

I Samuel – Part 5

Time for a Change – I Samuel 13-16

God has been testing Saul, the people's choice for a king. He has not been doing too well. The first test was a test of patience. God used the Philistines to carry out His testing for Saul. Would he wait on God's timing or plunge ahead when things started getting tough? Saul looked at the Philistines 30,000 chariots, 6,000 horsemen, and multitudes of foot soldiers (I Sam 13:5), and then turned to his own 600 men, who carried only axes and scythes as they ran into battle. They were badly outnumbered! Saul couldn't wait for Samuel like he had been told to do. Was God even there? Instead, he offered the burnt offering himself, giving only excuses for his behavior.

After failure number one, God used Saul's son, Jonathan, to test his pride. Saul had already taken credit for the first victory of Jonathan when he had attacked the garrison in Geba (I Sam. 13:3-4), so it would not be a surprise if he did it again! His little army was no match for the Philistines, but two men were no match for a garrison either! Instead of trusting God for the victory, Saul sat pouting beneath a pomegranate tree. (I Sam. 14). What a difference between father and son!

Jonathan and the armorbearer knew that to get to the garrison in a surprise attack would require a difficult climb up the sharp rocks, but God never promised that the way would be easy! He didn't look at the rocks and say, "Let's just sit here and pray that God does something." So, in broad daylight, Jonathan took God's strength to do the job that needed to be done and began the climb, all the while expecting God to give him direction in the process. As they neared the top of the mountain and poked their heads up, the Philistines saw them. God showed them His direction through the Philistine's response...and Jonathan attacked.

In Saul's camp, the diligent watchman saw that, "Behold!" the Philistines were "beating down on one another, and "Behold!" only Jonathan and his armorbearer were involved in the battle, and "Behold!" there was a very great discomfiture (total confusion). Because of Jonathan's faith, God's intervention with an earthquake "shook things up" even more, bringing panic and chaos to the Philistines so that God's promise of protection would be fulfilled. "So, the Lord saved Israel that day."

Saul finally realized that his strategies weren't working. He decided to seek God's guidance for the next steps in battle, but he received no answer. God's silence was a critical commentary on Saul's leadership, revealing his spiritual state and the consequences of his earlier disobedience. He had become disconnected from God; his rule was in a serious state of decline. His actions were based on fear rather than faith.

I. Downfall

Saul had been genuinely humble when he was first introduced to Israel (I Sam. 9:21). He hid among the baggage (I Sam. 10:22) rather than proudly walking up to take the throne. Now that he is king, he views himself as the ultimate authority in Israel, a view common among ancient Near Eastern monarchs. This attitude led him to disobey the Law of God.

He has begun issuing unreasonable demands on the people and declaring that even his own son must die for unknowingly defying his edict. Saul has proven impulsive,

given to severe reactions and volatile responses, with a tendency to act before he thinks. He has become an authoritarian, filled with pride, but fearful. These actions are in high contrast to God's mercy and grace highlighted throughout Scripture. As a king, he is to be God's representative...and he is failing miserably as he ignores the importance of seeking wisdom and guidance from God in all matters.

King Saul established his rule over Israel and gained victory over its enemies, including the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, the kings of Zobah, and the Philistines (I Sam. 14:47-52). But though he is successful militarily, it is only because of God's assistance. He has produced heirs, Jonathan, Ishvi, and Melchi-shua to continue the royal line, as well as two daughters, Merab and Michal.

Although 23 years have passed since Saul offered the burnt offering at Gilgal when he felt Samuel was late, God is not done testing him. Samuel is sent to deliver a message to Saul regarding the Amalekites. In this test, God requires Saul to show his obedience in a greater way than anything he has yet done.

II. Final Testing

The atmosphere is tense as Samuel tells him: "Thus says the Lord of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel..." On God's authority, and because God remembers what was previously done to Israel, Saul is given this job. "Now go, and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass." (I Sam. 15). This punishment is for their unprovoked attack on Israel and their disregard for God.

Four hundred years prior, God provided a miracle by supplying water in the barren Wilderness of Sin when Moses struck the rock. (Ex. 17; Numb. 24:24; Deut. 25:17-19). As they were leaving Mount Horeb, "Amalek [descendants of Esau] came and fought with Israel in Rephidim." They attacked, specifically targeting the weak and vulnerable, such as the elderly and children who trailed behind the main group of Israel.

Joshua led Israel in his first battle against the Amalekites. Moses raised his hands to heaven, and as long as they were raised, the battle belonged to Israel. When his hands became tired, Aaron and Hur held them up. After the victory, God told Moses, "I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven." At various times, God reminded Israel that this would happen, and now He is commanding Saul to bring about their complete judgment, "utter destruction."

God is emphatic about the "utter destruction" of the Amalekites and repeats it multiple times in this chapter. Although God has given these people plenty of time to repent of their actions, they have refused. While God is slow to judge, He always demands payment. God knew they would never repent; now judgment must be fulfilled.

So, Saul gathered his army, 200,000 men plus 10,000 more from Judah, and came to the city of Amalek where he camped in the valley until he was ready to attack. After encouraging the Kenites, a nomadic tribe who had befriended Israel after leaving Egypt (Jdg. 1:16), to leave the area so they wouldn't be destroyed, Saul is ready to attack.

Agag, the Amalekite king, and his armies are defeated, but instead of "utterly destroying" them all as God had told him to, Saul saved "Agag and the best of the

sheep, oxen, fatlings, lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them: but everything that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly.” Saul’s obedience was selective and partial. He used his own criteria for what he put to death. God’s will and directions were clear—kill them all; Saul’s disobedience was not an oversight.

God spoke to Samuel, “It repenteth Me that I have set up Saul to be king” (I Sam. 14:11). Wait a minute! If God said He “repented making Saul king,” doesn’t that contradict Numbers 23:19? “God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?” The word “repent” used here is not the same as confessing our sins, changing our minds, or such. It means “to change,” but in God’s case, it is not a change of mind, but a change of method. The nature of God is unchanging and trustworthy, unlike humans. What God says and the promises He gives are reliable and will be fulfilled. God doesn’t deceive or regret decisions He makes.

Because God is God, and He is so much higher than we are, there is always a difficulty in expressing Him, His characteristics, and His actions in human language. He is El Elyon, God Most High, so much more than we have words for, and we have no way of experiencing them. It is beyond us to even know how God thinks because He knows everything, past, present, and even the future before it happens. He knows the end of all things. (Isa. 46:10). Unfortunately, all we have is human language to be able to communicate these things. So, the best we can do is express Him with human terms as they appear from our own standpoint and human experience.

We can almost be assured that heaven’s vocabulary is far more capable of expressing things in languages and ideas we’ve never heard of. So, in this understanding of “repent” that is written here, we are trying to describe an action of God that shows that His favor with Saul has turned away.

The change was in Saul; he turned from following God. God Himself did not change, but because Saul did, God’s actions toward him changed. His actions toward us change when we are obedient to Him; it brings blessings rather than judgment. So also when we turn from Him, He deals differently with us, bringing judgment. He doesn’t change, but the method of dealing with us does.

It might be easier for us to understand as “God was grieved over Saul” because “Saul is turned back from following Me, and hath not performed My commandments.” Because of Saul’s actions, God was grieved; it was not because God had made a mistake in calling Saul. Since it is God’s action we are trying to express, think of it as God feeling about Saul the way we feel when someone whom we love greatly disappoints us.

Saul’s failure to follow God faithfully also broke Samuel’s heart. How could this man lead the people? How could one who was so rebellious and so willing to compromise the victories of Israel be a shepherd of God’s people? “And it grieved Samuel; and he cried unto the Lord all night.” He felt it all, knew it all, but still it grieved his heart.

When Samuel met Saul the next morning, Saul greeted him as if nothing was wrong. “Blessed be thou of the Lord: I have performed the commandment of the Lord,” but

Samuel knew better. “What meaneth then the bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?”

Rather than confessing his sin, Saul sought to justify his disobedience and blamed all wrongdoing on the people. Doesn't this remind you of Adam and Eve blaming each other and the serpent when they ate of the forbidden tree in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:12), and Aaron when he made the golden calf while Moses was on the mountain getting the Law? (Ex. 32:22-23). “*They* have brought them from the Amalekites: for *the people* spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the Lord THY God.” Saul insisted that his “partial” obedience was “total” obedience, but as king, he was responsible for the people's actions. He claimed these animals were for a worthy purpose... but God said, “Kill ALL!”

Saul had a long history of rebelliousness. God knew his confession was not genuine, nor was his repentance real. He was trying to “con” God into believing he was truly sorry, but he was like a child who tries to manipulate its parents. Rather than having a heart to please God, Saul only obeyed God when he felt it was to his advantage. He wanted to maintain control and receive the glory. We don't know if Saul was bowing down as he pleaded repentance, but if he was, he was standing up inside! It was that unbending resistance to God's complete will that made Saul unusable as king.

Samuel told Saul, “Hath 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 hearken than the fat of rams.” (I Sam. 15:22). Behold God's truth. Sacrificing things to God is good, but obedience is “better” because it involves sacrificing ourselves to Him. Sacrifice is only one aspect of obedience, but obedience is more than just sacrifice. We cannot salve our conscience for the things we deliberately do against God by giving up something else or giving a big offering. We cannot compensate for our lack of obedience to God's commands. It's not a question of whether to obey OR to sacrifice; we must do both—but on God's terms, not ours!

This partial obedience is rebellion and stubbornness. Verse 23 defines partial obedience as: “Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the Word of the Lord, He hath also rejected thee from being king.” No way could Saul blame that on anyone else. He is the guilty one, convicted, singled out by God. He is rejected as king; his days are numbered.

He's caught in the act, so Saul quickly admits he has sinned...but still gives an excuse, “Because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice. Now, therefore, pardon my sin...” Saul knew he was wrong, but he was more concerned about losing his kingdom than being repentant. He was not sorry for what he had done but thought he could control his future by a quick apology of sorts. Witchcraft also presumes to control or foresee future events. Failure to carry out God's will (insubordination) is wicked (iniquity); the rebellious person tries to put themselves in God's place. This is a form of idolatry. God would now begin to terminate Saul's rule as Israel's king.

Samuel also told Saul that he would not return to him again because he had rejected God's word. Saul hoped to change his mind, so grabbed onto the hem of Samuel's robe to hold him there a little longer, but he ripped it. He turned to Saul, “The Strength of Israel (God) will not lie nor repent [change His mind]: for He is not a man, that He should repent [change His mind.]” But Saul pleaded one more time, “I have sinned: yet

honor me now...before the elders of my people..." He wanted to save face. His repentance was for all the wrong reasons. It was not true repentance.

Samuel killed King Agag himself before the Lord, but other Amalekites had escaped; their descendants will show up again in Israel's history. Samuel never returned to see Saul. A new page in history was about to begin; it was time for a change.

III. A New King

Man's choice of king will now begin a transition to God's choice. God again calls on Samuel to perform the anointing. He tells him to quit mourning for Saul. This mourning wasn't the same as the grief we feel over the death of a loved one, although it may have felt like it. It was for the loss of what might have been and the fear of what could be in the nation of Israel.

Samuel's grief must have been going on long enough that it was almost sinful. He saw Saul's whole career, knew how deeply he had fallen, and how poorly he had done his job as king. He mourned for his people and the danger that had come from the example that they had seen in their king. If Samuel continued to mourn, the people would interpret it as a rejection of God's will and begin to rebel against Him. God said it was time to get up; look to the future. Saul's rejection was final; it would not be changed. Samuel must put aside his personal feelings and carry on with God's purposes.

God sent Samuel to Bethlehem to anoint one of Jesse's sons to be the next king. This was 10-12 miles from his home in Ramah and not on his yearly circuit as judge. He probably didn't have any real knowledge of the family or the sons other than what he had heard through the grapevine: Jesse was a man of wealth and importance, Saul's "neighbor," a man better than Saul. (I Sam. 15:28).

As seven of the sons of Jesse were paraded in front of Samuel, there were probably some who were impressive in height, as Saul was. Some may have been good-looking or militarily competent. After reviewing these sons, God reminded Samuel, "Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth, for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." (I Sam. 16:7).

After all were seen, and God rejecting each, Samuel asked Jesse, "Do you have any more? The Lord has not chosen these." One more, the youngest, and *behold*, he keeps the sheep." When he came in, he hadn't cleaned up from tending the sheep or been sanctified as the others, but he was a slender, handsome young man, glowing with health, and God said, "Arise, anoint him: for this is he."

So, Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him before his family. "And the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward...but the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him." (I Sam. 16:12-14). After God's blessing was removed from Saul, an evil spirit began to goad Saul, pushing him toward madness. This spirit was a distressing influence that God allowed as a form of judgment and discipline for his disobedience. Since God's protective presence was withdrawn, Saul was vulnerable.

This evil spirit troubled Saul and caused him distress. His servants saw this and asked if he would like someone to come to play their harp for him to help him relax.

They knew of one, a son of Jesse of Bethlehem, who was an excellent musician, a brave warrior, a good speaker, good-looking, with good judgment, and the Lord was with him. So, David was called into the palace, and Saul was relieved of his torment.

This evil spirit that troubled Saul was only temporary and would come and go on multiple occasions. Besides using the evil spirit to bring judgment on Saul, God also used it to bring David into Saul's life. The time he spent at the palace was David's training ground, the first step of his journey in becoming king.

Conclusion:

Saul's confession was superficial. The Hebrew word translated as "transgressed" means "overlooked" (I Sam. 15:24). Saul acted like he had only overlooked some small and relatively unimportant part of what God had commanded. What God called rebellion, Saul called an oversight. Saul put himself over God's authority. He was guilty of a kind of treason by trying to usurp the ultimate authority in Israel. His repentance was only to retain his kingdom and his image in front of others, not because he was sorry.

Most of us don't like to think our disobedience is serious. We think that no matter how serious our disobedience is, once we repent of that sin, we are forgiven and experience no real loss. Scripture teaches that genuine repentance does bring forgiveness, but it does *not* teach that there are no losses. Permanent losses can result when we fail to live up to God's ideal for our lives.

How do you view your sin? Is it something that you think God overlooks? When you ask forgiveness, do you just say you're sorry to escape punishment, hoping it's good enough for God? True repentance requires a change of mind that produces regret and remorse for doing things wrong. It means a change of attitude and action regarding sin, and a conscious, persistent pursuit of holy living, walking with God in obedience to His commands.

"Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19).

Faith, Courage, and God's Power (I Samuel Part 6)

1) Read I Samuel 20-23 and Psalm 11 and 59. What was the first test that God gave to David? How was he different than those around him?

2) What things did David do that showed he was responsible? (I Sam. 17)

3) Continue to highlight the word "Behold" or other such words that give you the same idea (See, Lo, etc.) as you have been doing. Identify why God has had you stop and see what He is showing you.

4) Besides being a Philistine enemy to the people, what was this enemy doing?

5) How did David approach the enemy? What was he wearing? What was his weapon? What was the purpose of each of these things important?

6) What kind of relationship did David have with Saul's son Jonathan?

7) What caused David to be a threat to Saul? (I Sam. 17) How did he use others against him? How did each protect David? (I Sam. 18-22).

Conclusion:

As we begin to look at David, we uncover a pivotal moment in the leadership that God has chosen for Israel. “And Saul sent to Jesse [David’s father], saying, ‘Let David, I pray thee, stand before me; for he hath found favor in my sight.’” (I Sam. 16:22). This single sentence gives us a significant transition in this book of transitions and shows us the beginning of a divine purpose that is profound.

When Saul was chosen, he stood head and shoulders above others, had the look that Israel wanted in a king, a commanding-looking figure of a man. But when the Lord showed his choice, he showed an individual who was a humble shepherd boy. David spent his days tending sheep, yet God was preparing him for a greater destiny even in this lowly setting. He would not be just a leader of the people; he would be a man after God’s own heart—something Saul never was.

The request of David’s presence before Saul signifies not only a shift in the monarchy, but a lesson in God’s sovereign choice. The favor that David found in the eyes of King Saul was not merely a recognition of his skills as a musician, but a reflection of God’s hand upon his life. In this moment, we see how God elevates the humble and how His favor can position us in the most unlikely circumstances.

In a culture that often prioritizes status, wealth, and power, David’s rise from shepherd to king shows us that when we are found in favor with God, His blessings know no boundaries. He may not make us a queen or wealthy, talented, or beautiful but that doesn’t matter in His eyes; God looks at our heart. Because of this, nothing on earth can change or limit the grace He showers on us.

Where do you seek your self-worth? Is it in the way you dress, the color of your hair, the home you live in, or the wealth you possess? Are you searching for acceptance in the eyes of those around you, or are you striving to earn God’s favor through obedience and a heart aligned with His?

When Saul summoned David to serve him, we see how God’s plan intersected with humanity for God’s purpose. He is the Sovereign God who works circumstances according to His will, often in the most unexpected way. Do you sometimes find yourself in a place that seems out of your comfort zone? David must surely have felt that way! There must have been excitement and fear in being summoned to the palace, but it was a moment crafted by God to challenge David to grow beyond his current situation and limitations.

Even in these unusual circumstances that David found himself in, musician, warrior, and comforter, he was ready to serve. He found favor with God and with man. Are you living your life to serve God? Are you willing to stretch yourself to fill the purpose in which God wants to use you, even if it does feel a little uncomfortable? God met David’s needs and protected him through trying circumstances. He will do the same for you.

“And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work” (II Cor. 9:8 NIV).