



KING DAVID

LIVING AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART

// Samuel 1 & 2

By Dr. Steve Jones & Claire Mummert

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How to use this guide

Review the context and big picture every week – The goal of a book study is not just to learn each individual lesson, but to build understanding of the Bible, how it fits together, and how to study it.

Try not to use this guide as a script. The purpose of this material isn't to give you exactly what to say. Rather it is to give you the content you need to structure and develop your own lessons. Teach as much as you feel is important for your class. Feel free to go off topic if your own study leads you to approach the passage in a slightly different direction.

Don't feel like you have to cover everything. There is a lot of material in each lesson. Some classes like to cover a lot of ground. Other classes like to camp on one point and drill deep. Start by teaching the Main Point, then teach the Main Bullet Points. Use the extra detail and discussion questions as you see fit. The goal is to generate discussion, specifically regarding life-application. So don't worry if you don't get all the way through a lesson.

Lesson 1 | Little Did They Know: *An Intro to the Books of Samuel*

1 Samuel 1:1-2

by Steve Jones

Have you been reading a book and come across the phrase “little did they know?” It normally occurs when the narrator is about to let the reader in on a detail that has escaped the notice of a character in the story. Normally this has to do with some great reversal of fortune that they don’t realize is about to happen. We are often like characters in those stories. We walk around wondering where our lives are headed, hoping we will matter in the grand scheme of things, worried that we won’t. All the while, God is saying “little do they know.” The Bible is the story of how God uses people you wouldn’t expect to do things you wouldn’t expect. So often, when things look bleakest is exactly when God is ready to do great things. This fall, in community groups, we will be studying First and Second Samuel, which happen to start off with a “little did they know.” Before we dive into the study, it is important that we gather some introductory facts so that we understand how to find Samuel in the Bible and where it fits in the Biblical Story. An important place to start is the name of the Book. Though they are two separate books in our Bible, 1/2 Samuel were originally one book, simply titled “Samuel.” They were divided when the original Hebrew text was translated into Greek in the 2nd century BC, probably due to the standard length of a Greek scroll. Ever since then, the books of Samuel have been joined with the books of 1 and 2 Kings, which was also a singular book divided because of its length into two parts. The Name of the book “Samuel,” probably comes from the fact that the book starts with him. People have tried to find deeper meaning behind this choice of title, but this seems the most reasonable. It’s similar to the way the title for the book of Numbers was chosen. Numbers is called that because it starts with a census of Israel. The bulk of the book, however, is the full story of Israel wandering in the wilderness. All that to say, it is correct to refer to the work as either 1/2 Samuel or simply the Books of Samuel.

Where 1/2 Samuel Fits in the Bible:

1/2 Samuel are found in the Old Testament. They are classified as books of History. Here is where to find

them in the roadmap of the bible:

- The Bible is broken into 2 groups: Old and New Testament
 - o The Old Testament is written primarily in Hebrew and is about God’s choosing the people of Israel
 - o The New Testament is written in Greek and is about Jesus and the Church.
 - o 1/2 Samuel is in the Old Testament.
- The Old Testament is broken down into 4 groups:
 - o Law, History, Writings, Prophets.

- One of the biggest obstacles to reading and navigating the Old Testament is not understanding this 4-fold division. So, take out your bible, open to the Table of Contents and label the Old Testament books in these groups.
 - o Law – (Also Called the Torah, Pentateuch, and the 5 Books of Moses) Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.
 - o History – Joshua through Esther; These books tell the story of the formation, division, collapse, exile, and restoration of the nation of Israel. (See the passage below on Old Testament history for more on this.)
 - o Writing – Job through Song of Songs; These books are a collection of wisdom literature (Proverbs), Worship Songs (Psalms), Philosophy (Job, Ecclesiastes), and Love Poetry (Song of Songs).
 - o Prophets – The rest of the Old Testament contains the writings of the prophets. They are divided into two Groups, Major and Minor Prophets. This had nothing to do with the importance of each work. It has mainly to do with length. The Major Prophets wrote longer works.
 - Major Prophets – Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel (We include Lamentations, which was written by Jeremiah, in the list of the Major Prophets, though in the Hebrew Bible it is listed in the writings with Proverbs, Psalms, etc.)
 - Minor Prophets – Hosea through Malachi

Old Testament History in a Nutshell

In order to understand any book of the Old Testament, you need to have a basic understanding of where it fits in the scope of Old Testament history. By placing it in context, you will be able to have a greater appreciation for what is going on.

- o Patriarchs – The story of God calling Abraham and working in the lives of His children. This is contained in the Book of Genesis
- o Slavery/Exodus – The story of how God brought Israel out of Egypt, led them through the wilderness and to the Promised Land. This is contained in Exodus-Deuteronomy
- o Conquest – The story of how the people of Israel entered the Promised land, conquered the other people living there, and established an early system of rule. This is contained in Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel.
- o United Kingdom – In 1 Samuel, Israel demands a king. So, God gives them Saul. The 12 tribes of Israel are only united as one nation for the reigns of 3 kings: Saul, David, and Solomon. This is contained in 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel, part of 1 Kings, 1 Chronicles, and part of 2 Chronicles.
- o Divided Kingdom – After the excesses of Solomon, the 10 northern tribes of Israel rebelled, broke away, and started their own nation. From this point on, the term Israel refers to the 10 northern tribes; Judah refers to the nation composed of the 2 remaining tribes: Judah and Benjamin. This is contained in part of 1 Kings, 2 Kings, part of 2 Chronicles.
- o Exile/Return – Both nations became wicked and were judged by God. Israel was destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 BC and were absorbed into their empire. They reappear at the Samaritans in the New Testament. The nation of Judah lasted until around 600 BC when it was also conquered, this time by the Babylonians, who transported many of them to Babylon (modern day Iraq) where they remained in

Exile for about 70 years before being allowed to return and rebuilt the city and the temple. This is contained in the end of 2 Kings, end of 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah.
o For more, watch the intro to this sermon on Ruth (starting at about the 4:00 mark):
<https://vimeo.com/136524262>

- Where 1/2 Samuel Fits in Old Testament History – In Biblical Chronology, 1/2 Samuel follows Joshua, Judges and Ruth. Joshua tell how the people of Israel entered into and conquered the land of Canaan. Judges recounts how the people settled the land and began falling away from God only to be delivered time and time again by temporary leaders called “judges.” Ruth is the story of an event during the time of the Judges. 1/2 Samuel tells the story of Israel’s transition from semiautonomous tribal rule to rule by kings. It starts with the last judges (Eli and Samuel) and moves into the appointment of the first kings (Saul and David).

The Story Begins (1 Samuel 1:1-2)

1 Samuel doesn’t start with any grand introduction. No statement of who the author is or why they are writing. The book starts by zooming in on a story already in progress. The technical term of this is starting “in medias res,” which is a Latin phrase meaning “in the middle of things.” It is how you start an epic story. The introduction of a man we haven’t heard of along with his wives who are having problems might sound inconsequential or irrelevant to us, but to an Israelite hearing this story told, their ears would have perked up, especially with the phrase in verse 2, “But Hannah had no children.”

A story starting this way is almost the biblical equivalent of “long ago, in a galaxy far, far away...” At least two other very important stories have already started this way. The whole story of God calling Israel includes this element. Genesis 16:1 says, “Now Sarai, Abram’s wife had borne him no children.” Similarly, in Judge 13:2, the story of the mighty and flawed hero Sampson starts: “There was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren and had borne no children.” Later, in the New Testament, Luke’s Gospel prefaces the birth of Jesus with the birth of His cousin John the Baptist, born in a similar way. Luke 1:5-7 says, “⁵In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah; and he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶They were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. ⁷But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in years.”

God’s stories don’t start like the world’s stories. God uses people no one has ever heard of, like Elkanah. God uses people whose lives are not going like they thought, like Hannah. He does this, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:7, “so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves.” The Jews knew it. Their ears perked up when they heard a story begin with an insignificant person with a barren wife. They knew that God was about to do something amazing. We need to learn to respond similarly. We all go through periods where we feel like we don’t matter or nothing good is going to happen to us, or life has passed us by. This story reminds us that when we feel insignificant or powerless, we are on the verge of seeing God do amazing things. We just haven’t seen it yet.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are the two major divisions or testaments of the Bible? What languages were they written in? What is the main story of each?
2. What are the four divisions of the Old Testament? What books go in each?
3. What are the major events of the life of Israel?
4. What stories in the Bible begin in a similar way to 1 Samuel? What does this show us about the kinds of people God uses?
5. Have you ever felt like Elkanah or Hannah, insignificant, powerless, and excluded from the plan and blessings of God? How can we learn to hope in those times? What should our hope be?

Lesson 2 | Hannah's Hope: *The Birth of Samuel*

1 Samuel 1:1-2:11

by Steve Jones

I remember one time being at the Houston Rodeo when a storm hit. I was walking out of a stock show exhibit when I looked up and saw black clouds. I tried to hurry towards shelter before the storm hit. As I walked, it began to sprinkle. As I began to run, it started to pour. I finally realized that I wasn't going to make inside a building, so I took shelter in front a food stand that had a fairly large awning. As I tried to wait out the storm, it just got harder and I began to worry that the cover I was under wasn't going to protect me from the brunt of the storm. So, I had to make a choice: stay where I was or seek refuge elsewhere. The story doesn't end well for me. I made a mad dash for better shelter, got thoroughly soaked in the process, and ended up having to miss the rodeo. That story has always served as a picture of how we often approach trials in our life. Simply put, a trial is anything that tempts you into believing that trusting God isn't going to work this time. It usually comes in the form of a choice: stick with God or try something else to see if that will work better and faster. When we are bombarded with lies that try to convince us that God's promises and plan won't protect us where we are, we can do one of two things: either run to God and pour out our heart to Him, or run for cover someplace else that we think might offer us better refuge from the storms of life. The first story in the Books of Samuel is about a woman named Hannah who found herself in a storm. She chooses to run to God not away from Him. God answers her prayer and reverses her fortunes. Perhaps by seeing how her story unfolds, we can gain confidence to follow her example.

Hannah's Problem (1:1-8)

Samuel's story starts with a description of his father and mother. 1 Samuel 1:1-2 says, "Now there was a certain man from Ramathaim-zophim from the hill country of Ephraim, and his name was Elkanah the son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. 2 He had two wives: the name of one was Hannah and the name of the other Peninnah; and Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children."

The first problem that must be dealt with is the issue of polygamy. Like slavery, polygamy is one of those hot button issues that people have both used the Bible to justify and used as evidence that the Bible shouldn't be trusted. Though polygamy is never explicitly condemned in scripture, it was never God's ideal for marriage. Genesis 2:24 says, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh." One man and one woman is how God intended marriage. Polygamy is recognized in the Old Testament as a common practice and is regulated (Deut. 21:15-17), but it is not endorsed or encouraged.

Taking more than one wife was prompted less by romantic desire than by concerns about having offspring to continue the family line and having a large enough family to do the work involved in seminomadic and agricultural living. Having multiple wives and many children was also sometimes intertwined with status issues. For a woman to remain childless, therefore, was a cause of grief and shame.

Given the order in which she and Peninnah are named, Hannah is probably Elkanah's first wife, and it may have been her barrenness that prompted Elkanah to take a second wife. Though Hannah mourned her inability to bear children, her story is like many other women in the Bible whose initial barrenness becomes the backdrop for God's demonstration of His grace and power.

Hannah's Prayer (1:9-18)

Every year, when Elkanah took his whole family to Shiloh to sacrifice and worship, the conflict between the two women would be renewed (v6-7). One year, though, Hannah rises early and goes to the temple of the Lord to pray. Though the text says temple, the actual brick and mortar temple had not been built yet. It is probably referring to the tabernacle which was a moveable temple that symbolized the presence of God with His people.

She is so sad at her circumstances that she weeps bitterly and begs God to give her a son. In return, she makes a vow to God that she will dedicate her son to serve the Lord all the days of his life (v11). Evidently, Hannah hadn't seen Eli when she came into the temple precinct. But when Eli saw her lips moving but no words coming out, He assumed that she was drunk. It was a natural mistake to make. Verse 9 says all this occurred "after eating and drinking." During times of feasting, some might overindulge. Given Eli's quick response, one wonders if this was a frequent problem at festivals. Perhaps that is specifically what Eli was keeping watch for.

Hannah corrects Eli. She is not a "worthless woman" (v15) who is oppressed by wine or strong drink. She tells him that "I have poured out my soul before the Lord. (v15)" This one incident shows the transformative power of prayer. Hannah comes to the temple distraught and unable to eat. She could have drowned her sorrows in the wine and strong drink which was common at these festivals. She chose instead to pour out her heart to God. The results were immediate. Verse 18 says she "went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad." Her circumstances didn't change, what changed was her confidence in God. Eli's words had given her assurance that God would answer her prayer and so she left at peace.

Hannah's Promise (1:19-28)

God does answer Hannah's prayer. She conceived and gave birth to a son named Samuel. Because infants and small children are heavily dependent on their mother, Hannah waited to take him to Shiloh until the child is weened, which meant more than just no longer being breastfed. It probably means something more like "able to feed himself," probably around 3 or 4, though some suggest that it might mean that Samuel remained at home his entire childhood since a 3-year-old boy would be nothing but a burden to Eli.

It is important to note that both Hannah and Elkanah fulfill their vow willingly and gratefully. The sign of this is their sacrifice. They go above and beyond. Most Bible translations say, "a three-year-old bull" but the Hebrew actually says "three bulls." They were so overjoyed and amazed at the goodness of God that they responded not begrudgingly but rather with a generosity that reflects the generosity of God that they had experienced.

Hannah's Praise (2:1-11)

Hannah' story started off in pain but was transformed by pouring out her heart in prayer, and responding with extravagant gratitude. Now that same heart once broken by sorrow pours out a hymn of joy for all that God has done. It is a testimony to others around about what God has done in her life. The focus of Hannah's celebration isn't herself and how she has "triumphed" over her enemies. It isn't even on her son, who she desperately wanted. Hannah's focus is on God who is the one who has done great things.

Her song served as inspiration for Mary who sang a similar song in Luke 1:46-55, which some know by the Latin name "the Magnificat". It can serve as a useful conclusion to this study as well, helping us see the lessons that we can learn from what God has done in Hannah's life. Her song revolves around three themes all of which celebrate the power, sovereignty, and love of God:

- God is the source of salvation (v1-2) – The source of Hannah's celebration is not what she has done but what God has done. She calls God her Rock and says in verse 2: "Nor is there any rock like our God." When things go wrong in our lives, we all run somewhere for safety. To describe those places, the Bible uses terms like "rock" and "refuge." Humans have a bad habit of running to the wrong rock and seeking the wrong refuge. Hannah here adds her voice to the Bible's plea that there is no Rock like our God and no refuge other than Him.
- God is able to reverse people's fortunes (v3-8) – Incremental change is all many of us expect. We look at the mess our world and our lives are in and think it is irreparably broken and that no good can come of it. We think we might be able to get out of the spot we are in, but we will never get to where we want to be. Hannah's song reminds us that God is in the business of completely reversing people's fortunes. He topples the proud and arrogant who think they will never be moved or shaken from their position. And the lowly and downtrodden, He is able to exalt. Verse's 3-8 are full of all the ways that "He brings low, He also exalts."

We don't need to worry when we feel like we are far from our intended destination, or that it seems like we don't have the time or ability to get there, God hasn't forgotten us. God's plan hasn't been broken. God is still able to do great things in and through our lives.

- God Preserves those who seek Him (9-10) – Hannah's hymn ends with the encouragement to do what she is doing: focus on God, not yourself, or your hardship, or what you think is your solution. Verse 9 says, "He keeps the feet of His godly ones," which means that He guides those who seek Him. This is a truth found throughout scripture. When you feel lost, don't seek a new path, seek God and you will find the path that He has for you. Psalm 37:4 says, "Delight yourself in the Lord; And He will give you the desires of your heart. 5 Commit your way to the Lord, Trust also in Him, and He will do it." Focus on God to find your true self and find the life you were looking for. Perhaps best summarized by Jesus's words in Matthew 6:33, Jesus tells His disciples, "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

Discussion Questions

1. What is God's ideal for marriage? What are some ways that humans break that ideal?
2. What does Hannah do with her problem? What is the immediate result in Hannah's life? What can we learn from this?
3. What does Hannah's song teach us about God as the source of salvation? What other things do we run to for salvation?
4. What does Hannah's song teach us about God's ability to reverse a person's fortune? What can we learn from that?
5. What does Hannah's song teach us about God's ability to preserve those who seek Him? How can we learn to do this?

Lesson 3 | Saul Looking for Donkeys: *Seeing God's Providence*

1 Samuel 2:12-17, 22-25

by Steve Jones

Many people have heard the famous quote by English historian, Lord John Acton (1834-1902): "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." What most people don't know is the line that follow this famous dictum: "Great men are almost always bad men." The reason power corrupts and great men frequently turn out to be bad is because with power comes freedom, and with freedom comes a choice: to do what you want or to do what you ought. Every political philosopher since Plato had said that in an perfect world being led by a wise and benevolent king is the best possible form of government, but in the imperfect world we live in it is the form of government prone to the most abuses. We will see how Israel learns this lesson in a few chapters when it asks for a king. It rejected the rule by God, a wise and benevolent king, preferring instead rule by an imperfect and sinful man. And it reaped the consequences of that choice. But Lord Acton's quote is true of more than just great men. We are all prone to similar abuses. As we grow up, we have fewer people looking over our shoulder telling us what to do. As we gain that freedom, we have a choice to make whether we will do what is right or do what our sinful inclination tell us to do. In Philippians 3:19 Paul writes about people who "whose god is their appetite." All of us have to choose between serving the one true God or the god of our own sinful broken desires. Paul doesn't mince any words about people who choose following their appetites over following God, in that same passage he calls them "enemies of the cross of Christ...whose end is destruction,"

In the book of Samuel, sandwiched in between the stories of the birth of Samuel and his call to prophetic work is the story of Eli's Sons, Hophni and Phinehas. They were priests of God like their father Eli, but they used the freedom and power the position gave them to feed their own appetites. They are described in 1 Samuel 2:12 as "worthless men" who ultimately end in destruction. They serve as a powerful negative example of the way that we abuse our freedoms to indulge our appetites. Hopefully as we study their story we will be convicted of how we make similar choices so that we can avoid their end.

Eli's Sons Despise the Service of God v12

After calling them worthless men, verse 12 says, "they did not know the Lord." The writer makes a subtle but stark contrast between these men and Samuel, about whom the writer will say in 1 Samuel 3:7, "he did not yet know." That word "yet" is a powerful one. It suggests that Samuel's ignorance of God was a mark of his youth and therefore of inexperience. The sons of Eli had no excuse for their ignorance of God. They were priests by birth and therefore people who should be expected to know God best. They served in the sanctuary of God with their family.

They had every opportunity to learn all they could about the God they represented. But they refused. They didn't see their position as anything other than an opportunity to take advantage of those whom they had power over.

Eli's Sons Despise the Sacrifices of God v13-17

This story describes the first aspect of their worthlessness that they "despised the offering of the Lord." V17 The books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy contain specific instruction about how to carry out sacrifices and how to distribute it. When a sacrifice was offered before the Lord, a portion was given to God, a portion was given back to the one who offered it, and a portion was give to the priests. The fatty parts were burned and turned into smoke and went straight to God. A designated part was to be given to the priests. There were also parts that were shared by the people who brought the sacrifices. Sacrificial times were occasions of fellowship between people and God. The Shiloh priests ignored all those conventions. The sons of Eli were not content with the specified portions of the animals that the sacrificer was supposed to "give" to the priests. Eli's sons sent their servants to take for themselves "all that the fork brought up" (v.14). The priests could not claim any of the flesh which the offerer of the sacrifice boiled for the sacrificial meal, after burning the fat portions upon the altar and giving up the portions which belonged to them, to say nothing of their taking it forcibly out of the pots while it was being boiled. In addition to stealing from the sacrifices, they began to steal from God too. They began demanding their portion of meat "before they burned the fat," which was specified in the law (Lev. 7:31) as the portion that belongs exclusively to God. The portion which legally fell to the priest as his share was the thigh, which he was to receive after the fat portions of the sacrifice had been burned upon the altar (see Lev. 7:30–34). To take the flesh of the sacrificial animal and roast it before this offering had been made, was a crime equivalent to a robbery of God, and is therefore referred to as being the worst crime that the sons of Eli committed.

Eli's Sons Despise the Servants of God vv16, 22

In addition to despising God's sacrifice, they also despised God's servants both those who came to the temple to sacrifice and those who were attending there to assist the priest. They stole from God's people under threat of violence. Verse 16 reports an exchange between a worshipper and the priest's servants: "If the man said to him, "They must surely burn the fat first, and then take as much as you desire," then he would say, "No, but you shall give it to me now; and if not, I will take it by force." The worshippers evidently knew better than the priests that the fat of the sacrifice was to be burnt as an offering to the Lord (cf. Lev. 17:6; Num. 18:17). They also knew that the priests couldn't take whatever they wanted but were only allocated certain parts of the animal to provide them with food (Lev. 7:28–36; Deut. 18:3). When the people tried to convince them to abide by the law, the priest's servants became bullies. They also took advantage of the women who served in the tent of meeting. Verse 22 says, "they lay with the women who served at the doorway of the tent of meeting." It is unclear who these women exactly are. They could be women, referred to in Exodus 38:8, who had were serving as volunteers in the tent of meeting.

They also could be prostitutes. In some pagan fertility religions, it was not uncommon for temple prostitution to be a part of the “worship” of the goddess. It might be surprising but such practices slowly entered Jewish worship. Hosea 4:14 refers to such practices. Whether consensual or not, the sons of Eli were taking advantage of and exploiting the people in God’s sanctuary. All of this shows us that Eli’s sons despised God’s servants. They saw them as means to get what they wanted and to satisfy their needs. They took people created in the image of God and used them as things to be cast aside.

Eli’s Sons Despise the Censure of God v23-25

Finally, Eli confronts his sons about their wrong doing. He tells them he knows what they are doing and that they should stop. He pleads with them to forsake their evil ways in order to avoid the judgement of God. But they despised the censure of God. Verse 25 says, “they would not listen to the voice of their father, for the LORD desired to put them to death.” The end of that verse makes it sound like the sons of Eli had no choice, that God wanted to kill them so He made them hard-hearted to the warnings of their father. Hard-heartedness is a difficult thing for many of us to grasp. We read in stories like the one in Exodus how God hardened Pharaoh’s heart and we wonder how this could be just. But the truth is that we have responsibility for the condition of our heart. Think of God as the sun. Sun responds differently to clay and wax. The sun bakes clay into bricks. The sun melts wax. Hearts of clay have been shaped by sin. When confronted by the holiness of God, it hardens further. In a little twist of language that doesn’t always come across in our Bible Translations, in the story of the exodus it says that Pharaoh hardened his own heart, but it says God hardened Pharaoh’s heart.

This phrase in Samuel should be understood not as a short-circuiting of their free-will but rather as a judicial verdict being rendered. As in the case of the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart in Exodus, so in this instance, persistence in sin over time results in the inability to do otherwise. God knows we are weak. He wants to forgive. To someone who repents, God would not say, “I won’t forgive you,” but God knows when further opportunities to repent won’t do any good and only continue to harm those effected by our sin and rebellion. There are circumstances in which God determines that there is no alternative to judgment. 2 Peter 3:9 tells us this about the character of God: “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.” God knows when it won’t do any more good and evidently the sons of Eli had reached it. They were despised the censure of God and refused to repent.

Conclusion

It's easy to read the story of Eli's sons and consider them outliers. They seem like extreme examples of sinful, selfish people who used everything as a means to satisfying their own appetites. But the truth is that all of us do the same thing. We presume upon the forgiveness of God or disregard his presence all together. The opportunities we seize are not to know God better but to exploit situations. It is important that we don't disregard their examples. We should be sensitive to the ways we share similar characteristics to them and run the other way as fast as possible. If we don't, we will find ourselves in the same place as them hard-hearted, unwilling to hear the call of God, and unable to respond. To avoid their end, chose different paths than they did. They were worthless men who had every opportunity to know God but still didn't because they were seeking their own pleasure rather than seeking God. They were evil men who used others to get what they wanted. They were hard-hearted men whose souls had become calloused by their life of rebellion making them deaf to the call of God.

Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean that Eli's Sons were worthless men? How does their knowledge of God compare to Samuel's?
2. How did they despise God's sacrifice? What rules did they break? Why is this important?
3. How did they despise God's servants? What did they do to the worshipers? What did they do to the women who served at the tent of meeting?
4. How did they despise God's censure? How do we understand the phrase "the Lord desired to put them to death?" What is the cause of hard-heartedness?
5. How do we sometimes act in similar ways to the sons of Eli? What are the opposite actions that we can take to avoid their fate?

Lesson 4 | A God Who Calls: *The Summoning of Samuel*

1 Samuel 3:1-12

by Steve Jones

I heard a story one time about a husband and wife who both were absolutely convinced that the other one of them was going deaf. They used to construct tests to try to prove who was right and who was wrong. One day, the husband walked into the living room and saw his wife sitting facing the TV with her back to him. He said in a low voice, "Honey, can you hear me?" When he didn't hear a response, he took a step closer and repeated in a low voice, "Honey, can you hear me?" Again, nothing. Convinced of his inevitable victory in this marital conflict, he took a final step closer to his wife and in a hushed voice, repeated again "Honey, can you hear me?" This time he heard his wife yell, "For the third time, YES!"

Though humorous when told in the context of a feuding couple, the same situation repeats itself with us in our relationship with God. We wonder why we hear nothing from God, but the truth is maybe God is speaking but we have become deaf to it. To use a different analogy, just about every place you go these days offers free wifi. These imperceptible signals grant access to the internet to those who have a device able to access it. A person's ability to access the internet has more to say about them than about the one broadcasting the signal. Perhaps God is broadcasting His presence continually but just like a customer in a shop, when we fail to get a good signal, we blame the broadcaster instead of ourselves. The world is full of communication from God. It is our benumbed senses that fail to perceive it.

Unfortunately, knowing the problem and knowing the solution are two different things. How do we recover our ability to hear God? Today, we are going to look closely at the calling of Samuel, one such person who heard God's call and responded. By looking at his story, perhaps we can learn more about the character of this God who calls us into relationship with Him.

Missing the Call (v1)

The story starts with a preface describing the spiritual condition of the times. 1 Samuel 3:1 says, "And word from the LORD was rare in those days, visions were infrequent." It's easy to read this and wonder why God stopped talking, or even shift responsibility to God for being silent. If God has left the people alone, then He and not they are to blame when, as Judges 17:6 says, "every man did what was right in his own eyes." This lack of 'visions' does hint at divine displeasure. But revelation from God presupposes men willing and able to hear and respond. Disbelief and disobedience on our part hinder us from hearing God. However, we should not think that means He isn't speaking. God always leaves Himself a witness. Romans 1:20 says, "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse."

Psalm 19:1-3 says, “¹ The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. ² Day to day pours forth speech, And night to night reveals knowledge. ³ There is no speech, nor are there words.” The whole world is full of His declaration. But sin deafens our ears and blinds our eyes to the testimony before us.

Mistaking the Call (v2-9)

The story begins with Samuel and Eli going to bed. God calls Samuel by name, but Samuel mistakes the call of God for the voice of Eli. Twice God calls Samuel. Twice Samuel runs to Eli. Twice Eli treats Samuel like a child who won't stay in bed. The reason for Samuel's confusion was an honest ignorance. Verse 7 says “Samuel did not yet know the LORD, nor had the word of the LORD yet been revealed to him.” Samuel had an excuse. He heard the voice of God but didn't know what he was hearing. He needed to be instructed. Eli, on the other hand, has some explaining to do. Eli turned Samuel away twice before he finally realized what was going on. Yes, he should be commended for finally figuring out that the cause was more than a kid who wouldn't go to sleep. But I think that we are supposed to read something into the nature of Eli's soul when the writer says in verse 2 “his eyesight had begun to grow dim and he could not see well.” Eli was going blind physically and spiritually. He was in the very place where God promised to make His presence known to His people and yet he was blind to the possibility of God revealing Himself in a personal manner. Well, almost blind. His eyes weren't closed completely. He eventually realized what was happening and told Samuel what to do next.

Receiving the Call (v10-15)

Samuel does what Eli says. He lays down and waits. God calls again this time repeating His name twice. Samuel responds “Speak, for your servant is listening.” And God does speak. He says in verse 11, “Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle.” It is so easy to end the story there. It is inspiring to learn about how God calls and how we can be in a place to hear it. But the truth is that the content of what God wants to tell Samuel is distressing. Verses 12-14 are the content of what God says to Samuel, namely that the judgement God promised to carry out on Eli and his sons is about to happen.

Recounting the Call (v16-18)

Verse 15 says, “Samuel lay down until morning. Then he opened the doors of the house of the LORD.” Samuel woke and went about his morning routine getting things ready. But he was evidently avoiding Eli. Verse 15 ends with: “Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli.” The result of hearing God's voice was not a “mountain top” experience or a “camp high” but rather a fearful thing for Samuel. He heard distressing news about his mentor. When Eli finally confronts Samuel imploring him as his own son to reveal the contents of God's message, Samuel does so. Eli, in response, doesn't get mad, or sad, but simply accepts the verdict of God.

Confirming the Call (v19-21)

Samuel received a hard word for someone close to him. He delivered it. The result of his obedience was that God confirmed His call on Samuel and entrusted him with more. Verse 19 says, "The Lord was with him and let none of his words fail." It also says that all of Israel realized that God had appointed Samuel. Verse 20 says, "All Israel ... knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the LORD." The story ends with the reversal of Israel's fortunes: "the Lord appeared again at Shiloh."

Application: God's Character Revealed

It might be tempting to focus on Samuel to see what he did differently to warrant such special treatment from God. And there are things we can discern about his character like his willingness to obey, his compassion for Eli, and ultimately his courage in telling the difficult oracle. But this story is more about realizing who God is. The key verses in 1 Samuel 2 and 3 are the contrasting descriptions of Eli's Sons and Samuel. 1 Samuel 2:12 says the sons of Eli "did not know the Lord." Compared with Samuel about whom it says in 1 Samuel 3:7, "he did not yet know." Knowledge of the Lord is key. Seeking to Know God is the point. We are all in the position of either Samuel or the sons of Eli. We either don't know God yet, or we stubbornly refuse to know God. This story teaches at least three things about the nature and character of God. Being Samuel starts with learning these lessons.

- God calls – Different philosophies debate the existence and nature of God. Many have a vague view of God like He is an impersonal force like the one in the Star Wars movies. That is not the God of the Bible. The God of the Bible is a personal God who speaks. Hebrews 1:1-2 says it best: "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, 2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son." He speaks in many portions and in many ways, but He speaks. His primary revelation is Jesus, whom John 1 calls the Word of God. This story from Samuel reminds us of this truth. The people had stopped expecting God to speak, so they did not hear anything.
- God is close – More than just speaking, this passage shows us that God is close. The temple served as a physical reminder of the fact that God comes near to us. It showed us that God desires for us to realize that He is close to us. God doesn't call from far away. Verse 10 says, "Then the LORD came and stood and called." The Bible is full of reminders that God isn't far away. Psalm 139:7 says, "Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?" The Psalmist realizes that there is no place in the world where he can go where God isn't fully present. If we are unable to discern His presence, the problem lies with us. Like Eli and his rebellious sons, our selfishness and sin will numb us to the call of God. The solution is as James 4:8 says, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." Seek God and you will find Him because as Paul reminds the Athenians in Acts 17:27, "He is not far from each one of us."

- God Cares – The attribute of God that might be the most difficult to discern in this story is His concern. God cares for us. It's a truth every child in church learns, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His [only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." God's reasons for acting in the world is out of the deep love for all that He has made. It might seem contrary to the words of judgement God sends to Eli through Samuel in this story, but the truth is that God has been patient with Eli and his sons. If Eli is an old man, 90 years old, then his own sons are probably themselves old enough to be grandparents. They have been given enough time to repent. God is now demonstrating His love by protecting those whom the sons of Eli have been victimizing. God cares about the suffering of His people and promises that He is doing something about it. The word that God speaks to Samuel is both judgement for the sons of Eli, and deliverance for the worshipers in the temple. Perhaps that is why Eli responds so stoically in verse 18, "It is the LORD; let Him do what seems good to Him." Maybe he felt relieved that God was doing what he, as their father, had been powerless to stop.
- God Commissions – When God called Samuel, He wasn't just offering the boy a profound, religious experience. He was commissioning him to do a job. God calls us to co-labor with Him. When God first created man, He placed man in a garden and gave him work to do. Genesis 2:15 says, "Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it." When Samuel showed himself faithful in delivering the message he had been entrusted with, God confirmed His calling and entrusted him with more. 1 Samuel 3:19-20 say "19 Thus Samuel grew and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fail. 20 All Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the LORD. 21 And the LORD appeared again at Shiloh, because the LORD revealed Himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the LORD." Such is the same with us. As Jesus says in Luke 16:10, "He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much."

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever been in a situation where you thought someone else couldn't hear you but in truth you couldn't hear them? What is the difference between Eli, His Sons, and Samuel in regard to their knowledge of God?
2. What does it mean that God calls? How do I hear Him? What does it mean when I can't?
3. What does it mean that God is close? What do I do when He feels far away?
4. What does it mean that God cares? How is His judgement also an aspect of His concern?
5. What does it mean that God commissions? How does God commission Samuel? How does Samuel show himself faithful? How do we have the opportunity to do the same thing?

Lesson 5 | A Consuming Fire: *The Ark Narratives*

1 Samuel 4-6

by Steve Jones

I remember the first car accident I ever got into. It wasn't my fault, but it involved blind spots and speed and if I were a better driver, I probably could have avoided it. I also remember how I responded to my first car accident. I hated the sound of crunching metal and breaking glass. I hated the shock of an unexpected impact. I hated the disruption that occurred in my life as I tried to recover from stiff limbs, shattered nerves, and a damaged car...and I never wanted to drive ever again. I remember being reassured by my family that it wasn't my fault and that I would gain confidence as I got better at it. I also realized that the reason I was initially so willing to walk away from driving was because I was finally brought face to face with what was at stake.

Driving is the dream of every teenager. It embodies freedom, independence, and maturity. In an attempt to appear cool and mature, teenagers typically treat driving cavalierly. It's not until the first accident or brush with the law that one realizes how dangerous driving can be. Heavy metal boxes traveling at high speed just inches from each other are recipes for disaster if one is not careful. When faced with this fact one can either retreat or retrain yourself to appreciate the forces that you are employing. It is only after you do this that you are truly able to enjoy driving. The same can be said of God. God loves us and wants to be in relationship with us and comes close to us. But He is also powerful and holy. As Hebrews 12:29 says, "our God is a consuming fire." What His fire consumes is sin. If we don't take Him seriously and approach Him carefully, we will find ourselves getting burned. That is what it means to approach God with reverence and Godly fear. God shows us how to come close. Just like in driving, meaning well and intending to do good are not enough, we must pay attention to what God says about who He is and be diligent to obey what He commands, not to earn His love but so that we can learn to enjoy living in right relationship with Him.

Today we are going to look closely at a series of stories that revolve around the Ark of the Covenant and its treatment by both Israel and Israel's enemies, the Philistines. The stories in the Ark Narratives of 1 Samuel 4-6 show people mistreating the Ark of the Covenant. The reasons for the mistreatment, both by God's people and their enemies, reveal ways they misunderstood the character of God. Perhaps by looking at them we can learn the lessons that they missed.

The Brief Intro to the Ark of the Covenant

Before we dive into the stories, it might be worthwhile to briefly remind ourselves about what the Ark was and what it represented. The Ark is a symbol of God's character and a reminder of His constant presence with the people of Israel. It is known best to us as the Ark of the Covenant, but it is also referred to in scripture as the "Ark of God" (1 Sam. 3:3) and the "Ark of the Testimony" (Ex.

25:22). It was an acacia-wood box covered in gold measuring 2 cubits long (1 cubit =18 inches), 1.5 cubits tall, and 1.5 cubits deep. The lid of the box was also gold and had two rings on each side through which two gold-covered poles could be inserted to carry the Ark. (Num. 7:9; 10:21; 4:5, 19, 20; 1 Kings 8:3, 6). The lid was called the mercy-seat. On it were two cherubim, angels, with their faces turned toward each other (Lev. 16:2; Num. 7:89). Their outspread wings over the top of the Ark formed the throne of God, while the Ark itself was His footstool (Ex. 25:10–22; 37:1–9).

Inside the Ark were the two tablets of stone which constituted the “testimony” or evidence of God’s covenant with the people (Deut. 31:26), the “pot of manna” (Ex. 16:33), and “Aaron’s rod that budded” (Num. 17:10). In addition to specific instructions about how the Ark was to be constructed, God also gave the Israelites instruction about how the Ark was to be treated. When carried, it was always wrapped in a veil and carefully concealed even from the eyes of the Levites who carried it. The specific instructions for how to treat the Ark might sound overly burdensome and pointless to our modern sensibilities and casual approach to life. But the Ark represented the place where God promised to meet His people. As such, the instructions for handling the Ark were windows into the character of God. As we said earlier, God loves us and comes near. But God is also holy and stands a little bit apart so that the consuming fire of His holiness does not overwhelm us. When we don’t obey God’s direction, we act in ways that cause destruction. That is the point of the three stories that constitute the Ark narrative.

You Can’t Demand God’s Involvement: The Ark is Taken (4:1-11)

The first story about Israel and the Ark involves a confrontation with their enemies the Philistines. The Philistines weren’t native Canaanites but rather had immigrated to the coastal area of Canaan. They figure as the chief foreign antagonists of the Hebrews throughout the books of Samuel. The Israelites go out to fight them and are defeated. Following their defeat, they ask the right question. 1 Samuel 4:3 says, “When the people came into the camp, the elders of Israel said, “Why has the Lord defeated us today before the Philistines?” They rightly saw the hand of God in their defeat. They wondered where God was and why God hadn’t helped them. They asked the right question but adopted a terrible solution. The rest of verse 3 says, “Let us take to ourselves from Shiloh the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord, that it may come among us and deliver us from the power of our enemies.”

They figured that all they had to do was bring the Ark into battle with them to guarantee success. Like a magic talisman or a lucky rabbit’s foot, they thought that as long as they had the Ark, they had the ability to get God to do what they wanted. The result was the opposite. Verses 10-11 recount how the Philistines slaughter the Israelite army and capture the Ark. This story is a powerful reminder that we can’t control God or compel Him to do what we say. This stands in stark contrast with other religions, where things like prayers and sacrifices were seen as payments or bribes to convince the gods to act on your behalf.

There are even instances in antiquity where people who demanded the price of their offering back from pagan priests when what they asked for didn't occur. God is constantly trying to teach us that our relationship with Him is not transactional. He acts the way He does towards us out of His love for us. When we try to force God's hand or make Him do what we want, we always end up in trouble.

You Can't Dismiss God Power: The Ark is Sent Back (5:1-6:12)

After being taken by the Philistines in battle, the Ark is transported to one of their chief cities, Ashdod, and put in the temple of their god, Dagon, as a trophy of their victory. This was common among polytheistic societies like the Philistines. They didn't deny the existence of the God of the Israelites, they simply interpreted their victory over Israel as proof that their gods were stronger. The God of Israel responds with terrifying and deadly action without the help of human agents.

First, He topples the statue of the god Dagon. 1 Samuel 5:3 says, "When the Ashdodites arose early the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen on his face to the ground before the Ark of the Lord. So they took Dagon and set him in his place again." At first, they thought it was an accident that Dagon had fallen over and a coincidence that he happened to fall before the Ark of the Lord, so they set Dagon back up. But 1 Samuel 5:4 leaves no doubt: "But when they arose early the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen on his face to the ground before the Ark of the Lord. And the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off on the threshold; only the trunk of Dagon was left to him." Dagon had been toppled. He was prostrate on his face before the Ark of the Lord, and this time his head and hands had been cut off, which were acts of ritual execution.

The God of Israel had not just subjugated Dagon but had utterly destroyed him. In addition to destroying the Philistine gods, God send disease on the Philistine people. Verse 6 says, "Now the hand of the Lord was heavy on the Ashdodites, and He ravaged them and smote them with tumors, both Ashdod and its territories." The Ark was sent to other cities and wherever it went, the tumors broke out. It is unclear what these tumors were. The Hebrew word most commonly means "hemorrhoids" which is why the word gets translated in the King James Version of the Bible as "emerods." But there is reason to believe that they might have been stricken with bubonic plague, both because of the tumors, which is one of the chief symptoms, but also because of the mice, which the people associated with the tumors (1 Sam 6:5) and which we now know are carriers of the fleas which carry the amoeba which carry the plague.

Whatever it was, the Philistines realized they were being punished by Israel's God, so they sent the Ark back to Israel along with offerings of golden tumors and mice. In 1 Samuel 6:5, the Philistine wise men tell the rulers what to do: "So you shall make likenesses of your tumors and likenesses of your mice that ravage the land, and you shall give glory to the God of Israel; perhaps He will ease His hand from you, your gods, and your land."

They understood the power of God and they sought as best they could to make up for their demeaning treatment of Him. God showed Himself as one not to be disregarded or taken lightly. Though this story might sound like one with no direct application to our own day, the truth is that that we frequently demean God's power. We often think that God is powerless without us. That He cannot act in the world unless we do something. That He needs our help. We are called to action. But we aren't called to dismiss the possibility of God intervening and acting as well. When we do, we demean and dismiss God in the same way that the Philistines did.

You Can't Disregard God's Law: The Ark is Sent away (6:12-7:2)

When the Israelites saw the Ark returning, being brought on a wagon drawn by two milk cows, they rejoiced and were glad. 1 Samuel 6:14-15 recounts what they did: "14 The cart came into the field of Joshua the Bethshemite and stood there where there was a large stone; and they split the wood of the cart and offered the cows as a burnt offering to the Lord. 15 The Levites took down the Ark of the Lord and the box that was with it, in which were the articles of gold, and put them on the large stone; and the men of Beth-shemesh offered burnt offerings and sacrificed sacrifices that day to the Lord.

Though it may seem like they acted with great reverence in their rejoicing at the return of the Ark. The truth is that they disregarded several commands God had given about how the Ark was to be treated. Leviticus 1:3 says that only male animals were to be used in burnt offerings, so the Israelites disregarded God's Law when they offered up the heifers as burnt offerings. Also, they shouldn't have placed the Ark on the rock. According to Num 4:5-6, no Israelites outside the Aaronic priesthood were permitted to see even the exterior of the Ark, much less its interior. Verse 19 says that some of the men were "looking inside the Ark of the Lord." God responded by punishing the Israelites for their shameless disregard for the Ark's sanctity and for their violation of His commands about how to treat it.

It is easy to misunderstand what is going on when we read stories about God responding harshly to those who break His commands regarding the handling of the Ark. We wonder why God is making a big deal about a box. Why can't He just relax? The purpose of God's commands is to teach us that we have to learn to obey God and do it His way. Sometimes I think that God gave the Israelites commands that seem arbitrary just so they could learn to obey Him because He is God and not just because they could easily see the direct benefits from obedience. The Israelites knew how they were supposed to treat the Ark, they decided however to disregard God's law.

The Israelites responded to the judgement of God by behaving just like the Philistines: instead of repenting from their sins, they tried to increase their distance from God. 1 Samuel 6:21 says, "So they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kiriath-jearim, saying, "The Philistines have brought back the Ark of the Lord; come down and take it up to you." Just like the Philistines had done in 1 Samuel 5:8-9, the Israelites came up with a plan to remove the Ark from their territory. They sent it up into the hill country to a town named Kiriath-jearim, where it stayed for twenty years.

Conclusion

Just like a teenager after his first car wreck, the Israelites wanted nothing to do with God. They sent God away. They were afraid of God because they misunderstood who He was. It would take the ministry of Samuel to lead them in rededicating themselves to serving God again. Though Israel might not have learned God's character from these encounters with the Ark, it is important that we do. These stories reveal to us that God can't be compelled, that He can't be controlled, and that His commands should not be disregarded.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the Ark of the Covenant? What are its other names? What did it represent?
2. How did the Israelites try to compel God to do what they wanted? How do we sometimes do the same thing?
3. What happened to Dagon when the Ark was put in his temple? What does this reveal about who God is?
4. What did the Israelites get wrong when they received the Ark back from the Philistines? What does this show us about who God is?
5. The Israelites responded to the judgement of God by sending the Ark to Kiriath-jearim. Why do you think they did that? What does this reveal about what they thought of God?

Lesson 6 | Here I Raise My Ebenezer: *Israel Repents & Remembers*

1 Samuel 7:1-12

by Claire Mummert

I grew up on video games. Over time I watched as video games became more detailed, complex, and involved. As games took longer to play and were more difficult to master, the standard “3 lives” that most games started with weren’t enough. Thus, one of my favorite video game inventions was born: the save point. A Save Point is like saving your work on any other computer program. If anything should happen after you save, you don’t have to start over from the beginning, you can start over from where you last saved the game. When do you create a new save point? Normal spots are right after or right before major battles or difficult tasks that way you don’t have to repeat hard victories you already won, and you can be sure you approach coming battles with an abundance of resources.

Our lives need save points too. Things happen. We wander off course. We get lost. It’s good to have points you can go back to and say, “At least when I was here, I knew I was on the right path.” The biblical word for them is Ebenezer, a Rock of Remembrance. There is a line in the old hymn, Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing, that says, “Here I raise mine Ebenezer, Hither by thy help I’ve come.” Ebenezer’s serve as a tangible place to go back to that you can put your hand on and remind yourself that you knew God was leading you and was with you this far.

Today we are going to look at the famous passage where the term “Ebenezer” comes from. On the heels of Israel returning to God and experiencing God’s victory, Samuel erects a monument to serve as a reminder of God’s faithfulness and deliverance. Perhaps as we read, we will gain insight into what it means to return to God and how we can remember God so that we don’t wander so far the next time.

Israel Regrets (v1-2)

There is twenty years of silence between 1 Samuel 7:1 and 7:2. During that time the Israelites experienced a change of heart. 1 Samuel 6:19 says that they were mourning “because the Lord had struck the people with a great slaughter.” They had experienced the discipline of God and like a child who has been spanked, wanted nothing to do with Him. They didn’t mourn their sin. They mourned the consequences of their sin. 1 Sam 7:2 is different. It says, “all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord.” The Hebrew phrase that gets translated “to lament after God” refers to a person following another around pestering them with their earnest questions and complaints. This seems to indicate that they were mourning the absence of God in their lives and were beginning to seek Him again.

It might sound like splitting hairs but the distinction between the two ways Israel mourns is important. In 2 Corinthians 7, Paul makes a distinction between two kinds of sorry: “Godly sorrow” and “worldly sorrow.” 2 Corinthians 7:10 says, “For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death. Worldly sorrow is where Israel was in 1 Samuel 6, sad they had been punished. Such sorrow leads to death because it makes one hard hearted. Godly sorrow is where Israel is here in 1 Samuel 7, sick of their sin, eager to be delivered from it.

Israel Receives (v3)

Israel had been longing to return to God, but evidently didn’t know the way. For two decades, the people had lacked a spiritual leader. Now Samuel reemerges as a young man and gives Israel some direction in what they need to do to return to God. He tells them to “remove the foreign gods and Ashtaroth from among you.” The land of Israel has always been dry. Drought is common. Crops grow reluctantly. Because of that, two common pagan gods were Baal and Ashtaroth. Baal was a warrior god, but he was also a sky god associated with rain and storms. Ashtaroth, Baal’s wife, was a fertility goddess who was associated with the earth. Samuel calls Israel to reject two kinds of false religions. First, when he says, “remove foreign gods” he is telling them to stop worshiping the wrong god. Second, when he adds “and Ashtaroth” to his list he isn’t being redundant, or even emphatic, he is telling them to stop worshiping the right in the wrong way or stop having bad ideas about God. You see, some people were doing what is called “syncretism,” which means they sort of combined Baal and Yahweh, or equated them with each other, and considered them the same god. Where syncretism was happening, people were adding Ashtaroth alongside Yahweh as his wife.

Samuel is telling the people, “Stop going to pagan temples” and “stop bring pagan ideas into God’s temple.” Next, Samuel tells the Israelites to “direct your hearts to the Lord.” Purging their lives of foreign gods and bad ideas isn’t enough, they need to focus on the real God to fill themselves with His truth. But in case some might be tempted to believe that this is only an intellectual exercise, he adds “and serve Him alone.” Obedience is the surest sign of repentance. What we believe is important. But the clearest indicator of what we actually believe is how we act and whom we obey.

Israel Repents (v3-6)

Israel does as Samuel directs. They dedicate themselves to the Lord. Verse 6 contains an interesting scene. When they gather at Mizpah, it says they “drew water and poured it out before the LORD.” This is the only time Israel does this in the entire Old Testament. They were denying themselves liquids as a symbolic confession that the Lord’s favor was more important to them than the life-sustaining water they had gone to Baal for. They were also symbolically pouring themselves out before the Lord, giving themselves completely, holding nothing back. Their idolatry had been an expression of them seeking other sources of fulfillment and success, now they showed God and themselves that they were relying on Him alone.

Verse 6 ends by saying “and Samuel judged the sons of Israel and Mizpah.” Like in the book of judges, Judges didn’t pronounce God’s judgement on the people, but rather were people through whom God called the nation to repentance and renewal so that they could be restored to proper relationship with God and so that God could deliver them from their enemies. And that is what happens next.

Israel Routs (v7-11)

Large gatherings, like the one at Mizpah, normally were how nations mustered their armies as a prelude to war. The Philistines saw the Israelites gathering, feared being attacked, and so they took the initiative and tried to strike the first blow. Israel sees the enemy coming and are afraid. More than that, they have been fasting, so they are also probably weak and tired. But this time, everything goes well. They cry out to God. God terrifies the Philistines with thunder and allows Israel to rout their enemy and emerge victorious. It is interesting that on the heels of repenting and restoring, they are given an immediate opportunity to choose to rely on God or run from Him. They rely on Him and God delivers them.

Israel Remembers (v12)

The repentance of Israel and the victorious fruits that come from being restored into right relationship with God are the center of this story. But if we stop the story here, we miss a key element of staying in right relationship with God. Verse 12 says that after the battle, “Samuel took a stone and set it between Mizpah and Shen, and named it Ebenezer, saying, “Thus far the Lord has helped us.”

Samuel knew that humans are forgetful. When we don’t remember the ways the Lord has helped us in the past, we are at risk of running somewhere else for refuge. So, Samuel sets up a marker, he calls it Ebenezer, which is Hebrew for “stone of help.” He does it so that everyone will remember that up to this point God led them.

Conclusion

This event in the life of Israel presents us with numerous questions we need to ask about our own life. When sin makes us sorrowful, are we simply sad because we are experiencing the consequences of trying to live our life apart from God, or are we lamenting after God Himself, eager to be restored to right relationship? Like Israel and Baal, what false gods do we seek refuge in to handle the difficulties of life? Like Israel and Ashtaroah, how have we allowed bad ideas from our culture to corrupt our view of who God is? Perhaps, we need to follow in the Israelites’ footsteps and erect Ebenezer’s in our own lives to testify to the power and presence of God, to remind us that God has led us and to strengthen us to keep following.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the difference between Godly sorrow and worldly sorrow? How does Israel exhibit both? How do we?
2. Who was the main foreign god that the Israelites were seeking after? Why did they seek after Him? What foreign “gods” do we seek after as well?
3. Who was Ashtaroth? How did the Israelites use her to corrupt the worship of Yahweh? How do we allow things from our culture to sneak in and corrupt our worship of God?
4. Why did Israel pour out water before the Lord? What act could we do to express a similar idea? What does fasting do/represent? Have you ever fasted?
5. What does Ebenezer mean? Why did Samuel erect it? What was it for? What can be Ebenezer’s in our own life?

Lesson 7 | Rejecting God: *Israel Demands A King*

1 Samuel 8

by Claire Mummert

Have you ever seen a child who is absolutely certain that their plan, their way, is the best way forward? Beyond all reasoning, they are determined that they know best. Recently, a child I know started learning how to tell their parents directions home. Or so they thought. They would insist that the family was going the wrong way or that they needed to turn right instead of left at different junctions. Unfortunately, they were never correct about which way to go. As time went on, the child became more and more insistent that they knew the proper way home despite past experiences. What does a parent do in this moment?

In this case, the parent finally said, “Okay, we will do it your way.” They allowed the child to give them directions and followed them to a tee. At some point, the child finally realized they were lost and did not know how to get home from where they ended up and began to worry. But the parent was not lost, the parent knew where they were, and was able to safely drive them home. While this is a story many people (parents or not) can relate to, we are this child. We come to God over and over with our own plan, insisting that we know best. We throw a tantrum when He does not bend to our will. We can see this plainly in the Bible as well. The Old Testament is littered with times that Israel decided to go their own way and ended up lost or in trouble. And while God was never lost, and He would work all things for their good, He does allow them to make mistakes. He knows what will bring them life, but He sees their rejection and allows them to do it their way.

Today, we are going to be looking at the passage in 1 Samuel 8. Up to this point, Samuel has been called and has been fulfilling the role of judge that God has given him, but Israel wants more. We will see what happens when Israel, like us, gets what they want rather than following God’s plan.

Israel’s Wants

As the passage opens, we see that “all the elders of Israel [had] gathered together and went to Samuel at Ramah” (1 Samuel 8:4). Samuel would already know that something was about to happen seeing this gathering, but he waits to hear what they would say. ‘They said to him, “Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Therefore, appoint a king to judge us the same as all the other nations have.” The elders of Israel come to Samuel not with a question, but a demand. While Samuel’s dishonest sons may have been some impetus for this meeting, it is more likely that the people have been thinking on this idea for some time. They have looked around them, seen how other nations work, and come up with a plan to make Israel powerful.

They are already forgetting that it was God who won the battle for Gideon, God who brought down the walls of Jericho, and Him who drowned the Egyptians in the sea. They forgot His provision of mana, The Law, and His presence even in the wilderness. Instead, they hold onto their perceived needs and desires, deciding that a human king is the only solution. When we read this passage, we get better insight into what they actually want.

- **Belong:** The first thing the elders mention is their desire to “be the same as all the other nations” (v.5). They are tired of being different and set apart from everyone around them. They just want to fit in. How many times did we feel this way growing up? How many times do we feel this way now? But God calls His people to be holy and the very definition of that is to be ‘set apart’. Leviticus 11:44 called them to be holy because God is holy rather than to belong to the world around them. God wants something different for them but what they want is to belong.
- **Control:** Further, they ask for someone to govern or “judge” them (v.6). This may seem counter intuitive to us because we typically want to be in control of our own lives and have no one to boss us around. However, that is their same goal. They want to feel like they, as a people, are in control. Trusting in what you cannot see, or touch is difficult. Faith is not easy! They want their lives to feel predictable and regulated.
- **Influence:** Lastly, they want a militaristic leader to “go out before [them] and fight [their] battles (v.20). They want to feel like the rest of the world sees them and knows what they are capable of. They want presence and influence within the world at large. Even this list makes them sound like the child we discussed above, or, more appropriately, a teenager. They are so concerned with what they want for themselves and others’ perception that they cannot see what God is doing. They are so convinced that they already know the solution that they cannot see the pitfalls. They truly thought having a king would solve all of their problems. Maybe this is where you congratulate yourself because you know that having a king will not solve it. But we do this same thing. We put ourselves as kings of our own hearts because we want to belong, we want control, and we want influence.

God’s Warning

Genesis opens up the Bible with a beautiful depiction of God’s creation of the world and all that is in it. In chapter 1 versus 26-31, we get to see some of God’s inner dialogue and thoughts as He creates humanity. He creates them “in His image” and then blesses them, giving them the rules for living in His Creation. Right from the start, we see that God is not only the Creator of existence but the sustainer and ruler over it as well. He looks at it all and calls it “very good indeed” (vs.31). Throughout the next two chapters, we see God communing with His people and attending to His creation. Even though sin will enter the world shortly (Genesis 3), this provides the basis for God’s theocratic rule throughout the Pentateuch.

Conversely, we look to 1 Samuel 8 and see that, in verse 5, the people are asking for a king. The Lord even says, in verse 7, “they have rejected me as their king.” Israel has had many ups and downs throughout their history thus far and we see that one of their major issues is putting other gods and people ahead of God on the throne. Despite what God created in Genesis, despite His continued care and provision for them, they want a human ruler instead. God had given the people judges and prophets to help spread His message, but Gideon makes their

rulership, or lack of rulership, very clear. "I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the Lord will rule over you" (Judges 8:23). God is not opposed to using people to implement His rule, but they are only acting under Him. He is the only one who has the omniscience to rule.

In Genesis, we see a God that is present with His people, walking in the garden and speaking with them. We see God as someone who continually gives. In 1 Samuel 8:10-18, we see a king who will take and take. The people cannot see the truth of theocracy, they cannot see the big plan that God has for them, they cannot see how God cares for them and loves them. Much like their time in the desert after the exodus, they can only see their own wishes and their own plan above all else.

Israel's Woes

In 1 Samuel 9 we meet Saul who will eventually become the king. He is strong, tall, and handsome, everything someone thinks of when they look for a leader. Later when David is appointed, he will not embody these things and God will tell Samuel that, "humans see what is visible, but the Lord sees the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7b). We see in Saul the physical choice that Israel would have wanted and, in the beginning, he seems to have the heart as well. He does battle with God's help and takes his commitment seriously. But Saul fails before Samuel and Jonathan and begins to decline. He ignores God's commands and begins to behave more like the king was predicted to behave in 1 Samuel 8. He takes rather than gives, he is competitive and vengeful. He is not a man after God's own heart. Saul's death in the end is not one of glory and an ending of a Godly life, it is of pain and disobedience. David will take his place and be considered a man after God's own heart but even he will not be the perfect king that that the people had in God. That king would not come for a while longer.

Application

When we decide that we know better than God, we often times find ourselves in trouble. We do not see the greater picture, we do not think about others around us, we are limited, we are human. However, God is omniscience, omnipotent, omnipresent, and omnibenevolent. He is the only one who can truly be king. While we may not have a king over our nation or have the option for country governed by theocracy, we can still decide who is king of our heart and our life. We can choose to take control of our life and insist on our own way. We can try to get through all the ups and downs of life on our own. Or, we can choose to trust and to rest because we have given control over to The Almighty God. We can know that His timing and His plan are perfect beyond measure. We can also rest assured that when we mess up and do it our own way, He always allows us to come back to Him and start fresh. He is not a vindictive parent saying, "don't come crying to me." Israel messed things up by wanting a king and they saw that with Saul. But God does reject them, He gives them David who points them to Jesus. He is not waiting for you to make a mistake; He is the loving father who wants you to come home.

Discussion Questions

1. What is one time in your past that you tried to take control of a situation and it did not work out?
2. What is one time in the past where you were patient and allowed God to show you His plan?
3. Take a look at your life right now. What are thing things getting in the way of you resting in God's will? If nothing comes to mind, pray and ask God to reveal it.
4. What patterns in your life reinforce your desire to rely on yourself over God?
5. What are practical ways that you can remind yourself that God is in control and that you need to let go?

Lesson 8 | Saul Looking for Donkeys: *Seeing God's Providence*

1 Samuel 9:1-10:1

by Steve Jones

Several years ago, I was driving down a street in Austin, TX when a person turned the wrong way up a one-way street and hit my car head-on, totaling it and giving me a minor concussion. Maybe the minor head injury that I got from the accident made me a little philosophical or perhaps the very slight brush with death reminded me of my own mortality. Either way, I remember asking myself why it happened and what, if anything, I could have done differently. I went through the litany of things I had done that day: got my wife ready for a road trip to see her mother, gassed up my car, got a snack at the gas station, ran a few errands, sped through a yellow light or two, dropped some stuff off with a friend, stopped by a used bookstore, and a dozen other things. As I made the list, I realized that if I had not done any of those things, or taken a little longer to do them, then I wouldn't have been where I was at the exact time necessary to be in that accident.

Life is full of variables too numerous to count. Tweak just one slightly, and a ripple of other changes happen as well. One term for this phenomenon is "The Butterfly Effect." It refers to the idea that a seemingly small or insignificant cause, like a butterfly flapping its wings, can have far-reaching and maybe even catastrophic effects. The name comes from a famous example posed by philosophers and scientists that tries to show how a butterfly flapping its wings in one part of the world can cause rain in another.

If you watch movies involving time-travel you have seen this idea played out. A person goes back in time and makes one small insignificant change, then returns to the present to find radical differences from the world they left.

Most scientists and philosophers, though, use the butterfly effect to show more than the difficulty in predicting outcomes in complex systems. They use it as an indicator of the supposed random and chaotic nature of reality. They are unable to account for, much less explain, the seemingly endless number of variables or why things happen the way they do, so they chalk it up to blind chance and random chaos.

But there is another possible explanation: Providence. Maybe the God who made the world is able to keep track of all the variables and to guide all things to their appointed end. The problem most of us have, though, is trying to see the messy chaos of our lives as the purposeful guidance of a loving and powerful God. That is precisely the promise we find in Scripture.

Today we are going to look at a passage of scripture where we get to see both sides of things. We are going to study how Saul ends up meeting Samuel and eventually is anointed as king. We see

it from Saul's perspective first, with all its twists, turns, bumps, and bruises. Then we see it from God's perspective, when it gives Samuel insight into what He is doing. Hopefully, we will come away with a firmer understanding of God's providence and more confidence in trusting Him even when life looks confusing.

Saul's Perspective (v1-14)

Starting in verse 15, we are let in on a little secret that God told Samuel. But the author purposefully waits to tell us that until after we read the random and bizarre way that Saul makes his entrance onto the stage of Israel's history.

Lost Donkeys (v1-3)

The story starts with the tall, handsome son of Kish, but he's not out fighting battles or defending herds. He is out looking for donkeys. Verse 3 says, "Now the donkeys of Kish, Saul's father, were lost. So, Kish said to his son Saul, "Take now with you one of the servants, and arise, go search for the donkeys."

In our minds, donkeys are stubborn and slow. We think heroes should be riding horses. But the truth is that horses were expensive to maintain and not as useful around a farm as donkeys. Donkeys on an ancient farm filled the role of a pickup truck on a modern farm. Maybe not the fastest mode of transportation, but an essential tool for getting the job done.

We aren't told how the donkeys wandered off, but we have to assume it was a big deal because this man sends his first-born son after them. Farm work can't continue until they are found. That is how Saul's story starts, with his father experiencing loss.

Fruitless Search (v4)

Saul has no luck looking for his father's beasts of burden. We don't know how long he searched but it must have been a while. Verse 4 describes all the places Saul journeys: "He passed through the hill country of Ephraim and passed through the land of Shalishah, but they did not find them. Then they passed through the land of Shaalim, but they were not there. Then he passed through the land of the Benjamites, but they did not find them." Saul and his companions journey a tremendous distance, all for no apparent reason or success.

Anxious Worry (v5)

Communication back then was incredibly slow. Planning and scheduling were incredibly complicated. No letters, much less calls, to assist you in keeping everyone updated when plans change. Saul and his father probably thought he would be gone for a few days max. As time started being measured in weeks instead of days, Saul realized his father was going to be worried more about losing his son than his donkey. Verse 5 says, "When they came to the land of Zuph, Saul said to his servant who was with him, "Come, and let us return, or else my father will cease to be concerned about the donkeys and will become anxious for us."

Desperate Idea (v6)

After spending so long searching that they are worried about being lost themselves, Saul's companion has one last idea to try before they head back. Verse 6 says, "He said to him,

“Behold now, there is a man of God in this city, and the man is held in honor; all that he says surely comes true. Now let us go there, perhaps he can tell us about our journey on which we have set out.” It sounds all formal and official, but their words reveal that they themselves didn’t know the person they were talking about. They had just heard a rumor about a guy. In reality, the idea was a desperate one. The pitch would probably sound like this in today’s English: “Hey, isn’t this where that fortune teller lives, maybe he knows where our donkeys are.”

Just Enough Money (v7-9)

Saul agrees but reminds his friend that they have been traveling and searching for so long that they don’t have any money or food left. Verse 7 says, “Then Saul said to his servant, “But behold, if we go, what shall we bring the man? For the bread is gone from our sack and there is no present to bring to the man of God. What do we have?” The servant replies in verse 8, “Behold, I have in my hand a fourth of a shekel of silver; I will give it to the man of God and he will tell us our way.” Saul’s servant has squirreled away the last of their money probably for emergencies. Now he produces it and offers to pay the man of God.

Right Place, Right Time (v10-14)

Saul and his servant go into the nearest city to inquire if the seer happens to be there. They ask a girl on the road who confirms they have come to the right place at the right time. Not only is he there, but he is walking out of the city towards them. Verse 14 says, “So they went up to the city. As they came into the city, behold, Samuel was coming out toward them to go up to the high place.”

The seer, who turns out to be Samuel, tells Saul in verse 20, “As for your donkeys which were lost three days ago, do not set your mind on them, for they have been found.” Samuel then invites Saul to a feast where he later anoints him privately as king. The focus of this study, however, is on the first meeting of Samuel and Saul. We have looked at things from Saul’s perspective. Now we get a window into how this meeting was arranged from God’s perspective.

God’s Perspective (v15-18)

In verse 18, Saul speaks to Samuel for the first time, “Then Saul approached Samuel in the gate and said, “Please tell me where the seer’s house is.” If you just read verse 14 then skipped down to verse 18, you wouldn’t think anything was missing. Verse 15-17 were interjected by the author to show us the perspective God gave Samuel on his meeting with Saul. Verses 15-17 say, “¹⁵ Now a day before Saul’s coming, the LORD had revealed this to Samuel saying, ¹⁶ ‘About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin, and you shall anoint him to be prince over My people Israel; and he will deliver My people from the hand of the Philistines. For I have regarded My people, because their cry has come to Me.’ ¹⁷ When Samuel saw Saul, the LORD said to him, ‘Behold, the man of whom I spoke to you! This one shall rule over My people.’”

What looked like chaos and random chance was actually the providence of God at work putting Saul exactly where he needed to be. These three brief verses help us understand how divine providence works.

God knows – First God reveals that He knows where Saul is and is working to bring him to Samuel. He also shows that He knows the plight of His people Israel. The root at the center of the word “providence” simply means “to see.” The Bible is full of reassurances that we are not forgotten by God, but that He sees us and knows the intricate details of our lives. In Luke 12:6-7, Jesus reminds His disciples that our God knows them and values them, “⁶ Are not five sparrows sold for two cents? Yet not one of them is forgotten before God. ⁷ Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows.” Psalm 139:17-18 says “¹⁷ How precious are your thoughts to me, O God. How vast is the sum of them!¹⁸ If I should count them, they would outnumber the sand.” In verse 17, the word “to” should be translated more accurately as “towards,” “of,” or “about.” The idea is that God has amazing thoughts directed towards us, about us. The whole of Psalm 139 is a meditation on how deeply we are known by God.

God guides – God does more than just know us. He guides us. God knew where Saul was, and He led Saul to Samuel. Some may be tempted to ask: Did God force Saul against Saul’s will? Or did God cause bad things to happen to Saul and his family in order to guide Saul where God wanted him to go? No. God doesn’t cause bad things to happen. But He does use them for His glory and our good. The famous verse Romans 8:28 says, “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” It doesn’t say all things are good. It says that God causes all things to work to produce good in the end. As Joseph tells the brothers who sold him into slavery, “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good. (Genesis 50:20)” This should reassure us that there is nothing that God can’t use to guide us where we need to go. Just look at the negative things that Saul experienced: loss, dead ends, anxiety, scarcity. All of it was used by God to direct him down his appointed path.

God rescues – The last point overlaps with the previous two, but it deserves to be said. God does all this because He loves us and desires to rescue us. God tells Samuel in v16 that Saul “will deliver My people from the hand of the Philistines. For I have regarded My people because their cry has come to Me.” Even in their sin and rebellion, God still considers Israel to be His people. The words in these verses are almost exactly the same ones that God speaks to Moses about His people in Egypt. He “regarded” their situation and heard “their cry” and is about to “deliver My people from the hand” not of the Egyptians this time but “of the Philistines.” We serve a God who is faithful to us even when we aren’t faithful to Him. When we are mired in the destructive consequences of our own rebellion against His laws, He is never wearied or shocked but is always eager to deliver those who cry out to Him for deliverance.

Discussion Questions

1. What does the word providence mean? How does it play out in this story? How have you seen it play out in your life?
2. How can we learn to trust that God is at work even when things aren't going the way we expect?
3. Have you ever felt forgotten by God or others? How did this cause you to act as a result? How can we remind ourselves that God hasn't forgotten us?
4. Have you ever felt completely lost? Have you ever seen God take something that you thought was beyond hope and turn it into something for His glory and your good?
5. What does it mean that God rescues? Who does He rescue us from? How can we learn to depend on His providence?

Lesson 9 | Saul Among the Prophets: *Equipping the King*

1 Samuel 10:1-12

by Steve Jones

Have you ever been in a situation where you were given an opportunity that you wanted but were not given the resources or time to actually do the job? In those moments you feel less like someone believed in you and more like they set you up for failure to teach you a lesson or worse, mock you in your defeat.

Sometimes we think Saul was doomed to fail. We read how Samuel keeps warning the Israelites about the dangers of a king. God reminded them that a king wasn't the answer, that wanting a king was tantamount to rejecting Him as their real king. We sometimes view God choosing Saul as king as one big "I told you so" to the nation of Israel.

In reality, though, God gave Saul everything he needed to succeed. The church later saw in Saul's successor David a prophetic picture of Jesus and a promise of what the Messiah was supposed to be. In Saul, by contrast, we get a picture of who we are. He is just like Adam and Eve, and every human after that. He was given everything he needed to succeed including freedom, which he, like Adam and Eve and we, always end up using to rebel against God and to attempt to make ourselves gods in His place.

We blame God for knowing ahead of time that we will make a mess of the good He gives us. We try to shift the responsibility. Since God knew the outcome, we mistakenly believe He could have changed it by giving us better stuff. John Milton, in his famous work *Paradise Lost*, writes the best answer to such complaints. In the poem, after man tries to blame God for the fall, God responds:

Whose fault?
Whose but his own? ingrate, he had of me
All he could have; I made him just and right,
Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall.
-John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Bk 3, 96-99

That last line is great: "Sufficient to have stood.... Though free to fall." The problem isn't our equipment. God gives us everything we need. The problem is how we use our freedom. It was the case with Adam and Eve, it was true of Saul, and it is true of us.

God did more than just point Saul out to Samuel. He equipped Saul so that he would be sufficient to stand and able to do the work he was called to do. Though in the end Saul used his freedom to fail, it shouldn't distract us from realizing all the things God did do to make sure Saul had what he needed. Hopefully, we will be reminded that God never abandons His people. He is always faithful to us, even when we aren't faithful to Him.

Today, we are going to look at how God equips Saul to be king. Perhaps along the way, we will learn how to seek similar equipping for ourselves as we seek to live the lives He calls us to.

Equipped with God's Assurance (v1-4)

Last week's lesson ends with God bringing Saul to Samuel telling him that this man was to be king. Our passage today starts with Samuel pulling Saul aside and actually anointing him as king. Verse 1 says, "Then Samuel took the flask of oil, poured it on his head, kissed him and said, "Has not the Lord anointed you a ruler over His inheritance?"

It must have been an odd encounter from Saul's perspective. One minute he is in the middle of a long and fruitless search for his father's donkeys, the next he has oil dripping down his face and is being told he is going to be king. He probably was thinking, like we would, "are you sure you got the right guy?"

What Samuel does next is confirm his call by giving him the assurance he needs. On first glance, the text reads just like a slightly boring and insignificant prophecy: First, in verse 2, Saul is told he will meet two men at a specific location, near Rachel's grave, who will give him a very particular message, that the donkeys have been found and his father is now worried about where he is. Next in verse 3, He is told about three men he will meet at the oak of Tabor, what they have (three young goats, three loaves of bread, a skin of wine), and what they will give him (two of the 3 loaves). There isn't any deep symbolism in the place, the people, or the gifts. The point is to show Saul that Samuel knows things that can only come from God. These signs are to encourage Saul to trust Samuel and to assure him that he does have God's anointing as king.

Sometimes we need assurance too. We are confused about the path God is calling us to. When we are, we can look for ways that God is trying to offer us the assurance that we need to trust that the calling we experience is from Him.

Equipped with God's Guidance (v5-8)

The next stage of equipping Saul involves an encounter with a group of prophets. This stage of Saul's journey is designed to equip him with the guidance he will need to lead Israel well. This guidance will come in two forms: God's presence and God's word.

Equipped with God's Presence: When Saul meets them, Samuel tells him in verse 6: "Then the Spirit of the Lord will come upon you mightily, and you shall prophesy with them and be changed into another man." Once that happens, in verse 7, he is told "do for yourself what the occasion requires, for God is with you."

Saul isn't ready to lead until the Spirit of the Lord comes upon him and makes him a new person. Some people think that the Holy Spirit wasn't around until the New Testament and the reference to the spirit here was something just for the kings of Israel. God does send His Spirit on the kings of Israel to help them rule, but the truth is that God promises the gift

of His presence to all who seek Him. Isaiah 41:10 says, "Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand." Psalm 32:8 says, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you." God promises His presence to dispel our fears and to guide our path.

Equipped with God's Word: In addition to God's presence, Saul is also equipped with God's word. In verse 8, Saul is told to go to Gilgal and wait for Samuel who will "show you what you should do." Samuel is going to be the way that God sends His word to Saul. Before the Bible was written down, the word of the Lord was given to man through the prophets. As Hebrews 1:1-2 says, "¹ God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, ² in these last days has spoken to us in His Son." We serve a God who doesn't leave us in the dark. We serve a God who speaks. He reveals Himself in His Word. That word is communicated through His Law, His Prophets, and most completely in His Son Jesus, whom John 1 calls the Word of God. God never leaves Himself without a witness. Romans 2:15 says that God even writes His law on our hearts in the form of conscience.

God gives us both His presence and His word to guide us. It is important to underscore the fact that we need both. Some people seek an experience of His presence. Others emphasize seeking God by studying His word. Both are essential. In fact, they are opposite sides of the same coin. Studying God's word without expecting a living God to meet you there turns the Bible into one more dusty old book of ancient wisdom. Seeking an experience of God without studying His word is like trying to find your destination on a trip without looking at a map.

Equipped with God's Power (v9-12)

The last piece of equipment that God gives Saul is His power. Verse 9 says, "Then it happened when he turned his back to leave Samuel, God changed his heart." Everything happened exactly as Samuel said. When God transformed Saul and he began to prophesy, the change was so dramatic that people were amazed. Verse 11 records how they responded, "It came about, when all who knew him previously saw that he prophesied now with the prophets, that the people said to one another, 'What has happened to the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?'"

The people were astonished at what they saw. Saul was doing something that no one expected from him. And he did it not because he was qualified, but because he was called. When God called him, God equipped him with what he needed to do the job God had for him.

God frequently defies human expectations. He calls the most unlikely people and gives them everything they need to serve Him effectively. God doesn't call the equipped. He equips those He calls. He transforms those He calls into the people they need to be to do the work He is calling them to. God is not only able to take things the world despises and casts aside and turn them into central players in His plan. That is His preferred method. Zechariah 4:6 says, "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit," says the Lord of hosts"

The transformation of Saul was so pronounced that it became a proverb. Verse 12 says, "Therefore it became a proverb: 'Is Saul also among the prophets?'" It was the Old Testament equivalent of "Will wonders never cease!" or "Don't that beat all you ever saw!" It came to express astonishment at seeing an unexpected person doing a job no one could have predicted in a way that was beyond his training.

That is what God promises to do for us when we rely on His power. He promises to transform us into the fullest expression of who we were created to be, something the world and ourselves could not predict. Paul writes in Colossians 1:29, "I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me." When we labor according to God's power, we find that God is at work to do things in and through us that even we couldn't predict.

Conclusion

God doesn't set us up for failure. He knows the outcome. But that doesn't mean He leaves us lacking anything. Like Milton said, God continually makes sure we are sufficient to stand. He offers us assurance to trust His calling. He offers guidance both in the form of His word and His presence. He promises to transform us. The question is what we will do with this equipment.

Discussion Questions:

1. Can you think of stories in the Bible where God offers assurance to people so that they can overcome their doubts and weakness and obey Him?
2. Have you ever needed assurance, or reassurance from God? Did you get it? What does God's assurance look like in our lives?
3. What does it mean that God promises to guide us by His Spirit and His word? Why do we need both? What happens when we emphasize one and forget the other?
4. What does the proverb "Is Saul also among the prophets?" mean?
5. Can you think of stories in the Bible where God calls someone unqualified in the world's eyes then worked an amazing transformation in their lives to make them able?

Lesson 10 | Saul Among the Baggage: *Confirming the King*

1 Samuel 10:14-11:13

by Steve Jones

Have you ever had someone tell you “God told me to _____” and what they filled in the blank with was crazy, bizarre, terrible, or just plain wrong?

I remember one time when I was having lunch with a friend and he informed me that God had told him he was going to marry a particular girl. When I asked him how the girl felt about it, he replied, “well that’s kind of the problem, she doesn’t seem all that interested. And she got upset when I told her.”

Though motivated by a positive desire to seek God’s will, and a correct belief that God can and does make Himself known to us, using terms like “God told me to…” always come across as arrogant and coercive. What is a person supposed to say in response? What is a person supposed to do if they disagree?

In Colossians 2:18, Paul warns us not to trust a person who is always “taking his stand on visions he has seen.” Paul doesn’t say God doesn’t use visions, experiences, etc. to guide us. He says we shouldn’t take our stand on them, meaning those experiences are to be used to direct our path not to compel others to do what we want.

The truth is that God does give guidance, but He also gives confirmation. When God calls or directs a person to do something, He also frequently works in the lives of others to draw them to the same conclusion.

We have seen in previous weeks how God guides Saul to Samuel, and how God equipped Saul to be king. Today we are going to look at how God confirmed Saul as King. Saul wasn’t forced upon Israel. God led Israel through a process where they arrived at the same conclusion as God did. They wanted Saul to be their King.

Saul Keeps Silent (v10:14-16)

How would you respond if you had just been anointed King and knew for certain that it was real and not some hoax? Most people would scream it from the roof tops. Not Saul. He keeps quiet. 1 Sam 10:14-16 reveal an exchange that Saul has with his uncle about what has just happened: ¹⁴Now Saul’s uncle said to him and his servant, “Where did you go?” And he said, “To look for the donkeys. When we saw that they could not be found, we went to Samuel.” ¹⁵Saul’s uncle said, “Please tell me what Samuel said to you.” ¹⁶So Saul said to his uncle, “He told us plainly that the donkeys had been found.”

Saul didn't lie. But he did not tell his uncle about the matter of the kingdom which Samuel had mentioned. Some try to see in this omission as a sign of the shiftiness and dishonesty that characterized Saul later. But that need not be the case. Earlier, in 1 Samuel 9:27, before Samuel anointed him, he asked Saul to send his servant away so they could talk privately. Perhaps Saul considered the matter as something private which didn't concern his uncle. He told his uncle the part of the story that he had a right to know.

I think a better explanation is that Saul did not want to compel the people to follow him. If God had chosen him to be king, then he wouldn't need to force his way to the throne.

God Confirms the Decision (10:17-19)

God starts the process of installing Saul as king by first confirming that Israel still definitely wants a king. It might sound odd or out of place for Samuel to say what he says here. Why the reminder of the dangerous course they are setting themselves on. It seems like the matter has already been decided. God has already chosen the person He wants to be king. Samuel has already anointed him privately. Surely God knew they wouldn't change their mind. And if they did, it would mean that God didn't really have foreknowledge. So, what is going on here.

First, there is a difference between foreknowledge and fatalism. Foreknowledge means God knows what is going to happen. Fatalism, also called determinism, means that everything that is going to happen has already been determined, so our will is an illusion. God knowing the outcome is different than God causing the outcome. God's knowledge of our choices before we make them doesn't mean we are compelled against our will to act in a specific way. If we had chosen to do something different, His foreknowledge would have been different. In this situation, God knows what they will choose and has already prepared for that choice, but the choice is still theirs to make, so Samuel reminds them of the consequences of choice and confirms their decision.

God Confirms the Selection (10:20-24)

Instead of simply telling them who God had chosen to be King, Samuel leads Israel through a selection process referred to as casting lots. The lots were two flat stones called the Urim and Thummim which were stored in the breastplate attached to the robe of the high priest. Some scholars think the two stones, one for yes and one for no, were placed in a bag, whichever was drawn out was the answer. Others think each stone had a yes side and a no side and that using them was basically like flipping two coins. Two heads meant yes. Two tails meant no. One of each meant try again. Though casting lots may seem like leaving everything to blind chance, it should be remembered this was only done by the high priest; it was not done flippantly but formally and prayerfully, and it was rooted in the belief that there is no such thing as chance since God guides everything. As Proverbs 16:33 says "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord."

Whatever we think of the process, the people accepted it as proof that Israel's next leader was selected by divine choice, not human manipulation. Once Saul is chosen, he can't be found. Verses 22-24 records the incident: "22 Therefore they inquired further of the Lord, "Has the man come here yet?" So, the Lord said, "Behold, he is hiding himself by the baggage." 23 So they

ran and took him from there, and when he stood among the people, he was taller than any of the people from his shoulders upward. ²⁴ Samuel said to all the people, “Do you see him whom the Lord has chosen? Surely there is no one like him among all the people.” So, all the people shouted and said, “Long live the king!”

Why was Saul hiding? Some, presuming that Saul was doomed to fail from the start, think that this indicates Saul was a coward or timid, but the truth is that his reasons for hiding might be the same as the reasons he kept quiet. He was a lot taller than the others. He would have stood out. By not being present when the lot was taken, he was able to not draw attention to himself. So perhaps his hiding was him trying to see God confirm the choice without him influencing it in anyway.

God Confirms the Boundary (11:25)

After the confirmation of the king, verse 25 says, “Samuel “told the people the ordinances of the kingdom, and wrote them in the book and placed it before the Lord.” Even though God was not in favor of giving Israel a king, when He did so, He also gave rules for how the kingship would work. We aren’t told what those ordinances are but they are probably very similar to what Deuteronomy 17:14-20 says about how a king should rule, especially verses 18-20, which say, “18Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. 19It shall be with him and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes, 20that his heart may not be lifted up above his countrymen and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or the left, so that he and his sons may continue long in his kingdom in the midst of Israel.”

Israel’s king wasn’t free to do whatever he wanted. The king was expected to study the law and learn to fear God and not exalt himself over those whom he ruled. If the kingship was to function the way God intended, the king was more like a vice-king, himself under the law of Yahweh, Israel’s true King.

God Confirms the Man (10:26-11:13)

God used this process of selecting Saul and establishing the rules for the kingship to persuade men to follow Saul. Others remain unconvinced. Verses 26-27 says, “26Saul also went to his house at Gibeah; and the valiant men whose hearts God had touched went with him. 27But certain worthless men said, “How can this one deliver us?” And they despised him and did not bring him any present. But he kept silent.” God touched some men’s hearts. Others refused to follow. It says they despised Saul.

Saul’s response to these “worthless men” was not to argue or attack them but to keep silent. Again, people try to find fault with Saul, but the truth is he is demonstrating trust in the God who has called him, equipped him, and confirmed him as king. If he is supposed to be king, these men won’t be able to change that.

What happens next is that God uses a military engagement to further confirm Saul in the minds of those who refused to follow initially. 1 Samuel 11:1-2 record the way God used Saul to deliver the city of Jabesh-Gilead from the hands of Nahash the Ammonite. This victory serves as final confirmation in the minds even of his stiffest opposition.

Verse 12 records their response after the battle, "12Then the people said to Samuel, "Who is he that said, 'Shall Saul reign over us?' Bring the men, that we may put them to death." This is their way of saying, "Does anyone still doubt that this man is confirmed by God as our king?" The idea is that everyone is now convinced. God does more than silence Saul's detractors. He has won them over.

What is amazing is Saul's final word in all of this. Just in case the men were serious about carrying out this retribution on those who previously doubted, Saul says in verse 13, "Not a man shall be put to death this day, for today the Lord has accomplished deliverance in Israel." Saul acknowledges he is nothing special, maybe understands why people doubt, and gives the glory to God for offering this final word of confirmation. A good beginning for Saul. But we all know where the story goes from here.

Discussion Question:

1. Have you ever heard someone say God told them to do something ridiculous or wrong? What was your response?
2. Have you ever heard someone say God told them to do something then seen God confirm that word through other people?
3. What are some things that God uses in this story to confirm Saul as king in the minds of Israel?
4. What are something that God can use in our lives to confirm His calling in our lives?
5. Several times in this story, Saul is either silent or he hides? What are some positive reasons why He might have done this? What can we learn from that?

Lesson 11 | Samuel Renews the Covenant: *Starting Over with God*

1 Samuel 12

by Steve Jones

I love baseball. But it must be hard being a coach. All you can do is watch and see if the practice and drills you put your players through gave them what they needed to be successful. But during the game, when something goes wrong, how do you dig them out of a hole. I always wondered what it feels like to take that long walk out to the pitcher's mound to talk it over with a struggling player. I wonder sometimes what they say. How do you tell a player that they have messed up big time? How do you help them see what they are doing wrong? How do you let them know you still believe in them? How do you help them keep from giving up completely?

That is kind of what is going on in today's passage. For the last several chapters we have watched the inauguration of the kingship in Israel. God told them it was a bad idea. But when they demanded, God relented and told Samuel to appoint Saul as king. God gave Saul everything he needed to lead the people well. The kingship narratives end with Saul being victorious over Nahash, the king of the Amorites.

The truth is that Israel's response to the crisis of Nahash was a huge blunder. Up until that point, God had always provided for Israel and protected her. 1 Samuel 12:9-11 shows how God always heard Israel when they cried out to Him, how He repeatedly sent judges like Jerubbaal, which is another name for Gideon, Jephthah, and Samuel.

But the people forget God's faithfulness or perhaps they got tired of always waiting on God's timing for God's deliverance, so they asked for a king. 1 Samuel 12:12-13 says, "When you saw that Nahash the king of the sons of Ammon came against you, you said to me, 'No, but a king shall reign over us,' although the LORD your God was your king. Now therefore, here is the king whom you have chosen, whom you have asked for, and behold, the LORD has set a king over you." This is the first we hear of this, but it turns out that the reason the Israelites demanded a king was out of fear of Nahash. The judges were temporary. Kings are permanent. The crisis is over, but the king remains. And there is nothing they can do about it.

After a demonstration of God's power in which Samuel calls down a thunderstorm in the midst of a dry season (1 Sam 12:16-18), the people respond in 1 Samuel 12:19 by saying, "Pray for your servants to the Lord your God, so that we may not die, for we have added to all our sins this evil by asking for ourselves a king."

Just like a coach walking to the mound to talk to a pitcher who has just given up a grand slam, Samuel summons the people to gather at Gilgal to talk things over and renew their covenant relationship with God (1 Samuel 11:14-15). In 1 Samuel 12, Samuel show them that, though they

can't undo what they have done in demanding a king for themselves, they have not been forsaken by God in their rebellion and that it is never too late to start following God.

We are all engaged in a struggle with sin. The enemy wants us to give up and not to get back up. The enemy wants to define us by our sin in order to keep us enslaved to it. Perhaps by looking at what Samuel says to Israel, we can gain encouragement and insight into how to get up again after we fail and what to do next.

Fear (v20a)

The first thing Samuel tells the people is "Do not fear." It may seem like a contradiction or like Samuel talking out of both sides of his mouth because both before in verse 14, and after in verse 24, Samuel tells the people to fear God. So, which is it? The answer is both. When someone says that we should fear God, people often think it means that we should be afraid of God. But that is not what it means. We are told that God loves us (John 3:16), and that perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18). So, the word fear must have a couple different but overlapping meanings. Fear can mean "to cower in terror at." This definition is often synonymous with "to be afraid of." But there is another definition of fear that means "to wonder and be amazed at." This definition is synonymous with "to be awed by." The difference is discerned in its effect on us. To be afraid of something makes you run away from it. To be awed by something makes you want to draw closer to it. Why is the word fear used? Most of the things that we are awe-struck and amazed by are powerful. Like a fire or a waterfall. We desire to be close, but we have to be careful because it's bigger, stronger, and more powerful than us. Fearing God is to be amazed by who God is and to desire to draw closer to Him.

Samuel is telling the people to fear God but not to be afraid of Him. Don't run from God, run to God. Realize His power, His love, His character. Keeping that before you continually can keep you from sin. But when we fail, it can help us remember to return to God. The lie the enemy often tells us when we are forced to face the reality of our sin is that God won't take us back, won't want us back. The consistent message of scripture is that it is never too late to go back home.

Confess (v20b)

The next thing that Samuel tells the people is to acknowledge the wrong they have committed. Verse 20 goes on to say, "You have committed all this evil..." Sometimes in our human relationships we pursue false restoration with others by pretending nothing happened or by acting like it was no big deal. Sometimes we think that is what God does for us as well. We think that since God loves us, His love means something similar. The truth is God neither dismisses nor denies sin. He is fully aware, more than us, of the gravity, depth, and nature of our sin, and He still loves us. In fact, that is precisely what His love means. God's love deals with our sin. 1 John 4:10 says it this way: "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Propitiation is a big word that means payment. It means that our sin is real and a huge deal. But God showed love by making a way for us to be free from it.

Our way back to God starts by acknowledging who we are and what we have done. We don't need to do it in fear, though, because God has made a way for us to be free from it.

Follow (v20b-21)

The next piece of advice that Samuel gives the people is to focus on obeying. Verse 20 says, "Do not turn aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart." Sometimes we look at the past and beat ourselves up about things we can't change. Samuel tells the people to learn from the past but not to dwell in it. Don't use yesterday's failures as a reason not to follow today.

The only purpose of looking at past failures is to learn reasons why we fail and to discern patterns that we can try to undo going forward. Hebrews 12:1 tells us that in order to run the race set before us we need to "lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us". Many times our ability to follow effectively is hindered by the fact that we really don't see or don't take seriously the things that keep tripping us up.

That is why Samuel's next advice is to be aware of what entices you off the path of following God. Verse 21 says, "You must not turn aside, for then you would go after futile things which cannot profit or deliver, because they are futile."

If we are to follow effectively, we have to figure out what is able to distract us and divert us into dead ends of futility, frustration, and false fulfillment. The best description and discussion of these things is found in 1 John 2:16, which says, "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world." "Loving the world" does not mean caring for and enjoying the things of this world. It is an attitude of the heart that sees in the world the false promises of profit and deliverance mentioned by Samuel. John mentions three things that characterize this sinful loving of the world.

1. Lust of the Flesh – The lust of the flesh is the desire for pleasure. The constant quest for pleasure is a sinful way in which we love the world. God did create the world, but when we see the world as primarily an object to be used by us to make ourselves feel good, we have gone off the rails.

2. Lust of the Eyes – The lust of the eyes is the desire of possessions. The world is full of shiny objects that distract and compete for our attention. Again, God gives us things to bless us. But when we focus on the thing and think it is this thing that will make us happy, then we are distorting what God created good.

3. Pride of Life – The pride of life is the desire for position, to be elevated and exalted over other people. God does create positions of leadership and calls people to serve in them. But when sin takes over, we come to view ourselves as better than other people. Or perhaps we think that our life is unable to have meaning unless we are a CEO or some other visible position that will get us praise from others.

All of these are distortions of the good things that God created and filled the earth with. They are sinful because they whisper in our ear that we can be happy apart from God, if only we had these things. They lie. They get us to get off the path of following God. They lead us to dead ends.

Remember (v22-24)

One of the main reasons we get sucked into sin is not that we don't know any better, but that we forget. What do we forget? Everything. We forget what we are supposed to be doing. We forget how God has been faithful to us. We forget the times God has worked mightily in the past. If we could only remember, we would be in a better position to trust and obey. That is one reason why Paul, in the New Testament, tells the young pastor Timothy that his primary job isn't to be original, or clever, or profound, but simply, to "Remind them of these things (2 Timothy 2:14)." The Greek is more emphatic. It says, "keep reminding them of these things." It's not a one time thing. It is a continual process. That is why Samuel concludes his sermon with a call to remember.

Remember God's Promises (v22) – The first thing Samuel tells Israel to remember is that God has promised to be faithful to His people, even when they aren't faithful to Him. Verse 22 says, "For the Lord will not abandon His people on account of His great name, because the Lord has been pleased to make you a people for Himself." One of the chief purposes of scripture is to remind us about the promises of God.

Remember God's Protection (v23) – One of God's chief promises is that He will protect us. God's protection is not primarily from the harsh dangers of the world, but rather from the destructiveness of sin. God desires to keep us from the death that sin brings. That is why Samuel says in verse 23, "Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you; but I will instruct you in the good and right way." God protects us by sending faithful leaders who will petition God on our behalf, and who will instruct us on the path God says is both good and right." God protects us by showing the path that leads to life and by sending expert guides to keep us from wandering off.

Remember God's Provision (v24) – We are easily attracted to sin when we think God has forgotten us, or that He can't handle this particular situation. That is why in verse 24 Samuel says, "Only fear the Lord and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider what great things He has done for you." When we consider what God has done, we remember how He has handled similar situations in the past and have the confidence to trust Him in the present.

Remember God's Power (v25) – It might seem like an odd way to end a sermon whose point is to renew the covenant and restart people on the path of faithful following, but verse 25 reminds people of God's power, specifically to bring discipline and judgement. Verse 25 says, "But if you still do wickedly, both you and your king will be swept away." Samuel isn't saying "You get one more chance, after that God isn't gonna help you anymore." He is reminding people not to take advantage of or take lightly the grace of God. God knows our weakness and frailty.

God is patient and forgiving. He also knows our heart. He knows when we are sincerely repentant even for a sin we keep stumbling in. He also knows that we sometimes misuse the promise of forgiveness as reason to continue in sin. So, Samuel reminds them that God is powerful and will protect others from the wickedness of our sin if we continue in it.

Conclusion

Starting over is hard. Especially after a monumental failure whose consequences cannot be undone. This passage in Samuel shows us that God never gives up on us. It is never too late, we are never so far gone that we cannot start again with God. The starting point is learning to fear, confess, follow, and remember.

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever been in a place of regret over past failures and weren't sure what to do next? How was Israel's situation in the lesson similar? What did Samuel do?
2. What are the two meanings of fear? How do we misunderstand what it means to fear God? What does it mean to fear God?
3. What is the purpose of confession? What roll does it play in renewing our relationship with God? What are some synonyms for confession?
4. What hinders us from following God better? What does It mean to turn aside to futile things? What do "lust of the flesh," "lust of the eyes," and "boastful pride of life" mean?
5. Why will remembering help us follow God better? How can we remember better?

Lesson 12 | Saul's First Failure: *Excusing Sin*

1 Samuel 13:1-15

by Steve Jones

Have you ever tried to talk yourself out of a traffic ticket? For some reason, seeing police lights in our rearview brings out the worst in everyone. In that moment, many people are willing to say whatever they can to keep from getting a ticket. No officer, I had no idea I was speeding. I thought I was still on the highway. Are you sure it was me and not the person next to me that was speeding? I normally go the speed limit; I must have accelerated a little bit coming down that hill. I am late for a court appearance, doctors' appointment, child's recital. Many people are willing to say whatever they can to get out of that situation without points on their license.

I remember the first ticket I got. Yes, I wasn't successful in talking my way out of it and actually got the ticket. To avoid it going on my record and raising my insurance rates, I elected to take a defensive driving course. This was before you could do it all online, so I took myself down to the strip mall on a Saturday morning and prepared to sit through a day of reminders about basic traffic laws.

The first lecture took me by surprise. It wasn't a preachy condescending lecture about the dangers of unsafe driving featuring graphic depictions of accidents. It was basically a math lesson where the speaker proved that speeding was pointless. Going faster than normal didn't make up any amount of time at all. It gives the illusion of helping but all it does is magnify the dangers of driving significantly. He then asked how many of us knew that. None of us did. He used this as the starting point to illustrate that the ways we had approached driving had been incredibly risky. The speaker then asked us each to remember the traffic stop and asked us what we thought of the officer. Did we think he was overreacting, or mean, or a jerk for giving us the ticket? He asked us to consider the other things the officer had seen on that stretch of highway. He concluded by saying that perhaps the officer wasn't overreacting, but we were making excuses for taking driving so lightly and endangering others in the process.

It was true. We hadn't experienced the negative consequences of speeding, so as far as we were concerned there weren't any. Sometimes we think that way about God and sin too. We disregard His commands then are startled when we experience consequences. When confronted with our sin, we make excuses. We try to talk ourselves out of it. We have been doing it since the beginning. We have been blaming everyone but ourselves for our sin ever since God confronted Adam about whether he had eaten from the tree he wasn't supposed to eat from and Adam responded "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate. (Genesis 3:12)." The woman was to blame. Even God was to blame for giving Adam the woman. But Adam didn't deserve the ticket.

Today we are going to look at a similar situation in the life of Saul. We are going to look at Saul's first failure and watch how he excuses his sin. Perhaps in doing so we will learn why this is so dangerous and be reminded not to do so ourselves.

Saul Disobeys (v1-9)

This is the story of how the reign of Saul began to unravel. It starts with Saul's son Jonathan picking a fight with the Philistines. Verse 3 says, "Jonathan smote the garrison of the Philistines that was in Geba, and the Philistines heard of it." The word translated "garrison" means, literally, something erected; probably like a pillar or flag, something erected by the Philistines to mark their territory. Jonathan probably tore it down in secret, perhaps at night. It was a minor action like defacing a monument or tearing down a flag, which is why it says that "the Philistines heard of it." One of their forts didn't experience an attack. One of their territory markers was torn down.

It might have been minor, but it represented a challenge to the authority of the Philistines, so they responded by raising an army. When the Israelites see their enemies have superior numbers and superior technology, they feel frightened and intimidated and begin to flee. Even the ones that remain, verse 7 says, were "trembling."

In 1 Samuel 10:8, Samuel had told Saul, "you shall go down before me to Gilgal; and behold, I will come down to you to offer burnt offerings and sacrifice peace offerings. You shall wait seven days until I come to you and show you what you should do." 1 Samuel 13:8 says Saul "waited seven days, according to the appointed time set by Samuel, but Samuel did not come to Gilgal; and the people were scattering from him."

In the absence of Samuel, with his army disintegrating before his eyes, in an attempt to boost morale, Saul does what he shouldn't. 1 Samuel 13:9 says, "So Saul said, "Bring to me the burnt offering and the peace offerings." And he offered the burnt offering."

The problem is that Saul is not authorized to offer sacrifice. He is authorized to act as judge and warrior, but not to act as a priest. That crucial social role has been retained by Samuel, and Saul has been told to wait for him.

Saul Defends (v10-12)

Almost immediately on the heels of Saul's disobedience, Samuel shows up. Saul goes out to meet him and is greeted by Samuel saying in verse 11, "What have you done?" What follows is the real center of the story. The debate between Saul and Samuel reveals how they both see Saul's disobedience. Ultimately, Saul's attitude about what he did is more decisive than his action in causing Samuel to pronounce final judgment on Saul's legacy as king.

First, Saul blames everybody but himself. In verse 11, he says, "I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come within the appointed days, and that the Philistines were assembling at Michmash." He blames his soldiers, who were deserting. He blames Samuel, who was late. He blames the Philistines, who were massing in large numbers.

Saul also exonerates himself completely. He tries to say that he was “compelled” (lit., “forced myself”) to perform the sacrifice because he feared that the Philistines would attack him before he had “sought the Lord’s favor” (v. 12). It is bewildering proof of Saul’s spiritual blindness that he believed the God’s favor could be gain by disobeying God’s law.

Samuel Declares (v13-15)

Samuel is unequivocal in condemning Saul. In verse 13 Samuel tells Saul, “You have acted foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you” What command? In 1 Samuel 10:8, Samuel told Saul to wait 7 days. Saul did that and Samuel didn’t come. What was Saul supposed to do?

The truth is that Saul was doing the bare minimum he felt necessary. The seven-day time frame was the least important part of the command Samuel gave Saul in 1 Samuel 10:8: “You shall wait seven days until I come to you and show you what you should do.” Samuel said “Wait for me to come and tell you what to do. I will be there on the 7th day.” What Saul heard was “wait 7 days.” So as soon as he felt like the sun had risen on the 7th day, Saul sacrificed. Proof he was wrong in doing so: Samuel showed up immediately after the sacrifice. Samuel hadn’t even been wrong about when he would arrive. He came on the seventh day like he said he would.

The result of Saul’s disobedience is that he is out, replaced by “a man after God’s own heart” which means a man who truly has God’s interests at heart. This episode is supposed to show us that being a king in Israel is different than other nations. In Israel, God is the real king, and obedience to Him must be paramount even for the earthly king. Saul’s action was the equivalent of rebellion against Israel’s real king.

This episode has a powerful and sad ending. Verse 15 says, “Then Samuel arose and went up from Gilgal to Gibeah of Benjamin. And Saul numbered the people who were present with him, about six hundred men.” There is something deeply symbolic about Samuel leaving Saul all alone. Saul didn’t want to obey God’s word, so Samuel departs. Saul is left with the sad reality that his disobedience hadn’t even achieved his desire of preventing his army from fleeing. He has a few hundred men. That is all. He has no army. He has no Samuel. He is all alone.

What Saul Did Wrong

It’s easy to read this passage and feel like God and Samuel are overreacting. Why can’t they relax? Saul makes one tiny mistake and God doesn’t just reprimand Saul but removes His blessing from Saul’s reign and promises to remove him as king. But the truth is that this is more than just about Saul’s actions. It is about his heart as well. In the previous chapter, we saw how Samuel led the people in a renewal of the covenant. He showed them that God is always willing to accept those who repent and return. He gave them four things they needed to do: Fear God, Confess their Sin, Follow God Earnestly, and Remember all that God has done for them. Keeping that grid in mind, this passage we are looking at today shows Saul rejecting every single one of those tenants.

Saul Feared the Wrong Thing

Instead of fearing God, Saul feared the Philistine army and the rejection of his people. Remember the two definitions of fear: to be amazed at, and to be afraid of. By changing his focus from his God to his problems, he ceased to be amazed at what God could do and started to worry about what his enemies would do to his dwindling army. He became a false prophet of his own demise and it led him into disobedience.

Instead of Confessing, Saul Blamed

I wonder what would have happened if Saul would have fallen on his face when confronted by Samuel. I wonder if the story would have ended differently. We know that Saul's successor David was far from perfect, but when David was confronted with his sin with Bathsheba, He confessed and repented. That is in stark contrast with Saul, who blames everyone except himself.

Saul "Technically" Followed

Instead of following earnestly and with a whole heart, Saul was trying to do the bare minimum. He told Samuel, "look, you said wait seven days. I waited seven days. You weren't here, so I did what I had to do." He wasn't looking to obey. He was trying to give the appearance of obedience while still finding a way to do what he wanted. He was living in the land of "technically."

Saul Forgot instead of Remember

There are countless stories of God delivering His people in the face of insurmountable numbers. But Saul didn't remember any of them. Saul didn't have to look back into Israel's past for instances of God's deliverance and activity. Saul had seen God do mighty things in his own life, most recently when God aided Saul in battle against Nahash and the Ammonites. Saul forgot all of this. He thought the current crisis was bigger than all previous ones and at the first sign of strain chose disobedience.

Conclusion

This story serves as a strong counterpoint to the previous passage. It shows us the dangers of taking sin lightly. The problem isn't primarily that Saul sins. We all sin. God knows we do. The problem is that when confronted with his sin he tried to do everything except repent. He didn't think it was a big deal and he wanted Samuel and God to overlook it. Ultimately, he wanted God to do what he wanted and not the other way around. The result reveals the folly of choosing that path. We would do well to avoid it.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the two definitions of fear? What does Saul fear in this story? How can we tell what we fear? How can we learn to fear God?
2. Who does Saul blame besides himself for his disobedience? How do we do the same thing? How can we choose confession instead of blame?
3. What does it mean that Saul “technically” obeyed? What is the problem with technical obedience? How do we do the same thing?
4. How did Saul show that he had forgotten what God had done for him? How can we keep from doing the same?
5. How did Saul try to excuse his sin? Why did this disqualify him from being king? How do we try to excuse our own sin?

Lesson 13 | Saul's Final Failure: *To Obey Is Better Than Sacrifice*

1 Samuel 15

by Steve Jones

Have you ever been in a situation where you saw somebody struggling and you wanted to help? The only problem was they didn't want your help. Maybe it was an underperforming employee, or a student who keeps missing assignments, or that relative with the poor money management skills. You keep trying to find ways to give them what they need to get out of the messes they keep finding themselves in, but it never seems to help. The employee's problems persist. The student doesn't seem interested in either learning the subject or turning work in on time. The relative with money troubles keep falling into money troubles over and over.

That's when you realize it. They don't want help in getting out of a situation. They want to stay where they are and be who they are. They just want you to bail them out of the consequences of their poor choices so they can go and continue to make them. At some point you realize that you are being preyed upon. This person is a consumer of your good will, your good intentions, your kindness, and your help. The only solution is to cut ties. It's time for the employee to find a different job. It's time for the student to receive the grade they earned. It's time for the relative with money problems to cut up the credit cards and declare bankruptcy.

This is precisely what we see played out in the life of Saul. God called Saul and equipped him with everything he needed to be the king Israel needed. The problem was that he kept failing. But he never seems to realize that what he did was really all that bad. He wanted to blame others for it or have God overlook it, but he never wants to confess, repent, and grow into a person who doesn't stumble into that sin anymore. In short, he wants to be excused and exonerated rather than forgiven and transformed.

Today's story is about how God finally has enough of Saul and cuts ties with him immediately. Saul's first failure led to Samuel telling him that his kingdom wouldn't last beyond him. This final failure is the one that ends his reign immediately. In the next chapter, Samuel goes to visit the house of Jesse and anoints David as the next king. Though it takes a while for David to finally ascend to the throne, God has moved on from Saul. All that remains after this is to watch the death throws as Saul's reign passes away.

The passage we look at today shows us the moment when God decided Saul was no longer qualified to be king. We don't have a kingdom to lose, but perhaps by looking at what Saul got wrong, we can learn more about who God is and who God desires us to be. Perhaps we will see how we behave like Saul, looking for God to excuse our sin and bail us out, rather than forgive us and rescue us from it.

Samuel Commissions Saul (v1-9)

The story starts with Samuel sending Saul off to war to destroy the Amalekites. Amalekites were a Canaanite people who had made war against the Israelites since the Israelites came up from Egypt. The God of Israel had promised to judge the Amalekites for their wickedness and sin. Now, God had chosen Saul as the instrument to carry out His judgement.

One aspect of the Lord's command sounds particularly harsh to our sensibilities. Verse 3 says, "Now go and strike Amalek and utterly destroy all that he has, and do not spare him; but put to death both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey." It is not hard to read this and be outraged at the horror that God seems to be decreeing. How could God allow innocent women and children to be slaughtered. Not just allow, how could God command His army to do such atrocities? Surely if this was the modern world, God would be charged with war crimes for such a command.

To understand the passage, though, perhaps a little context is required. To start with, escape was possible. In fact, verse 6 shows how Saul alerted some allies of the Amalekites about the coming war and encouraged them to be gone before the fighting started. In the modern world, when a war starts, women and children are transported away from the fighting. Such was probably the case in ancient times as well.

Also, the focus of this command was not about reckless, indiscriminate slaughter but about preventing the Israelite army from looting. In ancient times, kings paid their armies after the fact with the proceeds of the conquest, whether it be gold, or goods plundered, or people taken as slaves. God's command was focused on preventing the armies from benefiting from the war they were waging by acquiring things that could enrich them. The task they had been given was solemn and holy. They were agents of the Lord's justice and judgement. They were not to use it as an opportunity to enrich themselves along the way.

Proof that this is precisely the focus and the problem can be seen in how Saul breaks this command. Verse 9 says, "Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were not willing to destroy them utterly; but everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed." They kept all that was good. They destroyed what they didn't want but they kept what was valuable for themselves.

Samuel Confronts Saul (v10-21)

Samuel learns of Saul's disobedience when the Lord tells him in verse 11, "I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following Me and has not carried out My commands." The information breaks Samuel's heart and after praying all night (v11b), Samuel goes to confront Saul. He finds Saul not mourning his lapse in judgement or worshipping God like he says later he wanted to do, but rather celebrating himself. Verse 12 says, "Saul came to Carmel, and behold, he set up a monument for himself, then turned and proceeded on down to Gilgal."

When Saul meets Samuel, he says in verse 13, “Blessed are you of the Lord! I have carried out the command of the Lord.” To which, Samuel immediately replies in verse 14, “What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?” Basically saying, “Oh, you carried out God’s command? Really? Then whose sheep and cows do I hear?”

What follows is a give and take between Samuel and Saul where Samuel says, “didn’t God tell you not to keep anything? Then how come you did?” And Saul keeps saying “I did obey...it was the people who didn’t listen.” He then adds that they did it not to benefit themselves but to have something with which to worship God.

Samuel Condemns Saul (v22-35)

Samuel condemns Saul with the powerful phrase in verse 22, “to obey is better than sacrifice,” which means that it’s better to do what God commands rather than to do with good intentions and motives what God forbids. In verse 23, Saul’s disobedience is called “rebellion” and “insubordination” and equated with “divination” and “idolatry.” Saul has “rejected the word of the Lord,” and for that reason Samuel tells Saul that God “has also rejected you from being king.”

Saul is sad that he might lose the kingship, but he still doesn’t realize what he has done wrong. In verse 25, Saul says, “please pardon my sin and return with me, that I may worship the Lord.” What does he mean by inviting Samuel to worship the Lord? He wants to sacrifice some of the sheep and ox that he wasn’t supposed to keep. He doesn’t really repent of his action or regret his decision. He just hopes he can appease God or buy Him off with a cut of the spoils.

Saul’s true heart is finally revealed in verse 30: “I have sinned; but please honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel, and go back with me.” His main focus is not on pleasing God but on not looking bad before his people. He doesn’t want Samuel to disrespect him in front of everyone.

Saul is not a man after God’s own heart but after his own and the people’s. In the next chapter we will see God finding a man who is better fit to be king. But what can we learn from this episode that will enable us to avoid Saul’s mistakes?

Application

As he has done in the past, Saul blames others for his actions rather than confessing and repenting. Beyond that, though, there are other ways Saul fails that illustrate the reasons God rejected him as king.

Pleasing Man vs Pleasing God – Saul cares about disappointing the people more than he does about disappointing God. God said not to take spoils. They people wanted to, so Saul allowed it. Saul had to choose, and the opinion of people won out over God. This is just another way of saying that He feared man more than he feared God. You can’t please everyone. Who you fear is the one you most want to please and least want to disappoint.

Appearances vs Heart – He admits to disobeying God by taking spoils but claims it was because he wanted to worship God. Even though Saul had disobeyed God, he wants to appear like everything is ok. He tries to gloss over his disobedience under a smokescreen of false pretenses and religious devotion. He cares more about how he appears rather than who he really is. This is in stark contrast with what God tells Samuel in 1 Samuel 16:7, the very next chapter, when David is anointed king: “Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

Exalting Self vs Serving God – At the center of Saul’s failing is that he wasn’t serving God. He was using God to exalt himself. That is why after the battle he doesn’t immediately worship like he claims. In verse 12 we see him taking a victory lap from Carmel to Gilgal and setting up monuments to himself. We run the same risk when we try to use God to get what we want out of life rather than submitting to what He, in His wisdom and love, gives us. We exalt ourselves when we treat His commands like good advice to be taken under advisement and followed ultimately when we see the direct benefit to us. Serving God requires humility, acknowledging we are broken, sinful, finite people who don’t always know what is best for us. It is an act of surrender, something we will only do if we trust God and believe He loves us.

Discussion Questions

1. Did God sanction the indiscriminate slaughter of innocent people? How should we understand the point and focus of God’s commands to Israel?
2. How does Saul blame others instead of repenting for what he did? How do we do the same thing?
3. How does Saul show that he cares more about the opinions of men than of God? How do we do the same thing?
4. How does Saul emphasize appearances over heart? How do we do the same thing?
5. How does Saul exalt himself instead of serving God? How do we do the same thing?

Lesson 14 | Samuel Anoints David: *Letting God Lead*

1 Samuel 16

by Claire Mummert

The theme of Israel's journey throughout the Old and New Testament as well as the theme for the Christian life is that we want what we want, and we get mad at God when He won't give it to us. We struggle and wrestle with Him to take control of our life and have our own plan. We don't understand why God won't just stick with our plan and make it work. We are convinced that we know the best way. There's a quote from Elon Musk that reminds me so much of this ideal we have whether tacitly or explicitly.

It's okay to have your eggs in one basket as long as you control what happens to that basket.
– Elon Musk

We often believe that in order for our life to work out, for things to go as they should, we need to be in control of everything.

But this proves wrong in the life of Israel as well as our own life.

Think back to what we have learned about Israel's desire for a king and how that has gone for them thus far. Look even farther back in the Old Testament to the time of the Judges and you will see that over and over Israel tried to do it their way and were not able. Even after everything God had done to bring His people out of slavery in Egypt, we see them immediately accuse Him or bringing them out to the wilderness to die in Exodus 16. It hasn't been that long since he parted the Red Sea for them to cross, but they are already feeling like they cannot trust God's plan or provision. Later, in Exodus 32 they build a golden calf and make their own path to worship because it's taking too long for Moses and God to convene. This should've been the people who knew God most closely next to Adam and Eve and yet here they are trying to take control of their own basket. This same trend happened again when the Israelites demand a king.

But what happens when we let God have control. In today's passage, we are going to see that God takes back the throne of Israel and shows them how trusting His choices, categories, and confirmation leads to life and joy.

Trust God's Choices (v1-5)

God is speaking to Samuel in this passage and has already let Samuel know that Saul will be dethroned. Samuel grieves but God is already at work. He was not thwarted by Saul's disobedience and He is not lost or confused about what to do next. God's plan is to show the people what happens not when they choose the path but when He chooses the path. He wants to show them what happens when they allow His plan and His priorities to be in control.

He immediately lets Samuel know that “I have selected for myself a king” (vs1). The people did not get to select David, it was no one else’s work, but God is asserting His control over the situation. I can almost hear Him speaking as a parent to His children, “Enough.” I can almost feel Him steering the car in a new direction.

This idea that God is choosing a king for Himself is in direct contract with chapter 8 verse 22 where God says, “Listen to them...appoint a king for them.” While God is always sovereign, we see the initial appointing of a king as the result of Israel’s choice, but we see here that God’s choice will reign. This is not a political strategy contrived by man or some happenstance in history, this is God making a king for Himself. This is God making a king after His own heart. What is Samuel’s response to this directive? Fear. What are the elders feeling when they see Samuel show up in their town? Fear! Samuel is afraid of Saul and the elders are afraid of Saul as well as Samuel, Saul’s man the kingmaker, but in the true form of God, the plan has already been taken care of. Though the household of Jesse would have been no small number and would have opened Samuel up to Saul’s wrath if word got out, God gives him a quick nod and an ‘I’ve got you’. He had already seen the date and time of this anointing, He had already seen that it would fall at a time of sacrifice. God is at work in the details.

God is setting a new course, a new path for Israel, and He is going to take care of everything. It would be easy for us to say, of course it will work out, but this is also true of us. When we are confronted with unknowns and with difficulty, we often jump to fear and anxiety. It is easier to fight for control than to sit back and trust.

Trust God’s Categories (v6-11)

Take some time as a group to read this section of 1 Samuel 16, Matthew 20:16, 1 Corinthians 1:27, and Colossians 3:2 together and discuss what they have in common.

Matthew 20:16 “So the last will be first, and the first last.”

1 Corinthians 1:27 “Instead, God has chosen what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen what is weak in the world to shame the strong.”

Colossians 3:2 “Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.”

When Samuel goes to the house of Jesse, he immediately begins to scroll through the list of brothers. Eliab, the oldest, is sort of like what we had with Saul. He looks the part of the king. He is the oldest and probably the strongest. The Lord sees what Samuel sees and responds, “But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” Not only does this show us the truth of God’s control, God’s omniscience, and God’s plan, but it also looks forward even further toward Isaiah 52 and 53. This will not be the last time that God’s chosen is not the biggest and strongest one available.

When David appears on the scene, we see him as someone who has no qualifications to even be included in the naming of sons and living on the margins. So, the narrator makes us wait for a minute to get to him. He is the youngest but that can also be translated as the smallest. He is the stark contrast to Saul. He is not the king Israel would be expecting.

Doesn't this remind you of the New Testament? A man who lived on the margins of society, discounted by those around Him, and not at all what they were expecting. David is a type for Jesus, a foreshadowing of what is to come. The Jews of the New Testament will still try to wrestle control from God and decide their own path. They would also look for the outward appearance, and political prowess of the person who they wanted for a king. Just like in David's time, in the time of Christ, and now, we want to judge by what we see instead of using the God's criteria. He sees the heart.

Trust God's Confirmation (v12-13)

Samuel anointed David but David did not say or do anything. He does not list his qualifications; he does not show off his skills. Walter Brueggemann adds that "David is not a human accident but a divine intention." The Spirit comes upon David and confirms that David is, in fact, God's choice. God is changing the course of history; He is doing a new work. Even though this anointing is a secret, David is now on a journey that will end on a throne of triumph.

David is still a type for Christ, and we are being reminded that Jesus began a new path and a new covenant for us that started at His birth and continues even now. Though He was crucified and resurrected, destroying sin and death, His final triumph is still yet to come and will end on a perfect throne.

Conclusion

Just like the people of Israel in David's time and the people of Israel in the time of Christ, we want to follow our own path and look to our own priorities. We want to put all of our eggs in one basket and control that basket. In Saul's time, this looked like asking for a king over letting God be in control, this looked like trying to be like the other nations, asserting their own will over God's. In Jesus' time, things would be very similar. The people would want a ruler to overthrow Rome and refuse to see Christ as the coming Messiah. The Pharisees would try to keep control over religion and assert their rules rather than sticking to the truth of God. This looks differently for us but is the same truth. We want our plan, we want our priorities, we want God to confirm our choices and path. But God shows us in His confirmation of David and later in His confirmation of Christ, that when He is in control and we trust Him, we find life.

Discussion Questions

1. What is an example of a time that things felt unknown or in flux where you struggled to rest in God's plan and control? How did you attempt to wrestle that control for yourself?
2. How can we begin to look at a situation and even the people we encounter with God's eyes and His categories rather than our own?
3. Why does it confuse our minds that the last will be first and the first will be last?
4. What does God's confirmation of David teach us about His plan and provision?
5. What is one way you can let go and trust God this week?