

## Lesson 2      4 November, 2012

### Saul Fails as King

**Lesson Scope:** 1 Samuel 13-15, 18-23, 28, 31

#### Lesson Focus

This lesson covers most of the forty years of Saul's reign. Saul had a promising beginning. At first, he was a humble, qualified man whom God used to unite Israel and win a victory over the Ammonites.

It is disappointing that, with such a promising beginning, Saul turned so quickly out of the way. After only a short time, Saul began taking his own way. When his faith was tested, he "forced [himself]" and did what he knew was wrong. Saul's choosing of his army of three thousand men seems to have been a departure from trust in God. Saul lost a proper understanding of God and of his own need. Despite repeated rebuke from Samuel, self-will controlled Saul's heart and life. As a result, God left him and became his enemy.

Even a humble man of God has the potential to become proud and rebel against the Lord. A person chooses to remain little in his own sight or to ruin himself with self-importance.

This lesson is a sad commentary on the life of one whom God could have used and blessed. Be impressed with the fact that Saul's failure was a series of choices that led to his devastating end. God wanted Saul to turn back to Him and receive a blessing rather than to die in sin.

**Lesson Aim:** To see the tragedy of taking one's own way.

**Theme Verse:** 1 Samuel 15:23. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king.

#### Lesson Text

##### Hatred and Torment

1 Samuel 13:3-4 <sup>3</sup> And Jonathan smote the garrison of the Philistines that *was* in Geba, and the Philistines heard *of it*. And Saul blew the trumpet throughout all the land, saying, Let the Hebrews hear. <sup>4</sup> And all

Israel heard say *that* Saul had smitten a garrison of the Philistines, and *that* Israel also was had in abomination with the Philistines. And the people were called together after Saul to Gilgal.

1 Samuel 13:8-9 <sup>8</sup> And he tarried seven days, according to the set time that Samuel *had appointed*: but Samuel came not to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him. <sup>9</sup> And Saul said, Bring hither a burnt offering to me, and peace offerings. And he offered the burnt offering.

1 Samuel 13:13 <sup>13</sup> And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the LORD thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the LORD have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever.

### **Rebellion and Rejection**

1 Samuel 15:13-15 <sup>13</sup> And Samuel came to Saul: and Saul said unto him, Blessed *be* thou of the LORD: I have performed the commandment of the LORD. <sup>14</sup> And Samuel said, What *meaneth* then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?

<sup>15</sup> And Saul said, They have brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed.

1 Samuel 15:22-23 <sup>22</sup> And Samuel said, Hath the LORD *as great* delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey *is* better than sacrifice, *and* to hearken than the fat of rams. <sup>23</sup> For rebellion *is as* the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness *is as* iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from *being* king.

### **Disobedience and Displeasure**

1 Samuel 18:7-12 <sup>7</sup> And the women answered *one another* as they played, and said, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands. <sup>8</sup> And Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased him; and he said, They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed *but* thousands: and *what* can he have more but the kingdom? <sup>9</sup> And Saul eyed David from that day and forward. <sup>10</sup> And it came to pass on the morrow, that the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, and he prophesied in the midst of the house: and David played with his hand, as at other times: and *there was* a javelin in Saul's hand. <sup>11</sup> And Saul cast the javelin; for he said, I will smite David even to the wall *with it*. And David avoided out of his presence twice. <sup>12</sup> And Saul was

afraid of David, because the LORD was with him, and was departed from Saul.

### **Sorcery and Death**

**1 Samuel 28:1** <sup>1</sup> And it came to pass in those days, that the Philistines gathered their armies together for warfare, to fight with Israel. And Achish said unto David, Know thou assuredly, that thou shalt go out with me to battle, thou and thy men.

**1 Samuel 28:5-7** <sup>5</sup> And when Saul saw the host of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart greatly trembled. <sup>6</sup> And when Saul enquired of the LORD, the LORD answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets. <sup>7</sup> Then said Saul unto his servants, Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and enquire of her. And his servants said to him, Behold, *there is* a woman that hath a familiar spirit at Endor.

**1 Samuel 31:6** <sup>6</sup> So Saul died, and his three sons, and his armour bearer, and all his men, that same day together.

### Questions for Study

#### **Disobedience and Displeasure**

1. What early indications of Saul's turning from God do these verses reveal?

2. What are some early signs that we may be cooling toward God?

#### **Rebellion and Rejection**

3. What may have been the reason for Saul's greeting to Samuel in 15:13?

4. How might we excuse sin in our life? What is the proper response when we have sinned?

5. What makes rebellion like witchcraft and stubbornness like idolatry?

#### **Hatred and Torment**

6. For what reasons did Saul fear David?

7. How can we avoid the snare of hatred?

#### **Sorcery and Death**

8. In light of 1 Samuel 28:6, why does 1 Chronicles 10:14 say that Saul died because he "enquired not of the LORD"?

9. How can we avoid the tragedy in 1 Samuel 28:6?

## **Analyzing the Passage**

The "garrison of the Philistines" (1 Samuel 13:3) was a fortified post. When Jonathan attacked it, the Philistines quickly gathered their forces. Why was it important for Saul to wait for Samuel (1 Samuel 13:8)? If we look at God's command in Deuteronomy 20:1-4, we see that the priest was to encourage the people to trust in God and not fear their enemies. Saul argued that he needed to offer the sacrifice because the people were fearful; yet when Saul offered the sacrifice, his disobedience brought fear, not peace and trust.

The javelin that Saul threw at David (1 Samuel 18:11) was a spear designed for throwing. It was a weapon that Saul carried most of the time, so it did not seem strange that he had it when David was playing for him.

## **Principles and Applications**

### **Disobedience and Displeasure**

1. Those who take their own way often squander the benefits of others' contributions (1 Samuel 13:3-4). Saul was no longer the humble man that he had been; he was now taking credit for what Jonathan, through faith in God, had accomplished. When we fail to appreciate the contribution of others, God's work is hindered. Energy that could be used in kingdom work is expended on protecting personal interests, figuring out who gets the honor, being fair, and other carnal goals.

2. Those who take their own way do not respect holy things (1 Samuel 13:8-9).

Saul was told to wait for Samuel, but waiting became hard, so he gave in to his impatient spirit and sought God's blessing his way. Offering the sacrifice showed disrespect for Samuel and disobedience to God. Foolishly disobeying, and thinking that the end justifies the action, shows disrespect to God and often to His people. God will accomplish more with a few faithful men than the enemy can accomplish with a multitude. Will we faithfully obey God under pressure, or will we foolishly go another way?

3. The self-willed miss God's purpose for their lives (1 Samuel 13:13).  
God

would have established Saul's kingdom if he had chosen differently. How many times do we lose God's blessing when we, for selfish rea-

sons, fail to wait on God? We are here in this life to glorify God, but so often, like Saul, we are more concerned about how life affects me. Do we worry that someone's failure will affect our usefulness, and then excuse our own disobedience? We cannot serve self and God; neither can we experience the blessing of the faithful if we serve self.

### **Rebellion and Rejection**

4. Taking one's own way is a path of self-deception (1 Samuel 15:13). Saul seems to have convinced himself that he had obeyed the commandment of the Lord. Men who choose to violate their conscience get to a place where they no longer know right from wrong (see John 16:2). To avoid self-deception, we must cling tenaciously to God's Word to keep our conscience free.

5. Those who take their own way develop a twisted rationale for supposed obedience (1 Samuel 15:14-15). One wonders how Saul reasoned that he had obeyed the commandment of the Lord. How could the animals that God had commanded to be destroyed be an acceptable offering to God? But professing Christians today say they are obeying God's command to wash the saint's feet by doing kind deeds instead. Or they claim not to be living in adultery, although they have married another companion while their first one is still living. Does driving only a couple miles over the speed limit constitute obeying those who have the rule over us? Are we living honestly if we purposely leave someone under a wrong impression? When we need fancy explanations about why a thing is not wrong, it might be the twisted rationale of a deceived person.

6. Those who take their own way become stubborn and rebellious (1 Samuel 15:23). God's way is a life of surrender. Those who choose to take their own way instead of God's, or who choose partial obedience, have already rejected God. Samuel told Saul that stubbornness is like the sin of idolatry. Men who stubbornly refuse to obey God have replaced God with the idol of self.

### **Hatred and Torment**

7. The self-willed become plagued with envy and jealousy (1 Samuel 18:7-8). The self-willed are often afraid; they fear for their reputation or position when others receive praise. They want people to notice and honor them, but they fail to seek God's approval. What seems like a demotion to us may actually bring more glory to God if we respond

rightly.

"For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work" (James 3:16). Saul produced confusion when he envied David and wasted resources trying to kill him.

8. Those who persist in their own way become susceptible to evil spirits (1 Samuel 18:10-11). Self-will is a downward course, and those who continue to follow this way never know how far they will go from God. Eventually God will give them over to a reprobate mind; their delusion will render them incapable of making sound decisions. See Romans 1:28; Isaiah 66:4, 2 Thessalonians 2:11.

9. Those who take their own way become unable to relate productively to the righteous (1 Samuel 18:12). The self-willed are occupied with thoughts of self, failing to recognize the contribution of others. Like Saul, self-centered people become insecure and begin to suspect the motives of the righteous. They fear the righteous because the Lord is with them, providing protection and wisdom. They find it hard to control the righteous person because he is directed by the fear of God rather than by the fear of men.

### **Sorcery and Death**

10. Those who persist in their own way cut themselves off God (1 Samuel 28:5-7). Saul chose to live without God. Then, when he was desperately afraid, God would not hear him. Men may choose to go their own way, but the time may come that God will become their enemy. When God is man's enemy, He uses His mighty power against that man and his ambitions in an effort to help him to see his need of surrender. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Psalm 66:18).

11. Those who take their own way will perish (1 Samuel 31:6). "He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy" (Proverbs 29:1). The end of the path of self-will is eternal death. The only hope for the self-willed person is complete surrender while he yet has opportunity. The day will come when those who rejected God's way will be crushed into submission (Luke 20:18).

### **Important Teachings**

1. Those who take their own way often squander the benefits of others' contributions (1 Samuel 13:3-4).

2. Those who take their own way do not respect holy things. (1 Samuel 13:8-9).
3. The self-willed miss God's purpose for their lives (1 Samuel 13:13).
4. Taking one's own way is a path of self-deception (1 Samuel 15:13).
5. Those who take their own way develop a twisted rationale for supposed obedience (1 Samuel 15:14-15).
6. Those who take their own way become stubborn and rebellious (15:23).
7. The self-willed become plagued with envy and jealousy (1 Samuel 18:7-8).
8. Those who persist in their own way become susceptible to evil spirits (1 Samuel 18:10-11).
9. Those who take their own way become unable to relate productively to the righteous (1 Samuel 18:12).
10. Those who persist in their own way cut themselves off from God (1 Samuel 28:5-7).
11. Those who take their own way will perish (1 Samuel 31:6).
12. Those who take their own way become willing to commit sacrilege (1 Samuel 13:8-9).

### **Answers to Questions**

*1. What early indications of Saul's turning from God do these verses reveal?*

Saul's appointing a standing army perhaps indicates a shift from trusting in God to trusting in men. Saul offered the sacrifice because he feared the enemy rather than trusting God and seeking His direction. He became impatient while waiting for God's direction.

*2. What are some early signs that we may be cooling toward God?*

One of the early signs of cooling toward God might be failure to take time to seek His direction or to wait on that direction before making decisions. Worrying about what people think shows a cooling toward God. We have cooled off in our relationship with God if doing His will and honoring Him are no longer our primary goals.

*3. What may have been the reason for Saul's greeting to Samuel in 1 Samuel 15:13?*

Perhaps Saul had some misgivings about seeing Samuel and wanted to put his mind at ease. Was Saul so deceived that he thought he actually

had obeyed? He may have told himself that it was a shame to destroy all the good animals, or he may have felt his infraction was of little consequence.

*4. How might we excuse sin in our life? What is the proper response when we have sinned?*

There are a host of possible excuses for sin—"It might not be the best way, but it's not sin." One might excuse sin if something good results from it. "Everyone else is doing it." "Lots of fine Christians do things worse than this." "It might be a mistake, but it's not sin." Sometimes we are tempted to claim obedience by a technicality.

God wants man to respond with a surrendered will and a broken heart (Joel 2:12-14; Psalm 34:18). Repentance is the only right response to sin.

*5. What makes rebellion like witchcraft and stubbornness like idolatry?*

"Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" (Romans 6:16). Those who are stubborn and rebellious are serving self in place of God, hence the idolatry. Rebellion is like witchcraft because it holds an almost irresistible power over the lives of those who disobey.

*6. for what reasons did Saul fear David?*

The Lord was with David (1 Samuel 18:12). Saul could not control David, and that made him afraid. Saul did not have the Spirit of God or the protection of God; David had both, and this frightened Saul. David behaved himself wisely (1 Samuel 18:15). Saul's guilty conscience hated the reminder of the wisdom of a godly man. David had the respect of the people, and Saul feared rejection.

*7. How can we avoid the snare of hatred?*

Lead a godly life. Repent of disobedience or jealous attitudes. Be thankful for the contribution of others. Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.

*8. In light of 28:6, why does 1 Chronicles 10:14 say that Saul died because he "enquired not of the LORD"?*

The word *enquired* in 1 Chronicles 10:14 was translated from a different Hebrew word than that used in 1 Samuel 28:6. The original in 10:14 suggests anxious, studious inquiry. Except for the beginning of his reign, Saul did not have this level of interest in what God had to tell him. By



contrast, Saul used this same word when directing his servants to find a woman who had a familiar spirit (1 Samuel 28:7). If Saul had sought the Lord with the same intensity that he showed in consulting the woman of Endor, the result may have been different.

9. *How can we avoid the tragedy in 1 Samuel 28:6?*

Saul rejected God, who turned away from him and became his enemy (1 Samuel 28:16). To avoid the tragedy of God forsaking us, we must obey Him. We must seek the Lord while He may be found (Isaiah 55:6). We must avoid grieving the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30).

### **Research Guide**

1. Read the passages listed under "Disobedience" in *Nave's Topical Bible*.
2. Look under "Armor" in a Bible dictionary for more information on the javelin.
3. Read Genesis 4:4-8; 37:4-20; and Esther 5:13 to understand the effects of envy.
4. Read Ezekiel 33:11 as an inspiration on God's perspective for the backslidden.

### **Summarizing the Lesson**

God did not plan for Saul to fail. But when Saul failed and refused to repent, he continued on this downward course and died in his rebellious state. We have the same choice; will we take God's way, or will we go the downward path to destruction?

### **Warning Voice**

Stop, poor sinners, stop and think,  
Before you farther go;  
Will you sport upon the brink  
Of everlasting woe!  
On the verge of ruin stop—  
Now the friendly warning take:  
Stay your footsteps ere you drop  
Into the burning lake.  
—John Newton