

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

1 SAMUEL 12-15

History is full of costly blunders. What seemed like small errors at the time snowballed into major losses.

World War 1 took 20 million lives, but the conflict started when a driver made a wrong turn. A traffic error exposed Archduke Ferdinand to an assassin's bullet and launched the war... Atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki because the Allies misinterpreted a Japanese word. When told to surrender the Premier replied, "*mokusatsu*," or "*no comment*." But it was mistranslated as an adamant "*no...*" And the Challenger Space Shuttle exploded over the Atlantic after NASA ignored the cold weather's effect on the engines' O rings... In all three cases what seemed like little mistakes proved to be costly errors.

And this describes the fall of King Saul. A sin that some saw as a non-issue, cost Saul his kingdom.

In Chapter 11 Saul and Israel defeat the Ammonites and go to Gilgal to celebrate, to give God thanks. Chapter 12 records the Prophet Samuel's sermon...

"Now Samuel said to all Israel: "Indeed I have heeded your voice in all that you said to me, and have made a king over you. And now here is the king, walking before you; and I am old and gray-headed, and look, my sons are with you. I have walked before you from my childhood to this day." Samuel spent his whole life in the fishbowl of public ministry. He grew up under scrutiny. He was never just a neighbor, or Little League coach - he was always God's prophet. People drove by his house, and commented, *"that's where the prophet lives."* Samuel was always held to a higher standard.

Now he says to Israel, verse 3, *"Here I am. Witness against me before the LORD and before His anointed: Whose ox have I taken, or whose donkey have I taken, or whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed, or from whose hand have I received any bribe with which to blind my eyes? I will restore it to you. And they said, "You have not cheated us or oppressed us, nor have you taken anything from any man's hand."* Samuel had ordered his life so God's enemies would have nothing of which to accuse him. He lived above reproach. Samuel's life was a witness to God's keeping-power.

In verse 6 Samuel charts Israel's history, their exodus from Egypt, Joshua's victory over Sisera and the city of Hazor - of battles with Philistia and Moab.

He recalls the cycle that reoccurred throughout the book of Judges... Israel took after false gods and **sinned**... God punished them by making them **slaves** to their

enemies... They then repented and offered prayers or **supplication**... God raised up a Judge - a **savior**... God's **Spirit** empowered a victory... And that triumph produced a period of peace and **serenity** - *which was interrupted by another round of sin*.

This cycle gets repeated at least seven times in Judges - the stories of **Jerubbaal** or Gideon, **Bedan** or possibly Barak, **Jephthah**, and **Samuel**, among others.

Then Samuel recounts their most recent victory over Ammon, won by their new king, Saul the Benjamite.

Samuel concludes his sermon, verse 14, "If you fear the LORD and serve Him and obey His voice... you and the king... will continue following the LORD your God. However, if you do not obey the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then the hand of the LORD will be against you, as it was against your fathers." That's when Samuel calls on God to confirm his sermon with a storm.

"Now therefore, stand and see this great thing which the LORD will do before your eyes..." It was during the wheat harvest or late May, early June - the dry season in Israel. Yet at Samuel's request, God sent a good ole fashioned thunderstorm. God added special effects to Samuel's sermon to hammer home its importance.

Verse 18, "So Samuel called to the LORD, and the LORD sent thunder and rain that day; and all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel. And all the people said to Samuel, "Pray for your servants to the LORD your God, that we may not die; for we have added to all our sins the evil of asking a king for ourselves." Then Samuel said to the people, "Do not fear. You have done all this wickedness; yet do not turn aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart. And do not turn aside; for then you would go after empty things which cannot profit or deliver, for they are nothing." Here's a good word for us. Don't go after "*empty things*" - material, physical, just pleasure-only things that don't "*profit*" or "*deliver*."

"For the LORD will not forsake His people, for His great name's sake, because it has pleased the LORD to make you His people." And after Samuel's sermon - and God's stormy affirmation... the people repent.

In verse 19, the Israelites ask Samuel to pray or intercede for them, and he insures them he will. Verse 23, "Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you; but I will teach you the good and the right way." **Realize there is such a thing as *the sin of prayer-less-ness*.**

This comes as a shock to most Christians, but prayer is not an elective activity, or only for emergencies - it's part of Christianity's core curriculum. It's a tremendous privilege to touch the hem of Jesus' garment, and to communicate with the Almighty... but prayer is more than a privilege, it's our duty to pray for one another!

Verse 24, “Only fear the LORD, and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider what great things He has done for you.” And I hope we consider what great things God has done for us! “But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king.” *Warnings are as needed as encouragements...*

Chapter 13, “Saul reigned one year; and when he had reigned two years over Israel, Saul chose for himself 3000 men of Israel. Two thousand were with Saul in Michmash and in the mountains of Bethel, and a thousand were with Jonathan in Gibeah of Benjamin. The rest of the people he sent away, every man to his tent.” After his victory over Ammon, Saul disbands his standing army. He keeps only a 2000 member militia as his secret service, and a 1000 member special ops force under his son, Jonathan... *And this Jonathan was a feisty general, ready to take on Israel’s enemies.*

Verse 3, “Jonathan attacked the garrison of the Philistines that was in Geba, and the Philistines heard of it. Then Saul blew the trumpet throughout all the land, saying, “Let the Hebrews hear!” Now all Israel heard it said that Saul had attacked a garrison of the Philistines, and that Israel had also become an abomination to the Philistines. And the people were called together to Saul at Gilgal.” It seems Saul had become sedentary, but Jonathan wasn’t content. He saw to it that it was *battle-on* in Israel. He prodded the Philistines, who marched 30,000 troops and 6000 cavalry toward Michmash - a Benjamite city, Saul’s hometown... Saul, who was in Gilgal, has to reenlist an army. *The Philistines are now camped in his backyard!*

Verse 6, “When the men of Israel saw that they were in danger (for the people were distressed), then the people hid in caves, in thickets, in rocks, in holes, and in pits. And some of the Hebrews crossed over the Jordan (eastward) to the land of Gad and Gilead.” The Hebrews were so frightened they abandoned the battlefield, and went A-WOL. “As for Saul, he was still in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling.

Then (Saul) waited seven days, according to the time set by Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him.” Saul is fearful of the encroaching Philistines, **but he’s being tested!** *Does Saul trust God? Will he wait on God’s will and God’s prophet, or be impatient and start to fight?*

Samuel had told Saul to wait so he could offer a sacrifice to God, and pray for Israel’s victory. But from a military standpoint Saul needs to act! The longer he waits to strike the Philistines the more entrenched they become. Every day he delays the panic among his troops spreads. More and more Hebrews are chickening out and disappearing into the countryside...

On the other hand, Saul doesn’t dare go to battle without first committing the war to God, *but a sacrifice is not a king’s privilege.* It takes a priest, like Samuel, to offer it... FB Meyer said, “God can only use those who trust Him absolutely; and He often tests

them by long delays.” A prerequisite for godly service is the willingness to wait. Get ahead and you’re on your own.

And Saul reveals his character - *or lack of it* - in verse 9, “So Saul said, “Bring a burnt offering and peace offerings here to me.” And he offered the burnt offering.” He oversteps his bounds and offers the sacrifice himself. Blood is still dripping from his knife, when Samuel walks up. Verse 11, “And Samuel said, “What have you done?” And Saul said, “When I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered together at Michmash, then I said, “The Philistines will now come down on me at Gilgal, and I have not made supplication to the LORD. Therefore I felt compelled, and offered a burnt offering.” Here’s Saul’s problem in a nutshell, he acts on his *compulsions* - **on feelings rather than faith**. Outside pressure and snap decisions dig his grave.

Hey, an **externally motivated person** responds to whatever outward stimulus is applying pressure. In contrast we need to anchor our feelings to God’s Word.

Samuel has ominous words for Saul. *Impatience* has cost him dearly... Verse 13, “And Samuel said to Saul, “You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you. For now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you.” This is a defining moment. Saul fails the test - *God can’t trust him*. Saul will continue to sit on Israel’s throne, but God’s choice sits elsewhere.

Verse 14 tells us God wanted “*a man after His own heart.*” In Chapter 16 God will find such a man in a shepherd boy named David... Saul’s consideration was always, *what does this do for me?* Whereas David thought, *how can I please God?* Here’s a little jingle, “When conducting the band you’ll find it’s allowed; you’re expected to stand with your back to the crowd.”

This was Saul’s problem. Rather than turn his back to the crowd, his every move played to the crowd. His chief concern was his own image. Saul was so insecure he lusted for people’s approval at all costs. *What about you? Do you allow opinions and circumstances to drive your ship - or are you anchored to principle?* Are you an *internally-motivated person* or are an *externally-motivated person?* Do you cave in or trust God? *Are you a Saul or are you a David?*

Verse 15, “Then Samuel arose and went up from Gilgal to Gibeah of Benjamin.” Saul’s army, which numbered 600 Israelites, camped in Gibeah. The Philistines were at Michmash. This all takes place in the mountains of Ephraim, in the center of Israel...

And the battle starts when Philistine raiders move out in three waves - **(the blue arrows)** north, west, and east. This effectively cut off Saul from any reinforcements.

And we find Israel has an additional disadvantage in verse 19, **“Now there was no blacksmith to be found throughout all the land of Israel, for the Philistines said, “Lest the Hebrews make swords or spears.” But all the Israelites would go down to the Philistines to sharpen each man's plowshare, his mattock, his ax, and his sickle; and the charge for a sharpening was a pim (or 2/3 of a shekel - a high cost for sharpening) for the plowshares, the mattocks, the forks, and the axes, and to set the points of the goads.”** And you can be sure no Israelite ever left a Philistine tool shop with a super-sharp edge. They certainly didn't want the Israelite farmers turning their plows into swords. They held a monopoly on the latest technology. The Philistines had come from Greece and brought the iron age to Israel. Iron-working was an advantage they wanted to keep.

Verse 22 tells us, **“On the day of battle... there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people...”** Only the royal family, Saul and Jonathan, had iron weapons. Israel's army was vastly unarmed.

“And the garrison of the Philistines went out to the pass of Michmash.” Chapter 13 closes with the Philistines on the move. Their three commando units cut off Israel's supply lines and stall Saul's troops. Saul is paralyzed. He's providing no leadership and his son, Jonathan, hates his dad's silence. Israel needs to strike, so Jonathan initiates a secret offensive...

Chapter 14, **“Now it happened one day that Jonathan the son of Saul said to the young man who bore his armor, “Come, let us go over to the Philistines' garrison that is on the other side.” But he did not tell his father.”** Understand, an armor bearer was more than just a servant who carried your helmet and shield. He was a sidekick - a brave and trusted accomplice in combat.

“And Saul was sitting in the outskirts of Gibeah under a pomegranate tree which is in Migron. The people who were with him were about 600 men.” Saul is sitting under a tree sulking - feeling sorry for himself. As usual he's self-absorbed, while the Philistines wreak havoc.

Verse 3 notes the High Priest Ahijah was in town. *(He was a friendly guy, this **A Hi Ya.**)* Saul could've sought him for guidance, but instead he stays passive. **“But the people did not know that Jonathan had gone.”**

Verse 4, **“Between the passes, by which Jonathan sought to go over to the Philistines' garrison, there was a sharp rock on one side and a sharp rock on the other side.”** During his reconnaissance, east of the normal pass, Jonathan noticed sharp rocks forming a narrow canyon. Here, a few men could fend off an entire army.

The rocks even had names... “And the name of one was Bozez (or *glistening*), and the name of the other Seneh (or *thorny*). Call them *shiny* and *sticky*. “The front of one faced northward opposite Michmash, and the other southward opposite Gibeah.” They were between the camps of the Philistines and Israelites.

And in verse 6, you’ve got to love Prince Jonathan’s daring faith, “Then (he) said to the young man who bore his armor, “Come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; it may be that the LORD will work for us. For nothing restrains the LORD from saving by many or by few.” Rather than the same ole, same ole battle style - let’s do something different - let’s take a step of faith, and just see what God might do! As the old saying goes, “Nothing ventured nothing gained.”

Hey, we all need to be willing to take some *ventures of faith!* God blesses people who are not content to sit and sulk, but who look for God an opening. Saul had allowed his failure to paralyze him, but not Jonathan.

He was crossing enemy territory, back and forth, eyes peeled, looking for an opportunity. *Are you doing the same? Saul was licking his wounds, while Jonathan was licking his chops anxious for an opportunity to take a bite out of the enemy.* And God wants people of faith, like Jonathan, unafraid to take initiative for God. *Be on the lookout - see a need - get a direction - then go for it - and see if God will bless!* Jonathan’s armor bearer agrees and tells him, “Do all that is in your heart. Go then; here I am with you...”

But before the dynamic duo venture out, they want to make sure they’re not being presumptuous, so they pose a test to make sure the Lord is with them.

Verse 8, “Then Jonathan said, “Very well, let us cross over to these men, and we will show ourselves to them. If they say thus to us, ‘Wait until we come to you,’ then we will stand still in our place and not go up to them. But if they say thus, ‘Come up to us,’ then we will go up. For the LORD has delivered them into our hand, and this will be a sign to us.” They’re hoping to get invited into the Philistine camp. “So both of them showed themselves to the garrison of the Philistines.”

And the Philistines said, “Look, the Hebrews are coming out of the holes where they have hidden.” Then the men of the garrison called to Jonathan and his armorbearer, and said, “Come up to us, and we will show you something.” In other words, “Come on over here and we’ll teach you a lesson!” It was a threat.

The Philistines are threatening, while the two Hebrews take their trash-talk as a green light from God. “Jonathan said to his armorbearer, “Come up after me, for the LORD has delivered them into the hand of Israel.” And Jonathan climbed up on his hands and knees with his armorbearer after him; and they fell before Jonathan.” We learn elsewhere Jonathan was an archer. Evidently he picked them off with his bow.

“And as he came after him, his armorbearer killed them.” The Philistines Jonathan didn’t hit with an arrow, charged him, and his armor-bearer finished them with a sword. “That first slaughter which Jonathan and his armorbearer made was about twenty men within about half an acre of land.” They died in that narrow canyon.

Before we move on, let me sum up five components of Jonathan’s venture of faith. To take initiative and win new ground for God, here’s what’s involved for us...

First, a daring faith. Second, a deliberate plan. Third, discernment of God’s will. Fourth, a discreet approach. They didn’t just charge into the Philistine camp kamikaze style. Jonathan climbed discreetly to the top of the rock where he had the leverage. And **fifth, divine intervention...** God joined the venture.

Again, we all need the faith to take a venture from time to time, just to see what great work God will do!

Well, news of Jonathan’s victory - coupled with a well-timed, God-orchestrated earthquake - produced hysteria and panic in the camp of the Philistines.

Verse 15, “And there was trembling in the camp, in the field, and among all the people. The garrison and the raiders also trembled; and the earth quaked, so that it was a very great trembling. Now the watchmen of Saul in Gibeah of Benjamin looked, and there was the multitude, melting away; and they went here and there.” Saul can see the enemy is confused, but he doesn’t know why. He’s looking for an explanation...

So Saul has roll call, and realizes Jonathan is MIA. He calls for the Priest to ask for God’s supernatural insight, and Ahijah is about to stick his hand in his breastplate to consult the sacred rocks - the Urim and Thummin - when Saul hears noise erupt in the Philistine camp, and puts it together... Jonathan has stirred up a fight. God’s will is to join him in the battle.

Some matters of guidance are obvious. It’s time to fight. Saul and his troops finally go to battle, and it inspires all Israel to join them. Some Israelites who had capitulated to the Philistines decide **to fight**. Others who had hidden came out of the mountains **to fight**.

We’re told in verse 22, “they also followed hard after them in the battle. So the LORD saved Israel that day, and the battle shifted to Beth Aven...” *But there was a problem. There’s always a problem when Saul leads...*

“The men of Israel were distressed that day, for Saul had placed the people under oath, saying, “Cursed is the man who eats any food until evening, before I have taken vengeance on my enemies.” So none of the people tasted food.” Saul makes a rash, stupid vow to fuel his own ego. *I need to win before anyone eats.* But the soldiers

renewing their energy is a key to success!

Verse 25, “Now all the people of the land came to a forest; and there was honey on the ground. And when the people had come into the woods, there was the honey, dripping; but no one put his hand to his mouth, for the people feared the oath. But Jonathan had not heard his father charge the people with the oath; therefore he stretched out the end of the rod that was in his hand and dipped it in a honeycomb, and put his hand to his mouth; and his countenance brightened.”

Here’s an important spiritual lesson. Don’t get so busy fighting battles for God, that you don’t take time to feed your own soul. **You’ve got to fuel before you duel.** If you always give out, and never replenish, you grow weak. Like Jonathan, Christians need honey from God’s Word in order to finish the battle victoriously.

Of course, someone points out that Jonathan broke Saul’s oath. And Jonathan responds by criticizing his father, verse 29, “My father has troubled the land. Look now, how my countenance has brightened because I tasted a little of this honey. How much better if the people had eaten freely today of the spoil of their enemies which they found! For now would there not have been a much greater slaughter among the Philistines?” Jonathan was right in his assessment, but wrong to criticize dad in front of the people. Jonathan hadn’t taken his father’s vow, but the people had. And later, he’ll be the excuse they’ll use to break their vow.

Verse 31, “Now they had driven back the Philistines that day from Michmash to Aijalon. So the people were very faint. And the people rushed on the spoil, and took sheep, oxen, and calves, and slaughtered them on the ground; and the people ate them with the blood.”

Spurred on by Jonathan’s example the people not only break *Saul’s oath*, but *God’s Law*. They don’t cook the meat - they eat it rare and bloody. The Law of Moses said the blood was to be drained from the meat.

When they tell Saul what the people are doing, he realizes they’re sinning against Yahweh. He rolls in a stone on which he slaughters the animals properly. He builds an altar. Verse 35 calls it the first altar Saul built.

In verse 36 Saul wants to launch a night raid on the Philistines, but when he asks counsel of the Lord, *God remains silent*. Saul interprets this as sin in the camp. And Saul vows to kill the culprit, even it’s his own son.

And how ironic, when they cast lots to determine where the problem lies it falls on Saul and Jonathan; then on just Jonathan. Verse 43, “Then Saul said to Jonathan, “Tell me what you have done.” And Jonathan told him, and said, “I only tasted a little honey with the end of the rod that was in my hand. So now I must die!” **You’re going to**

execute me over a mouthful of honey?

“And Saul answered, “God do so and more also; for you shall surely die, Jonathan.” Saul should’ve realized his rashness and rescinded his oath. Now he’s made such a big deal over it, he’ll lose face if he doesn’t follow through. *Saul cares so much about public perception he’d rather slay his son, than appear weak.*

In verse 45 the people rescue Jonathan from his own father. Jonathan is now a national hero, a man of faith, who had followed God and delivered Israel. *Not a single hair on his head was to be harmed. The people saved Jonathan. While Saul’s goal was to save face. Saul’s insecurity is causing him to come unhinged.*

Verse 46, “Then Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, and the Philistines went to their own place. So Saul established his sovereignty over Israel, and fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, against the people of Ammon, against Edom, against the kings of Zobah... And he gathered an army and attacked the Amalekites, and delivered Israel from the hands of those who plundered them.”

Verse 49 lays out Saul’s family tree... “The sons of Saul were Jonathan, Jishui and Malchishua. And the names of his two daughters were these: the name of the firstborn Merab, and the name of the younger Michal. The name of Saul’s wife was Ahinoam the daughter of Ahimaaz. And the name of the commander of his army was Abner the son of Ner, Saul’s uncle. Kish was the father of Saul, and Ner the father of Abner was the son of Abiel.” And General Abner plays an interesting role in drafting Israelites. Rather than *Uncle Sam* wants you, it was *Uncle Abner* wants you...

“Now there was fierce war with the Philistines all the days of Saul. And when Saul saw any strong man or any valiant man, he took him for himself.” Back in Chapter 8, when Israel first asked for a king, Samuel had warned them that a king would take their “*finest young men.*” His warning definitely came true... Israel underestimated “*the ferocity of kings.*”

Chapter 15 records Saul’s costly blunder. It didn’t seem like *a big deal to him*, but it was *a big, big deal to God*... The Lord had an old score to settle with the Amalekites and Saul was to carry it out. After the exodus opportunistic Amalekites attacked the newborn nation. At the time Israel had no army. They were just a band of slaves in the wilderness. Amalek saw them as easy pickings, and pounce on God’s people. God remembered Amalek’s cruelty. *It’s now payback time.*

Which brings up a point... You’ve heard the old saying, “*Time heals.*” That might be true with cuts and scrapes - even bruised feelings - but it never applies to sin and forgiveness. Time alone never atones for sin.

Not even 400 years had caused God to forget the sin of the unrepentant Amalekites. Thus, God will treat Amalek with the same harshness they showed Israel.

God says in verse 3, "Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey."

So Saul gathered the people together and numbered them in Telaim, 200,000 foot soldiers and 10,000 men of Judah. And Saul came to a city of Amalek, and lay in wait in the valley. Then Saul said to the Kenites, "Go, depart, get down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them. For you showed kindness to all the children of Israel when they came up out of Egypt." The Kenites were descendants of Moses' father-in-law, Jethro. They'd been innocent of any wrongdoing... "So the Kenites departed from among the Amalekites.

And Saul attacked the Amalekites, from Havilah all the way to Shur, which is east of Egypt." In other words, it was a complete and savage slaughter.

"He also took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were unwilling to utterly destroy them." Saul's orders were to take no prisoners! Every Amalekite - every animal with an Amalekite brand - should be killed. Instead, Saul keeps King Agag as a trophy, and holds on to the best of the herds as a reward for a job well done. Saul was thinking like a good Southerner, *never waste delicious barbeque!*

Verse 10, "Now the word of the LORD came to Samuel, saying, "I greatly regret that I have set up Saul as king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not performed My commandments. And it grieved Samuel, and he cried out to the LORD all night." How sad, for *the God of all patience* to regret setting a person up in ministry - *a king... a pastor... any leader.*

"So when Samuel rose early in the morning to meet Saul, it was told Samuel, saying, "Saul went to Carmel, and indeed, he set up a monument for himself; and he has gone on around, passed by, and gone down to Gilgal." Remember at the end of Chapter 11, after Saul defeated the Ammonites he was careful not to detract from God's glory. Now he sets up a memorial to himself. It proves when you measure your own worth by what others think, you either shy away from attention - or clamor for all you can get. *Saul did both.*

"Then Samuel went to Saul, and Saul said to him, "Blessed are you of the LORD! I have performed the commandment of the LORD." He says this while the livestock he kept back from the slaughter are making noise in the background. *Saul is caught red-handed. Samuel asks, "What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?"*

And Saul said, "They have brought them from the Amalekites; for the people spared

the best of the sheep and the 'oxen, to sacrifice to the LORD your God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed." And note the religious justification... *we'll use these animals as sacrifices*. As if God is pleased with illegal contraband. It'd be like pouring moonshine in our communion cups.

"Then Samuel said to Saul, "Be quiet! And I will tell you what the LORD said to me last night.' And he said to him, "Speak on." So Samuel said, "When you were little in your own eyes, were you not head of the tribes of Israel? And did not the LORD anoint you king over Israel? Now the LORD sent you on a mission, and said, 'Go, and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.' Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD? Why did you swoop down on the spoil, and do evil in the sight of the LORD?"

"And Saul said to Samuel, "But I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me, and brought back Agag king of Amalek; I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took of the plunder, sheep and oxen, the best of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal." King Saul disobeyed, but he blames it on the people.

Verse 22 is a famous passage. "Then Samuel said: "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams." Don't confuse sacrifice with obedience. *Many people do*. Folks assume you can do as you please as long as you throw God a bone...

They figure God can be bought off with an offering. *But they don't know God...* The Almighty cares little about our sacrifices. He wants *us - our hearts, our devotion, our submission* He wants us to trust and obey. An occasional tip of the hat is no substitute.

Verse 23, "For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry." There are folks, like Saul, who pack the pews in church. They're sacrificial. They come, and give, and serve. Their sacrifice is on the altar, but rebellion brews in the heart. God has demands on their life they stubbornly resist.

No one would call them "a sinner"... let alone a *witch* or an *idolater*. But God grades on a different scale. On the surface, you're not a diabolical person. You're not into witchcraft or idolatry, yet to God *rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as idolatry*.

And next comes the words Saul regrets hearing the rest of his life, "Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king."

Verse 24, "Then Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed

their voice.” Again Saul cared more about the people’s approval, than God’s approval. Saul was an **externally-motivated person** to the bitter end.

“Now therefore, please pardon my sin, and return with me, that I may worship the LORD.” But Samuel said to Saul, “I will not return with you, for you have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel. And as Samuel turned around to go away, Saul seized the edge of his robe, and it tore.” The humiliation of losing his position, is more than Saul can bear. His ego loves to be in control, but now he’s not, so as Samuel turns to leave, Saul grabs him, holds him and tears his robe.

“Samuel said to him, “The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today, and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you. And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor relent. For He is not a man, that He should relent.” And what a great name for God, “*the Strength of Israel.*” Today, Hezbollah and Iran are learning the true God is “*the Strength of Israel.*”

After such a devastating announcement most folks would’ve hung their heads, and walked away - *but not Saul*. He still worries about how people will see him.

He asks Samuel, verse 30, “I have sinned; yet honor me now, please, before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, that I may worship the LORD your God.” *Samuel, go alongside me, and help me save face.* “So Samuel turned back after Saul, and Saul worshiped the LORD.” But Samuel’s concern isn’t Saul’s image, *he has some unfinished business.*

“Then Samuel said, “Bring Agag king of the Amalekites here to me.” So Agag came to him cautiously. And said, “Surely the bitterness of death is past.” *He expected mercy!* But Samuel said, “As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women.” And Samuel hacked Agag in pieces before the LORD in Gilgal.”

Ironically, years later when King Saul dies in battle, he falls at the feet of an alien, an Amalekite. *An Amalekite of all people* finishes Saul off and brings the news to David that the king is dead! If Saul had dealt with Amalek the story might have ended differently.

“Then Samuel went to Ramah, and Saul went up to his house at Gibeah of Saul. And Samuel went no more to see Saul until the day of his death. Nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul, and the LORD regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel.”

To this point Saul has been king over Israel for only ten years. He’ll remain king for thirty more, but the Lord is no longer with Saul. The king is now a lame-duck.

Author Phillip Keller sums up King Saul’s career, “*He was forever a man determined to protect his own self-interests. Ultimately he simply became a pathetic castaway. His*

end was a dreadful alienation from God.” His replacement enters the picture in Chapter 16...