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## **1st Samuel—**

**“Alas, how many once bright Christians have been spoiled through wanting to be like the people of the world around, even as did Israel in demanding a human king! And how insidious is the temptation to lean on that which is seen and human instead of resting on the invisible God! It is a temptation to which we are all prone; but to yield to it invites a harvest of regrets.”**

**—J. Baxter Sidlow, *Explore the Book*.**

## **Other Helpful Links:**

Additional Commentary:

[http://preceptaustin.org/1\\_samuel\\_commentaries.htm](http://preceptaustin.org/1_samuel_commentaries.htm)

Adam Clarke Commentary:

<http://www.studylight.org/com/acc/view.cgi?book=1sa>

Matthew Henry's Commentary:

<http://www.studylight.org/com/mhc-com/view.cgi?book=1sa>

David Guzik's Commentary:

<http://www.studylight.org/com/guz/view.cgi?book=1sa>

# Daily Bible Study

Thursday, October 5, 2006



*Passage for today:* **1 Samuel 13-14**

## Questions to Ponder

1. This section of scripture offers us a descriptive and real look at Israel's desired king, Saul, and his noble son, Jonathan. The two obviously were different in the way they went about things. One acted upon feelings (13:12); the other acted on faith (14:6). One was a leader who "chose for himself" and the other was a leader who led by serving. Take some time to list out the characteristics of each man that these two chapters reveal. How are they different?
2. Hebrews 11:1 gives us a definition of faith. How does Jonathan exhibit the faith described there? How does Saul not exhibit faith?
3. Looking into your own life, what similarities do you see between yourself and Saul? On the other hand, what characteristics of Jonathan do you see in yourself? Obviously, neither was perfect. But if you could choose between the two as to which you would rather live like, which would it be? Explain.
4. Saul and Jonathan both had opportunities to do great things in faith. However, we see that Saul chose to act on feelings instead of faith; and Jonathan believed in God and proved to be victorious. Can you think of a time in your life when the Lord laid out a step of faith before you? Did you take the step? Explain.
5. Today, what step might the Lord be laying before you that requires much faith for you to walk out? What do you intend to do? Explain.

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# Daily Bible Study

Saturday, October 7, 2006



*Passage for today: 1 Samuel 16*

## Questions to Ponder

1. Seek to describe the details of Samuel's anointing of young David. (For example: Who is there? What are the words said? Where does it take place? When does it happen? Why does it happen this way? How did David's anointing differ from Saul's?)
2. In 1 Samuel 16:7, we see the Lord teach Samuel that man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks upon the heart. How does David's appearance differ from Saul's? Why is this significant? What is God trying to teach us concerning the importance of outward appearance versus the importance of quality of the heart?
3. If the Lord were to take away all flesh and outward appearance, what would we be able to see concerning David in this chapter? If the Lord were to take away all flesh from you today, what would be others see? How would your heart compare to those of the world? How would it compare to that of David—"a man who would do all the Lord's will" (Acts 13:14)?
4. In 2 Corinthians 4, Paul writes, "Though our outer man is decaying. Our inner man is growing day by day. And these momentary, light afflictions are producing for us an eternal weight of glory." How does this 2 Corinthians passage apply to what we read about concerning David? How does it apply to your own life today? Explain.

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# Daily Bible Study

Sunday, October 8, 2006



*Passage for today: 1 Samuel 17*

## Questions to Ponder

1. This chapter gives us strong evidence of the great things that the Lord can do through a man who is totally submitted to Him and anointed by His Holy Spirit (See 1 Sam. 16:13). Take a few minutes to list the various out workings of the Lord in David's life that you can find in 1 Samuel 17. What do David's actions reveal to us about his heart for God? What do his actions say to us about the way God works through a person?
2. In verse 45, David tells Goliath, "You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel whom you have defied." What is the difference in Goliath and David concerning their weapons of warfare? What is the difference between going to battle with material weapons versus going to battle in the name of the Lord?
3. Read Ephesians 6:10-20. How does what we read of here in 1 Samuel 17 apply to what Paul teaches us in Ephesians 6 concerning warfare?
4. Can you think of the last time you experienced a time of heavy spiritual battle? What was the outcome? From what we see in this chapter, David knew very strongly that the Lord was his strength and that he had to rely on the power of the Lord in order to not only survive, but to advance the Lord's people into battle against their rivals. What does this say to you today concerning how you should stand against the wiles of the devil?

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## TRANSITION FROM JUDGES TO KINGS

### The Request.

The change-over came about through the insistence of the people themselves. This we find in chapter 8, which marks the turning-point.

Verses 4 and 5 say: “Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves and came to Ramah, and said unto him: Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.” Now as Dr. Kitto says, “The demand was not the outcry of an ignorant and deluded rabble, but the grave and deliberate application of the *elders* of Israel—of those whose years or high standing in the nation gave to them the utmost weight and influence. It was not made from the mere impulse of the moment, but was the result of previous deliberation and conference; for the elders repaired to Ramah *for the purpose* of proposing the matter to the prophet; and beyond all doubt they had met together and considered the matter well before they took a step so decided.”

Their approach to Samuel was marked by considerateness. They had no dissatisfaction with Samuel personally; but in view of his advanced years and the unsatisfactory behaviour of his sons they must urge that the government be put on the new basis of kingship while Samuel is yet with them, and by the sanction of Samuel’s authority. Yes, they were deliberate and considerate; but they were wrong. Their eyes were away from God again. Such a request had never been born in prayer. They had held a committee meeting instead of a prayer meeting!—and now they were determined on taking a retrograde step instead of going on with God. How often is unbelief thus dressed up as the corporate wisdom of committees!

### The Response.

Samuel’s reaction to the request is given in verse 6: “But the thing displeased Samuel when they said: Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the Lord.” The Divine answer is: “Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee; for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them....Now therefore hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and show them the manner of the king that shall reign over them.” Samuel thereupon makes dissuasive protest to them (10-18), but without avail; for verse 19 says: “Nevertheless, the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and said: Nay, but we will have a king over us that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us, and go out before us to fight our battles.” The re-

quest has now become a demand: and God's further word to Samuel is: "Hearken unto their voice, and make them a king" (verse 22).

Three things, therefore, we ought to note about this demand for a king. First, the outer *reason* for it was the degeneracy of Samuel's sons. Second, the inner *motive* was that the people might become like the other nations. Third, the deeper *meaning* was that Israel had now rejected the theocracy, which was the most serious thing of all; and this is emphasized in the Divine response—"They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected *ME*, that I should not reign over them." Alas, how many once bright Christians have been spoiled through wanting to be like the people of the world around, even as did Israel in demanding a human king! And how insidious is the temptation to lean on that which is seen and human instead of resting on the invisible God! It is a temptation to which we are all prone; but to yield to it invites a harvest of regrets.

### The Results.

So then, the people claimed and exercised what in these days is called "the right of self-determination." The change-over from theocracy to monarchy was of themselves. God gave them a king and constituted a kingship. The fact would seem to be that Israel had wearied of a theocratic form of government which made their wellbeing dependent on their right conduct. Perhaps they vaguely supposed that a government under a human king would relieve them somewhat of this responsibility, inasmuch as their wellbeing would rest more with the character of the government and the qualities of the king himself.

But in giving them a king, God safeguarded the moral interests of the nation by constituting a kingship which preserved as far as possible the principles of theocratic government. The king is made directly responsible to God, and the people are no less responsible to Him through their king. Israel's king was not to be an autocratic king, but a theocratic king. The prophet and the priest, in their *official* capacity, were coordinate with, rather than subordinate to, the king, being themselves directly dependent on God; though, of course, as men and citizens they were subject to the king, like all others. As we have already said, the government was to be that of kingly power in the hands of a layman, but acting in obedience to the written law of God, and to His will as declared from time to time by the living voice of prophecy. Therefore, when we speak of the change-over from theocracy to monarchy we do not mean that all the principles of theocratic government were then waived. Theocratic responsibility still persisted through the monarchy: but absolute theocracy had ceased to be.

### Observations.

We can understand the *feelings* of Israel's leaders in pressing for a human king. There were signs of trouble coming, so it would seem, from the Philistines, ever planning war, on the west, and from the Ammonites on the east (12:12); and it was an understandable anxiety that in Israel there was no man marked out, either by preeminent fitness or station, to be their leader in such conflicts as were likely to come. We can understand, too, the craving for outward dignity of state such as the surrounding nations had, for the Oriental mind is pervasively regal; and maybe it was a stigma on Israel that there was no royal head of the nation. Yet in view of the theocratic privileges and high calling of Israel, this peremptory demand for a human king was gravely wrong.

The people's asking for a king had been *anticipated* in the word of God through Moses. See Deuteronomy 17:14-20. Maybe the elders of Israel inferred from this that it was the ultimate Divine intent to establish a monarchical government among them—and perhaps rightly so; yet even so, the least they could have done was to seek the counsel of their Divine King about this. Note further that instead of being gratefully anxious to preserve the liberties and public rights which were theirs under the theocracy, they insisted on being ruled as the surrounding peoples were ruled. In other words, they insisted on surrendering their present mild government for the overlordship of a despotic human royalty. Samuel solemnly warns them against what they were intending to bring upon themselves. See chapter 8:11-20. Such a king would take their sons and daughters to wait on him and work for him and war for him. He would take their fields and vineyards, and the tenth of their seed and produce and locks and other possessions; and he would do much more, so that they should cry out because of him. And without doubt Samuel's words accurately depicted the monarchical governments which then existed round about Israel. Yet still undeterred, Israel's leaders pressed to surrender their precious immunities! The fact that the monarchy which was thereupon consisted in Israel was *not* despotic, like those around, is due, as Dr. Kitto says, to “the sagacious care and forethought of Samuel, acting under Divine direction, in securing from utter destruction at the outset, the liberties which the people so wilfully cast into the fire.”

—J. Baxter Sidlow, *Explore the Book*.

# **1 SAMUEL: THE DEATH OF THE FLESH**

by Ray C. Stedman

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The Old Testament is wonderfully illuminating in presenting case studies in normal and abnormal living. Anyone who has taken a course in psychology knows that in the text the case studies illustrate the principles being taught, in terms of real people and incidents. The whole of the Old Testament is just like that. It is filled with the most fascinating case studies illustrating the principles God wishes us to know. Sometimes, however, they are hidden in enigmas. If you like such things as cryptograms and crossword puzzles and riddles, you will enjoy ferretting out these truths of the Old Testament. You have to read your Bible (at least figuratively) with the Old Testament in one hand and the New Testament in the other, comparing them constantly in your mind. The Old Testament accounts illustrate the truths that are set forth in the New Testament. In them you will meet yourself and your own case study.

First Samuel is the story of two men, Saul and David. These two men illustrate for us the two principles in the heart of every Christian believer seeking to walk before God. They are the principle of flesh and the principle of faith. Saul is the man of the flesh, and David is the man of faith; the carnal believer and the spiritual believer. The fact that both of these men were kings beautifully illustrates the supremacy of the will in human life. As the book of Esther shows, each one of us is a king over a kingdom. Our will is supreme in our life. Even the Spirit of God does not violate it. We are ruling over the kingdom of our lives and our affairs, over those things that concern us personally and also the things that have an impact and influence upon others. What you, the king, say and do, influences the whole kingdom over which you reign.

Here, in these two kings, the two principles which are in conflict in your life and in mine are illustrated. We see in Saul the ruin caused by the will that is set on the flesh. In David you see beautifully illustrated the blessing which is brought by the mind that is set on the Spirit. "To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace." (Rom. 8:6) This conflict is illustrated in the book of 1 Samuel in the lives of these two men.

The book actually begins with the story of a third man, Samuel, who is the human expression of the voice of God to both Saul and David. (You and I have in our lives the expression to us of God's will by the word of

God in those men and leaders in the church who teach and explain the word to us. God speaks to us objectively as well as subjectively. This is what is pictured by Samuel.) These three men mark off the divisions of the book. The first seven chapters give us the life of Samuel. Chapters 8 through 15 present King Saul, the man of the flesh. Then in chapters 16 through 31, David, the man of faith, is eminent as an illustration of the mind set on the Spirit.

Samuel was the last of the judges and the first of the prophets. The events of this book take place right after Israel had passed through some three hundred or more years of the rule of the judges. (During that time the little episode of Ruth occurred.) Samuel is the chosen instrument of God to close out the realm of the judges and to introduce the beginning of the prophetic ministry and the monarchy.

In the beginning, there is the wonderful story of a barren woman, Hannah, the wife of a man named Elkanah. This man had two wives. The other wife was a prolific woman, who taunted and mocked Hannah in her barrenness. The barrenness of Hannah is very symbolic, coming as it does at the beginning of this book, because it illustrates the spiritual state of Israel at this time. This people to whom God had manifested himself had fallen into a state of utter infertility and barrenness. The priesthood which God had set up with the tabernacle and the rituals - the means by which the people would have access to him -- was beginning to disappear. The cause for this failure is found in the song that Hannah sang after her prayer to God was answered and God gave her the boy, Samuel. Every woman ought to memorize this glorious song. In it, Hannah indicates the problem with which the book is essentially concerned:

"Talk no more so very proudly,  
let not arrogance come from your mouth;  
for the Lord is a God of knowledge,  
and by him actions are weighed.  
The bows of the mighty are broken,  
but the feeble gird on strength." {1 Sam 2:3-4  
RSV}

The rest of the song magnificently sets forth the ability of God to exalt the lowly and to cast down the proud.

In this book is set forth the eternal conflict between the proud heart which finds confidence in itself and its ability to do things, and the humble spirit which looks to God in utter dependence, receiving all the fullness of divine blessing. That was the problem with Israel. The priesthood was failing, not because there was anything wrong with the priesthood (which was a picture of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ), but because the people refused to bow before the Lord. They refused to come for cleansing and to turn from idolatrous worship. As a result, their access to God was cut off. The priesthood, then, was about to pass out of the picture as an effective means of mediation between the people and God.

At this point we have the familiar account of Samuel's birth and childhood. When Samuel is just a little lad he is brought to the temple and dedicated to God. He becomes the voice of God to Eli the priest and is given a message of judgment. Later he becomes the voice of God to the nation -- especially to the two kings, Saul and David. The first seven chapters tell us the story of Israel's fall into decay. The ark of God, the very place where God himself wrote his name and where his presence dwelt, was taken captive by the Philistines into their own country. Eli the priest, because he did not make his sons obey him (which is a powerful word of warning about juvenile delinquents today) -- even though his own heart was right -- finds that his priesthood is taken away from him. And when Eli's grandson is born, his mother names him Ichabod, which means "the glory has departed." Here Israel reaches one of the lowest states in its national history.

We read then of the entrance of King Saul. In chapter 8, verses 4 and 5, the people demand to be given a king like all the other nations:

Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, and said to him, "Behold, you are old and your own do not walk in your ways; now appoint for us a king to govern us like as the nations." {1 Sam 8:4-5 RSV}

The principle of the flesh is at work in the nation of Israel to destroy its communion. its fellowship and its enjoyment of God's blessing. The same principle is interwoven in every Christian life, and it may be expressed in many ways, which are clearly indicated throughout this book. The first is that they be given an authority like all the other nations. In other words, the desire of the flesh is to be religious in a manner ac-

cepted by the world, to conduct its business like the rest of the world does. If our mind is set on the flesh, we want to interject the principle of business acumen into the conduct of the church. We wish to adopt the salesmanship tactics of the world. We no longer rely upon the strategy of the Holy Spirit but we appoint a committee to plan out the program.

Then we ask God to come and bless it and make it work. It is our program instead of his. This principle is continually at work, reflected in Israel's rejection of the authority and the sovereignty of God and their desire to be ruled like all the nations.

Well, this request was granted by God. Samuel was displeased when they asked for a king, because he knew that this was not God's program. Samuel prayed to the Lord and the Lord said:

"Hearken to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. According to all the deeds which they have done to me, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are also doing to you. Now then, hearken to their voice; only, you shall solemnly warn them, and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them." {1 Sam 8:7-9

RSV}

This is always the way of God. I think one of the greatest lessons we can learn about God is that if we want something badly enough, he will give it to us. But we must also be ready to face the consequences. This is true about everything in life, isn't it? Suppose I have before me two glasses filled with liquid that both look like water. One of them is water and the other is poison. I have a choice to make between drinking the poison or the water. If I choose to drink the poison, I no longer have any influence over what happens. The results are inevitable. Once I have made the choice, then I must accept the sequence of events that follows. All through the scriptures we find that this is the way God deals with men. If we want something badly enough, we can have it. But when we get it, we won't want it. If we start hungering and thirsting and clamoring after what we want as these people did, instead of relying upon God to give us what we need, we will discover that what we desired is no longer what we want. Our only recourse is to come back to God in repentance and ask him to give us what we need.

I will never forget hearing Dr. Ironside tell of an incident in the life of Dr.

William Evans of the Hollywood Presbyterian Church. His little girl, who was about eight years of age, came home and said to him, "Daddy, I want to get some ballbearing skates. All the other children have ballbearing skates and that is what I want." He said, "But dear, you have a pair of skates." She replied, "Yes, I know Daddy, but they are not ballbearing skates. They are rollerbearing skates. They won't go as fast as the others will." He was a minister and did not have too great an income so he said, "Well, my dear, I'm afraid you will have to make do with the rollerbearing skates. We simply can't afford to buy any others right now." But she wouldn't let him be. That night when he came home from his work, there was a little note at his place on the table. It said, "Dear Daddy, I still want the ballbearing skates." When he went to bed that night there was another note pinned to his pillow. It said, "Daddy, would you buy me some ballbearing skates?"

Well, he did what we would have done; he scraped up the money somehow and got the ballbearing skates. When he gave them to her, she was delighted. She threw her arms around his neck and hugged him and kissed him and thanked him. Then she put on the ballbearing skates and started out the gate and down the sidewalk and around the corner. That was the last time they ever saw her well and alive. As she went around the corner, the skates were too much for her and she slipped and fell down, hitting her head against the sidewalk. They brought her home in a coma. She died at the hospital before the night was out. "Since then," Dr. Evans said, "when I want something of God and it seems as though he is not willing that I should have it but I keep crying out for it, the Spirit of God reminds me, "Are you asking for ballbearing skates?" " This is what happened in Israel. It is a principle that is at work in all of our lives.

The tremendous story of Saul follows here. It is a fascinating story of a young man who, like so many young people today, was living his life without any regard or concern for what God wanted him to do. He was busy with his father in the donkey business. And donkeys take a lot of tending. Samuel was running and judging the country and they were glad to leave that all up to him. Saul and his father were too busy with the donkeys. It is wonderful to trace God's dealings with this man and to see how he reached him. Here is a young man who shuts God out of his thinking, has no time for him nor any real interest in him. We all know people like Saul. How do you think God reached him? Well, he did the very obvious thing. He went into the donkey business himself. He

lost Saul's donkeys for him. When the donkeys strayed away, Saul was vexed. It didn't occur to him that God was involved; he thought only that someone had left the pasture gate open, so he set out to look for the donkeys.

After a long and fruitless search, he came to the town where Samuel lived. In chapter 5 he was about to give up and go back home, when his servant said to him, "Let us go and ask the man of God who lives here where the donkeys are." Saul was not very anxious to do this. In fact, he desired to stay about as far away from the prophet as possible, because prophets were a very disturbing kind of people, and he wanted to get back home. But the servant prevailed on him to go up to see Samuel, and to Saul's amazement, Samuel was expecting him. God had told Samuel the day before that there would be a young man named Saul appearing upon his doorstep. Samuel had a great dinner prepared for Saul and thirty invited guests; and Saul, to his consternation, was the guest of honor. He hardly knew what was happening. Those troublesome donkeys had got him into all this and he wanted to get out of it as fast as possible. But Samuel took him aside as they finished the dinner and announced to him a stunning thing: "God has anointed you," Samuel said, "to be the king over Israel." (10:1)

Saul had been out looking for donkeys but ended up the king of Israel. And he wasn't at all interested in the job. But Samuel told him that he would have three signs indicating that God was with him, and then sent him home. Sure enough, each one of these signs was fulfilled: one, two, three. The first one was that he would meet a band of prophets and the Spirit of God would come upon him and he would begin to prophesy. When Saul began to prophesy along with all the other seminary students - all those who were in this school of the prophets -- the word went out through all of Israel. The people said, "Is Saul, the son of Kish, also one of the prophets?" (10:11) As Saul went on toward his home, he met his uncle, who said, "What has been happening?" Saul said, "I went out looking for the donkeys and I ran into Samuel, and he told me that the donkeys are safe at home." (10:14-16) Not one word about the anointing and the new commission that God had given him. Saul was out to make the most of his life and he was not interested in what God wanted him to do, unless he could use God for his own purposes. So he said nothing.

But Samuel wasn't through. He told Israel that God had hearkened to

their plea, and would give them a king according to their desire. Samuel calls all the people together to cast lots for the choice of the king. The lot is cast first upon the tribes and the tribe of Benjamin is taken. Then upon the family group and the family of Kish is taken. And then upon the individual and Saul is taken. The word went out, "Where is Saul?" No one could find him anywhere. Finally the Lord said, "He is hiding among the baggage." Sure enough, that is where they found him.

Now why was he hiding? Was it because he was so modest that he didn't want to have anybody make a fuss over him? Was it because he was shy and diffident? No, the record indicates that Saul was hiding because he was finding it rather inconvenient to do what God wanted. He wanted to live his own life his own way and he was trying to get away from the call of God.

But God had called him and he was crowned king. As he stood among the people, they raised a great shout and said, "What a king!" He looked like the very picture of a king: head and shoulders above everyone else, handsome as could be, a very wise young man in many ways and fair-minded in seeking justice. But now there is trouble with the Ammonite people up in the north. Saul sends out word to all the people of Israel to come together, and to his great delight, thirty-six thousand people respond to his call. They march up and utterly destroy the Ammonites in a great victory. And Saul begins to feel that maybe this matter of serving God is going to be all right. Maybe he can use it for his own advancement after all. But the next battle he faces is with the Philistines. Now the Philistines aren't a mere tribe of people who are tough only in their own limited area like the Ammonites. Saul is up against a nation which was the equivalent of the Soviet Union or the United States -- one of the major powers of the world. The Philistines, when they heard of the little difficulty that Saul's son, Jonathan, had caused when he defeated their army at Geba, gathered thirty thousand chariots of iron, six thousand horsemen, and a multitude of people so vast that even the Philistines could not number them.

When Saul looked out his window and saw this great horde of people advancing upon him, he realized that this job of being king was not totally delightful. So he sent out the word again through all Israel expecting that the people would rally to his support as before. He waited, and he waited, and he waited. Finally a thousand people showed up, and then another thousand, and then another thousand. This happened to be

the three thousand standing troops that he had already selected and he kept waiting for the others to come. No more came. He compared this pitiful three thousand soldiers with the multitude of the Philistines' tremendous force and sent for Samuel. Samuel told him to wait at Gilgal for him to offer a burnt offering to the Lord. The man of flesh depends upon his own resources until he gets into trouble, and then he calls upon the Lord. But God was ahead of Saul as usual, and Samuel delayed coming. While Saul waited, he kept watching his soldiers begin to slip away one by one and go back home. So the three thousand soldiers dwindled to two thousand, and then to one thousand, until finally only about 600 men were left. By this time, Saul was getting desperate, and when Samuel had not come after five or six days Saul took it upon himself to offer the burnt offering. The moment he had finished, Samuel came walking up. The old prophet was stern-faced as he said, "What have you been doing?" Saul said, "Well, I waited for you, but when I saw that the people were going back to their homes, I thought I ought to take action, so I finally forced myself to do the offering. I knew we did not dare go out to battle without going through this kind of a ritual and since you weren't here, I did it myself." (13:12) On hearing this, Samuel said to Saul:

"But now your kingdom shall not continue; the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart; and the Lord has appointed him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you." {1 Sam 13:14 RSV}

It was thus prophesied that Saul's kingdom would be taken from him.

As we read on, we find that God gave a great victory through Jonathan's faith and delivered the people from this vast horde of Philistines. When at last the battle was won, Saul built an altar. It is the first altar that we are specifically told King Saul ever built. Here is a man who thinks the outward marks of faith are all that are necessary. If you go through the external ritual -- if you belong to a church, if you sing the hymns, if you say the right things, if you confess the right creed -- that is all God expects. That is the principle of the man of the flesh. But God says that when you act on that basis, your reign over your own life is taken away. You no longer have authority in your own kingdom. You become the victim and the slave of an inexorable force which will grind you under its heel and bring you into subjection to it. This is what every man or woman who lives by the flesh sooner or later discovers. When we

yield ourselves to that which we obey, as Paul puts it in Romans, we become slaves of that thing. (Rom. 6:16) This is what happens to Saul. After he builds an altar, God brings him to his knees, and gives him one last chance. At the beginning of chapter 15:

And Samuel said to Saul, "The Lord sent me to anoint you king over his people Israel; now therefore hearken to the words of the Lord. Thus says the Lord of hosts, 'I will punish what Amalek did to Israel in opposing them on the way, when they came up out of Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek and utterly destroy all that they have; do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.'" {1 Sam 15:1-3 RSV}

This was Saul's last chance, because if Saul had obeyed this command, he would have demonstrated that he was ready to allow the cross to do its work against the flesh -- to crucify it and to put it to death. Amalek is a picture throughout all of the scripture of the principle of the flesh which opposes the things of God. Amalek was that people about whom Moses had said to Israel, "Remember Amalek unto all generations. He will never make peace with Amalek." (Ex. 17:16) And Saul was given this remission to carry out. But did he?

And Saul defeated the Amalekites, from Havalah as far as Shur, which is east of Egypt. And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep and of the oxen and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them; all that was despised and worthless they utterly destroyed. {1 Sam 15: 7-9 RSV}

Worthless in whose eyes? I wonder if it wasn't the donkeys that Saul wanted to save. After all, he appreciated farm animals. He probably reasoned, "Why should we destroy these perfectly good animals?" He presumed to find something good in what God had declared utterly bad. Paul wrote that we must "put off the old nature" {Col 3:9 RSV} with its ways of jealousy, perverseness, bitterness, envy, anger, intemperance, selfishness and all these things. But the mind of the flesh says, "Oh, some of this is worth keeping. I can hardly be a real personality if I don't have a hot temper and tell people off once in awhile." So we presume to find good in what God has declared bad.

The result was that Samuel came to Saul and asked him, "How have you been doing?" Saul said, "Wonderful. I have done everything the Lord said. I killed all the Amalekites and destroyed everything just as the Lord said." Samuel cocked his ear and said, "What do I hear? What is that sound of bleating and lowing outside the window? Why are those animals out there?" Saul said, "Well it is true that I spared a few; I thought God would be pleased if I dedicated them to him." That is an excuse we use, isn't it? What we desire to keep, we pretend to dedicate to God. This is what Saul tried too.

And Samuel said, "Though you are little in your own eyes, are you not the head of the tribes of Israel? {1 Sam 15:17a RSV}

Why did you not obey the voice of the Lord?" {1 Sam 15:19b RSV}

And Saul said to Samuel, "I have obeyed the voice of the Lord." {1 Sam 15:20a RSV}

And Samuel said,

"Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,  
as in obeying the voice of the Lord?

Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,  
and to hearken than the fat of rams

For rebellion is as the sin of divination,  
and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.

Because you have rejected the word of the Lord,  
he has also rejected you from being king." {1 Sam 15:22-23 RSV}

No man can walk in the authority and the freedom that God has intended for his children when he rejects the authority of the Spirit of God in his life. That is primarily the story of Saul.

The story of David, starting in chapter 16, is the story of the man after God's own heart. There are tremendous lessons in the accounts of David, his rejection, and his exile. He was chosen from the eight sons of Jesse. The seven eldest sons passed before Samuel and each one looked like a king in the making until God said to Samuel, "This is not the one that I have chosen." And last came the youngest and the skinniest one of all -- David. God put his seal upon him. His choice was not according to outward appearance -- God looked instead at his heart.

David was not set on the throne immediately as Saul was, but was tested and proved by struggle and adversity. This is the principle that God often follows with the man who learns to walk by faith. He is put through a time of obscurity, of testing, and of problems. Everything seems to go against him until at last he recognizes the great principle by which God's activity is always carried on -- man can do nothing in himself but only in complete and utter dependence upon the God who indwells him. This is what David learned even as a shepherd boy, so that he could say, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want; he makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul." (Ps. 23:1-3a)

We come to the testing of David as he comes face to face with the giant, Goliath. Israel was held in fear and cowardice by this giant who paraded up and down between the armies, taunting and mocking the impotence of the Israelites. No one dared to do a thing about him. He strutted in arrogant pride up and down, beating his chest and demanding they send someone out to fight. And no one dared to go. When little David came from his flocks to bring food to his brothers, he found the whole camp of Israel plunged into gloom and despair. He came in and asked, "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine who dares to defy the armies of the living God?" (17:26) That is always the outlook of faith. It is never shaken by the circumstances.

Word is brought to Saul of this young man in their midst. Saul asks David what he wants to do. David says, "I'll go out and fight him." Saul, thinking to be helpful, puts his armor upon David. Now Saul was about one and a half feet taller than David and the armor on the young lad began to clank and get in his way. David tried to move around and couldn't even take a step. Finally he said, "Bring me a can opener and get me out of this." David then went down to the brook and got five smooth stones. Why five? A little later in the book of 2 Samuel you will read that Goliath had four brothers. That is why he took five. He was prepared for the whole family!

David went out, threw the sling around his head, and Goliath fell to the ground with a stone right between his eyes. Someone has said his last words were, "Nothing like this has ever entered my mind before." Anyhow he went down. David took Goliath's own sword and cut off his head. What a glorious picture this is of him who

went up against the great enemy of mankind face to face and slew him with his own sword. We read in Hebrews 2:14 that by death the Lord Jesus slew him that had the power of death, even the Devil. David becomes here a picture not only of Christ, but also of the believer who lives the life of Christ.

This event is followed by Saul's great jealousy of David. From chapter 18 on we have the story of the growing persecution of David by Saul -- a living illustration of the principle that Paul declares in Galatians. He says,

... as at that time, he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now. {Gal 4:29 RSV}

For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh...to prevent you from doing what you would. {Gal 5:17 RSV}

So Saul persecuted David and tried to kill him. It was during this time that David wrote so many of the Psalms -- those wonderful songs that speak of God's faithfulness in the midst of distressing conditions. David was pursued and finally exiled from the presence of Saul.

In chapters 21 and 22 we find the fullness of God's abundant provision made for him even in his exile. He is given the very holy bread of the tabernacle. This bread, representing the presence of God, is a picture of that secret ministering to everyone who is undergoing difficult problems, yet looking to God for deliverance. To such God gives the hidden bread, the bread from the very table of the Lord himself. Jesus said, "I am the bread of life." (John 6:35) "As I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me." (John 6:57) In his exile, David the king had a prophet, Gad, and a priest, Abiathar -- whose resources were available to him even though he was hunted like a bird upon the mountains -- just as when you are in trouble, hardly able to work out your own problems yourself, you can find in the Lord Jesus Christ (who is our prophet, our priest, and our king) all that it takes to bring you through the time of trouble to God's open door for you. This is what happened to David. He refused to act for himself. Twice he spared Saul as God delivered him into his hand. In a remarkable spirit of faith he waited for God to work out the problems.

At the end of the book, we see the end of the man of flesh. Saul, out of

