometimes people wonder why their prayers are not answered. But if they don't fulfill the responsibilities God has already given them, they should not be surprised when he does not give further guidance.

But Samuel replied, "Why ask me if the Lord has left you and has become your enemy? The Lord has done just as he said he would. He has taken the kingdom from you and given it to your rival, David. The Lord has done this because you did not obey his instructions concerning the Amalekites. What's more, the Lord will hand you and the army of Israel over to the Philistines tomorrow, and you and your sons will be here with me. The Lord will bring the entire army of Israel down in defeat."

Saul fell full length on the ground, paralyzed with fright because of Samuel's words. He was also faint with hunger, for he had eaten nothing all day and all night. When the woman saw how distraught he was, she said, "Sir, I obeyed your command at the risk of my life. Now do what I say, and let me give you something to eat so you can regain your strength for the trip back."

But Saul refused. The men who were with him also urged him to eat, so he finally yielded and got up from the ground and sat on the couch. The woman had been fattening a calf, so she hurried out and killed it. She kneaded dough and baked unleavened bread. She brought the meal to Saul and his men, and they ate it. Then they went out into the night.

1 Samuel

Chapter 29

The entire Philistine army now mobilized at Aphek, and the Israelites camped at the spring in Jezreel. As the Philistine rulers were leading out their troops in groups of one hundred and one thousand, David and his men marched at the rear with King Achish. But the Philistine commanders demanded, "What are these Hebrews doing here?" And Achish told them, "This is David, the man who ran away from King Saul of Israel. He's been with me for years, and I've never found a single fault in him since he defected to me."

But the Philistine commanders were angry. "Send him back!" they demanded. "He can't go into the battle with us. What if he turns against us? Is there any better way for him to reconcile himself with his master than by turning on us in battle?"

The other Philistine commanders knew that David was the one who, as a young man, had killed their champion, Goliath (1st Samuel 17:32-54), had killed hundreds of Philistine soldiers (1st Samuel 18:27), and was the hero of Israelite victory songs (1st Samuel 21:11). They were afraid that, in the heat of battle, David might turn against them. Although David was upset at this at first, God used the commanders' suspicion to keep him from having to fight against Saul and his countrymen.

[5] Isn't this the same David about whom the women of Israel sing in their dances, 'Saul has killed his thousands, and David his ten thousands'?" So Achish finally summoned David and his men. "I swear by the Lord," he told them, "you are some of the finest men I've ever met. I think you should go with us, but the other Philistine rulers won't hear of it. Please don't upset them, but go back quietly." "What have I done to deserve this treatment?" David demanded. "Why can't I fight the enemies of my lord, the king?"

But Achish insisted, "As far as I'm concerned, you're as perfect as an angel of God. But my commanders are afraid to have you with them in the battle. Now get up early in the morning, and leave with your men as soon as it gets light." So David headed back into the land of the Philistines, while the Philistine army went on to Jezreel.

1st Samuel

Chapter 30

Three days later, when David and his men arrived home at their town of Ziklag, they found that the Amalekites had made a raid into the Negev and had burned Ziklag to the ground. They had carried off the women and children and everyone else but without killing anyone. When David and his men saw the ruins and realized what had happened to their families, they wept until they could weep no more. David's two wives, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail, the widow of Nabal of Carmel, were among those captured. David was now in serious trouble because his men were very bitter about losing their wives and children, and they began to talk of stoning him. But David found strength in the Lord his God.

Faced with the tragedy of losing their families, David's soldiers began to turn against him and even talked about killing him. Instead of planning a rescue, they looked for someone to blame. But David found his strength in God and began looking for a solution instead of a scapegoat. When facing problems, remember that it is useless to look for someone to blame or criticize. Instead, consider how you can help find a solution.

Then he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring me the ephod!" So Abiathar brought it.

David couldn't go to the tabernacle to ask the Lord for guidance because it was in Saul's territory. Therefore he called for the ephod, the only tabernacle-related object he possessed. In the presence of the priest and this priestly garment, he asked God for direction. When David called for the ephod, he was really asking the priest to bring him the Urim and Thummim, which were kept in a pouch attached to the ephod. Only the high priest could carry and use the Urim and Thummim

Then David asked the Lord, "Should I chase them? Will I catch them?" And the Lord told him, "Yes, go after them. You will surely recover everything that was taken from you!"

So David and his six hundred men set out, and they soon came to Besor Brook. But two hundred of the men were too exhausted to cross the brook, so David continued the pursuit with his four hundred remaining troops.

Some of David's troops found an Egyptian man in a field and brought him to David. They gave him some bread to eat and some water to drink. They also gave him part of a fig cake and two clusters of raisins because he hadn't had anything to eat or drink for three days and nights. It wasn't long before his strength returned.

"To whom do you belong, and where do you come from?" David asked him. "I am an Egyptian—the slave of an Amalekite," he replied. "My master left me behind three days ago because I was sick. We were on our way back from raiding the Kerethites in the Negev, the territory of Judah, and the land of Caleb, and we had just burned Ziklag."

"Will you lead me to them?" David asked. The young man replied, "If you swear by God's name

that you will not kill me or give me back to my master, then I will guide you to them."

The Amalekites cruelly left this slave to die, but God used him to lead David and his men to the Amalekite camp. David and his men treated the young man kindly, and he returned the kindness by leading them to the enemy. Treat those you meet with respect and dignity no matter how insignificant they may seem. You never know how God will use them to help you or haunt you, depending upon your response to them.

So the Egyptian led them to the Amalekite encampment. When David and his men arrived, the Amalekites were spread out across the fields, eating and drinking and dancing with joy because of the vast amount of plunder they had taken from the Philistines and the land of Judah. David and his men rushed in among them and slaughtered them throughout that night and the entire next day until evening. None of the Amalekites escaped except four hundred young men who fled on camels. David got back everything the Amalekites had taken, and he rescued his two wives. Nothing was missing: small or great, son or daughter, nor anything else that had been taken. David brought everything back. His troops rounded up all the flocks and herds and drove them on ahead. "These all belong to David as his reward!" they said.

When they reached Besor Brook and met the two hundred men who had been too tired to go with them, David greeted them joyfully. But some troublemakers among David's men said, "They didn't go with us, so they can't have any of the plunder. Give them their wives and children, and tell them to be gone."

] But David said, "No, my brothers! Don't be selfish with what the Lord has given us. He has kept us safe and helped us defeat the enemy. Do you think anyone will listen to you when you talk like this? We share and share alike—those who go to battle and those who guard the equipment." From then on David made this a law for all of Israel, and it is still followed.

David made a law that those who stayed with the supplies were to be treated equally with those who fought in battle. Today it takes several people to provide the support services needed for every soldier in battle. In the church and other organizations, we need to treat those who provide support services equally with those on the front lines. Without bookkeepers, secretaries, trainers, and administrators, those with a public ministry would be unable to do their jobs. Are you on the front lines? Don't forget those who are backing you up. Are you in the support group? Realize that your position, although it may be less glamorous or exciting, is vital to the work of the entire group.

When he arrived at Ziklag, David sent part of the plunder to the leaders of Judah, who were his friends. "Here is a present for you, taken from the Lord's enemies," he said. The gifts were sent to the leaders of the following towns where David and his men had been: Bethel, Ramoth-negev, Jattir, Aroer, Siphmoth, Eshtemoa, Racal, the towns of the Jerahmeelites, the towns of the Kenites, Hormah, Bor-ashan, Athach, Hebron, and all the other places they had visited.

1st Samuel

Chapter 31

Now the Philistines attacked Israel, forcing the Israelites to flee. Many were slaughtered on the slopes of Mount Gilboa. The Philistines closed in on Saul and his sons, and they killed three of his sons—Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malkishua. The fighting grew very fierce around Saul, and the Philistine archers caught up with him and wounded him severely. Saul groaned to his armor bearer, "Take your sword and kill me before these pagan Philistines run me through and humiliate me." But his armor bearer was afraid and would not do it. So Saul took his own sword and fell on it.

The Philistines had a well-earned reputation for torturing their captives. Saul no doubt knew about Samson's fate (Judges 16:18-31) and did not want to risk physical mutilation or other abuse. When his armor-bearer refused to kill him, he took his own life.

Saul was tall, handsome, strong, rich, and powerful, but all of this was not enough to make him someone we should emulate. He was tall physically, but he was small in God's eyes. He was handsome, but his sin made him ugly. He was strong, but his lack of faith made him weak. He was rich, but he was spiritually bankrupt. He could give orders to many, but he couldn't command their respect or allegiance. Saul looked good on the outside, but he was decaying on the inside. A right relationship with God and a strong character are much more valuable than a good-looking exterior.

Saul's armor-bearer faced a moral dilemma—should he carry out a sinful order from a man he was supposed to obey? He knew he should obey his master, the king, but he also knew murder was wrong. He decided not to kill Saul.

There is a difference between following an order with which you don't agree and following one you know is wrong. It is never right or ethical to carry out a wrong act, no matter who gives the order or what the consequences for disobedience may be. What shapes your choice when you face a moral dilemma? Have the courage to follow God's law above human commands.

Saul faced death the same way he faced life. He took matters into his own hands without thinking of God or asking for his guidance. If our lives aren't the way we would like them to be now, we can't assume that change will come more easily later. When nearing death, we will respond to God the same way we have been responding all along. Coming face to face with death only shows us what we are *really* like. How do you want to face death? Start facing life that way right now.

When his armor bearer realized that Saul was dead, he fell on his own sword and died beside the king. So Saul, three of his sons, his armor bearer, and his troops all died together that same day.

When the Israelites on the other side of the Jezreel Valley and beyond the Jordan saw that their army had been routed and that Saul and his sons were dead, they abandoned their towns and fled. So the Philistines moved in and occupied their towns.

The next day, when the Philistines went out to strip the dead, they found the bodies of Saul and his three sons on Mount Gilboa. So they cut off Saul's head and stripped off his armor. Then they proclaimed the news of Saul's death in their pagan temple and to the people throughout the land of Philistia. They placed his armor in the temple of the Ashtoreths, and they fastened his body to the wall of the city of Beth-shan.

To put Saul's armor in the Philistine temple gave credit to a pagan goddess for victory over Saul. Ashtoreth was a goddess of fertility and sex. Beth Shan was a town on the eastern slopes of Mount Gilboa, overlooking the Jordan Valley

But when the people of Jabesh-gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, their warriors traveled all night to Beth-shan and took the bodies of Saul and his sons down from the wall. They brought them to Jabesh, where they burned the bodies. Then they took their remains and buried them beneath the tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and they fasted for seven days.

Consider the difference between the last judge of Israel and its first king. Saul, the king, was characterized by inconsistency, disobedience, and self-will. He did not have a heart for God. Samuel, the judge, was characterized by consistency, obedience, and a deep desire for God's will. He had a genuine desire for God.

When God called Samuel, he said, "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening" (1st Samuel 3:9). But when God, through Samuel, called Saul, Saul replied, "Why do you say such a thing to me?" (1st Samuel 9:21). Saul was dedicated to himself; Samuel was dedicated to God.

Saul's death was also the death of an ideal—Israel could no longer believe that having a king like the other nations would solve all their troubles. The real problem was not the form of government, but the sinful king. Saul tried to please God by spurts of religiosity, but real spirituality takes a lifetime of consistent obedience.

Heroic spiritual lives are built by stacking days of obedience one on top of the other. Like a brick, each obedient act is small in itself, but in time the acts will pile up, and a huge wall of strong character will be built—a great defense against temptation. We should strive for consistent obedience each day.