1 SAMUEL

BIBLE STUDY

A Verse-by-Verse Study



The LORD looks at the heart: Hannah's prayer, the boy Samuel, a king who would not listen, and a shepherd with a sling

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A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Study

My preferred Bible for personal study, teaching, and research is the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources: the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I prepared the SLB myself, and the Scripture in this book is taken from it.

Where a literal phrase would mislead an English reader, the SLB gives the writer's meaning in plain words. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

The complete Steadfast Literal Bible is free to read, search, download, and print at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. If you want to check a verse in its full setting or read the translation's preface and principles, that is the place to go.

Above all, my desire is not to promote one translation over another, but to faithfully teach the Word of God, encourage careful examination of the Scriptures, and help readers grow in their knowledge, understanding, and relationship with the Lord.

May every page of this study direct attention not to the translation itself, but to the truth of God's Word and the One whom it reveals.

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Introduction

Welcome, and thank you for taking the time to work through this verse-by-verse study of the book of 1 Samuel. My purpose in writing this study guide is the same as it was for my study of Revelation: to bring you closer to our Creator and to give you a way to grow in your Christian walk.

Like Hannah, I prayed for years about the things that had a hold on me. I asked God over and over to set me free. He answered, but in His time and His way, not mine. The waiting taught me that prayer is not giving God orders. It is trusting Him to answer well.

1 Samuel is the book where Israel gets a king. It opens with a woman weeping in prayer at Shiloh and closes with a king dying on a mountain in battle. In between are some of the best-known stories in the Bible: the boy Samuel hearing God call his name in the night, the ark of God captured by the Philistines, Saul hiding among the baggage, David and Goliath, and the friendship of David and Jonathan. It also has hard chapters: priests who steal from God, a king who will not obey, the command to destroy Amalek, and a king who goes to a medium on the night before he dies. I do not claim to be an authority on the Bible or on 1 Samuel. I am simply someone like you who wants to grow closer to God and understand His Word. Before you read any part of this book, or any part of Scripture, I ask that you pray, asking God:

- For the Holy Spirit to be present, to help open your eyes and your heart (Psalm 119:18, 119:105)
- For discernment and knowledge (Psalm 119:66, James 1:5)

2 Timothy 2:15 (SLB)

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker not needing to be ashamed, cutting straight the word of truth."

The Bible is God's Word to us (2 Timothy 3:16), given for training in righteousness. If we cannot understand what it says, we cannot apply it to our lives or help build God's kingdom.

So how do we go about understanding God's Word?

The first rule is context. You may have heard the saying "Context is King," but what does that mean? Every word, sentence, and passage helps explain the ones around it. Before we read any passage, we should ask a few simple questions: Who wrote it? Who was it written to? What came right before it? Knowing the answers gives us a clearer picture of what God is saying, both in general and to each of us personally.

Context matters a great deal in 1 Samuel. The book picks up where Judges leaves off. Judges ends with Israel falling apart, and it says twice that there was no king in Israel and every man did what was right in his own eyes (Judges 17:6; 21:25). 1 Samuel answers that problem, but not in the way the people expected. God had told Abraham that kings would come from him (Genesis 17:6), and Moses had said that one day Israel would set over itself a king whom the LORD would choose

(Deuteronomy 17:14-15). So the question in 1 Samuel is not only whether Israel will have a king, but what kind of king, and whose choice he will be. Saul is the king the people asked for. David is the king God chose. If we read the book without that thread, the stories can feel like a string of separate adventures. Read in context, they show God moving His people from the judges to the throne of David, and through David toward Jesus Christ, the Son of David.

Exegesis, Eisegesis, and Hermeneutics

People typically interpret the Bible using one of two methods, Exegesis or Eisegesis. Both are explained below, along with a third word, Hermeneutics. Sometimes people use both methods to "make their case" for the interpretation they want. These definitions are based on www.merriam-webster.com, with my own notes added.

Exegesis means explaining a text, especially a passage of Scripture. Exegesis is reading and interpreting the full text of a passage, and drawing out what it is actually saying.

Eisegesis means reading your own ideas into a text. This happens when we try to find something in the text that really isn't there. It can lead to many errors, especially when we bring assumptions to a passage that aren't actually in it. This method can be used to justify a behavior, position, or belief that goes against what the text originally meant.

Hermeneutics is the study of the principles used to interpret a text, such as the Bible. "Hermeneutics" and "Exegesis" are sometimes used to mean the same thing. The difference is that Exegesis is the work of explaining a passage, while Hermeneutics is the set of principles that guides that work. In Biblical Hermeneutics, the Bible should be read literally unless the text itself gives us a different meaning.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (SLB)

"16 Every Scripture ***is*** God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training which ***is*** in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work."

This passage tells us plainly that the writers of Scripture were inspired by God. Every passage in the Bible came from God and was written down by man. These are not fairy tales or made-up stories. They are God's own breath, given to us so we can be equipped and ready to do good work.

Because every word was inspired and breathed by God, I believe we must let God's Word interpret itself. We must study the Bible using Exegesis, drawing out what the text says, guided by sound Biblical Hermeneutics.

We should study God's Word using the Golden Rule of Interpretation, as Dr. David L. Cooper stated it:

"When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate

context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise."

(http://www.biblicalresearch.info/page55.html)

I read the Bible as it is written. 1 Samuel is history, and this study takes it at its word: God really did open Hannah's womb, speak to Samuel by name, humble the Philistine god Dagon before His ark, and choose a shepherd boy from Bethlehem to be king. The New Testament reads it the same way. Paul told the synagogue at Antioch that Israel "asked for a king, and God gave them Saul son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years" (Acts 13:21), and that God then raised up David (Acts 13:22). Jesus Himself pointed to what David did when he was hungry and ate the holy bread (Matthew 12:3-4; 1 Samuel 21:1-6). A note on the name of God: in the SLB, when you see "LORD" in capital letters, it stands for God's personal name, Yahweh (often written YHWH), which He made known to Moses (Exodus 3:14-15). When you see "Lord" in regular letters, it translates a word that means master. When you see "God," it usually translates Elohim, the general Hebrew word for God. 1 Samuel is also the first book of the Bible to call God "the LORD of armies" (1:3). Many older Bibles say the LORD of hosts. It means that every army of heaven and earth belongs to Him.

This study uses the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB) unless I note otherwise. To better understand the original Hebrew, I also used The Interlinear Bible (Jay P. Green Sr., ISBN 1-56563-977-4).

How This Study Is Laid Out

Each chapter of this study follows the same pattern as my study of Revelation:

- Scripture: the full text of the chapter, broken into sections, so you can read it straight through first.
- Preview: a short look at what the chapter covers.
- Study: the chapter again, verse by verse, with my notes on what each verse says and what it means for us.
- Summary: the main points of the chapter in a few lines.
- People and Places: in chapters that bring in many new names, a short list explaining the people, places, and terms.
- Study Questions: questions for personal study or a small group, from simple fact questions to questions about how we live. Some of them are personal. In a group, no one should ever have to answer one aloud, and what is shared in the group stays there.

Using This Study With a Group

This study works for one person or for a group. 1 Samuel has 31 chapters, so here are two ways a group can pace it:

- One chapter a week: thirty-one weeks, or about seven months. If you like, add a first meeting to read the Introduction and the Background together.

- A faster pace of about twenty-five weeks: take some of the shorter or closely joined chapters two at a time (chapters 5 and 6, 9 and 10, 11 and 12, 21 and 22, 27 and 28, and 29 and 30) and the rest one at a time.

For each meeting, I suggest reading the Scripture out loud together first, straight through, before anyone comments. Then walk through the Study section, stopping where the group has questions, and finish with the Study Questions and prayer. The first questions in each list can be answered from the text. The later ones are more personal, and no one should feel pressed to answer them aloud.

Some parts of 1 Samuel touch painful subjects. Hannah's long years without a child, and the way her rival mocked her (chapter 1), may be close to home for someone in your group who has longed for a child. Eli's sons abuse their office as priests and take advantage of women who served at the tabernacle (2:12-25). Many men of Beth-shemesh die for looking into the ark (6:19). God commands Saul to devote Amalek to destruction, men, women and children (15:2-3), and Samuel puts King Agag to death (15:32-33). David is hunted by a jealous king, the priests of Nob are slaughtered (22:18-19), Saul consults a medium (chapter 28), and the book ends with Saul taking his own life on the battlefield (31:4-5). I do not skip these passages, and I try to explain them honestly in their context. If you lead a group, read those sections ahead of time and be ready to listen. Some people in your group may have suffered infertility or loss, been hurt by leaders in the church, lived through war or violence, or lost someone to suicide. If someone shares something that puts them or another person in danger, help them get help right away.

I look forward to walking with you through the book of 1 Samuel. If you'd like to share feedback, please email me at andrew@trinfinityenterprises.com.

May God bless you and your time studying and getting to know Him better.

Overview of 1 Samuel

1 Samuel is the ninth book of the Bible. It follows Ruth and comes before 2 Samuel, in the part of the Old Testament we call the historical books, which run from Joshua through Esther. In the Hebrew Bible, 1 and 2 Samuel were one book, and it belongs to the Former Prophets, the books that tell Israel's history from God's point of view. When the Old Testament was translated into Greek, the long book was split in two, and that is how our Bibles still have it. The book is named for Samuel, the prophet who anointed both of Israel's first two kings.

In Israel's history, 1 Samuel covers the time from Samuel's birth to the death of King Saul, about one hundred years. It is the bridge from the judges to the kings. Judges showed Israel going around and around the same circle of sin, oppression, crying out and rescue. Ruth showed God quietly preparing the family of David in Bethlehem. 1 Samuel tells how Samuel, the last of the judges and a great prophet, called Israel back to the LORD, how the people asked for a king, how Saul was made king and then rejected, and how God chose David and kept him alive while Saul hunted him. 2 Samuel picks up the story with David on the throne.

The theme of 1 Samuel is that the LORD rules over His people and looks at the heart. He raises up the humble and brings down the proud, as Hannah sings in chapter 2. He honors those who honor Him and sets aside those who despise Him (2:30). Saul looked like a king, but he would not obey. David was the youngest son, out with the sheep, but God saw his heart. When Samuel came to anoint one of Jesse's sons, the LORD told him:

1 Samuel 16:7 (SLB)

"Do not look at his appearance and at the height of his stature, for I have rejected him; for ***it is*** not what man sees, for man sees according to the eyes, and the LORD sees according to the heart."

Alongside that theme runs a second one: obedience matters more than religious show. When Saul spared what God told him to destroy and said it was for sacrifice, Samuel answered, "to listen is better than sacrifice" (15:22).

1 Samuel has 31 chapters and 810 verses. Here is its structure:

Part One: Samuel, the Last Judge (chapters 1 to 7)

- Chapter 1: Hannah's Prayer and the Birth of Samuel
- Chapter 2: Hannah's Song and the Sins of Eli's Sons
- Chapter 3: The LORD Calls Samuel
- Chapter 4: The Ark Is Captured
- Chapter 5: The Ark Among the Philistines
- Chapter 6: The Ark Comes Home
- Chapter 7: Samuel Judges Israel

Part Two: Saul Becomes King (chapters 8 to 15)

- Chapter 8: Israel Asks for a King
- Chapter 9: Saul Meets Samuel
- Chapter 10: Saul Anointed and Chosen King
- Chapter 11: Saul Rescues Jabesh-gilead
- Chapter 12: Samuel's Farewell Address
- Chapter 13: Saul's Unlawful Offering
- Chapter 14: Jonathan's Victory and Saul's Rash Oath
- Chapter 15: Saul Rejected as King

Part Three: David and Saul (chapters 16 to 31)

- Chapter 16: David Anointed
- Chapter 17: David and Goliath
- Chapter 18: Saul's Jealousy of David
- Chapter 19: Saul Tries to Kill David
- Chapter 20: The Covenant of David and Jonathan
- Chapter 21: David at Nob and Gath
- Chapter 22: The Cave of Adullam and the Priests of Nob
- Chapter 23: David Rescues Keilah and Flees From Saul
- Chapter 24: David Spares Saul in the Cave
- Chapter 25: David, Nabal and Abigail
- Chapter 26: David Spares Saul Again
- Chapter 27: David Among the Philistines
- Chapter 28: Saul and the Medium at Endor
- Chapter 29: The Philistines Send David Away
- Chapter 30: David Recovers All at Ziklag
- Chapter 31: The Death of Saul and His Sons

Where this book points to Christ: In Hannah's song, before Israel ever had a king, she says the LORD "will give strength to His king and exalt the horn of His anointed" (2:10). The Hebrew word for anointed is mashiach, which gives us the word Messiah. In Greek it is Christos, Christ (John 1:41). From then on in Samuel, the anointed one is the king God chooses, and the book keeps calling the king "the anointed of the LORD" (24:6; 26:9). Saul failed. David, the anointed shepherd from Bethlehem, became the king after God's own heart (13:14; Acts 13:22), and God later promised that his throne would last forever (2 Samuel 7). The angel told Mary that God would give her Son "the throne of David His father" (Luke 1:32). Mary's own song of praise in Luke 1:46-55 echoes Hannah's song again and again. Samuel himself, a prophet, a priest who offered sacrifice, and a judge, gives us a picture of the One who is Prophet, Priest and King in one Person. The faithful priest God promised in 2:35 was first Zadok in Solomon's day, and Hebrews

shows us Jesus as the merciful and faithful High Priest (Hebrews 2:17). Peter said that all the prophets "from Samuel" on foretold the days of Christ (Acts 3:24).

Background of the Book

Author: The book does not name its author. Jewish tradition holds that Samuel wrote the early part. Samuel dies in 25:1, so others had to finish it. 1 Chronicles 29:29 says the acts of David were written "in the words of Samuel the seer, and in the words of Nathan the prophet, and in the words of Gad the seer." Many conservative scholars believe the book was put together from the records of these three prophets. Many modern critical scholars believe it was formed much later from several older sources and edited in the time of the exile, as part of a longer history running from Deuteronomy through Kings. I take the book at its word: it reads as a careful record kept by prophets who knew these men, and the New Testament treats it as true history.

Who it was written to: The people of Israel, in the days of the kings. They needed to know how the kingdom began, why Saul's house lost the throne, and why David's house was God's choice. Every generation after them needed to learn that the king, too, was under the LORD and His Word.

Setting: Most of the book takes place in the hill country of Israel between Shiloh in the north and Bethlehem and the wilderness of Judah in the south. Shiloh is where the tabernacle stood. Samuel's home was Ramah, a few miles north of Jerusalem. Saul's home was Gibeah in Benjamin. Israel's great enemy was the Philistines, a sea people who lived in five cities on the coastal plain to the west: Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Gath and Ekron. They had iron weapons, and Israel mostly did not (13:19-22).

When it was written: Sometime after Saul's death and most likely after the kingdom divided about 930 B.C., because 27:6 says Ziklag has belonged "to the kings of Judah until this day." The book was probably given its final form not long after that, from records kept during the lives of Samuel, Nathan and Gad.

When the events happened: About 1105 to 1010 B.C. Samuel was born near the end of the period of the judges. Most conservative scholars date the start of Saul's reign about 1050 B.C. Paul says Saul reigned forty years (Acts 13:21), so Saul died about 1010 B.C., when David became king over Judah. The exact years of Samuel's life and of Saul's reign are debated, and the Hebrew text of 13:1, which gives Saul's age and years, has a copying problem that I explain in that chapter.

Samuel the man: Samuel was a Levite by descent (1 Chronicles 6:26-28, 33-34), born to Elkanah and Hannah in answer to prayer and given to the LORD for life. He grew up at the tabernacle under Eli. He was the last judge, a prophet the whole nation recognized (3:20), and a man of prayer. Centuries later the LORD named him with Moses as a man who stood before Him and prayed for the people (Jeremiah 15:1; Psalm 99:6).

Saul and David: Saul, from the small tribe of Benjamin, was tall and impressive and started humbly, but he did not obey the LORD, and God rejected him as king (13:13-14; 15:23). David, the youngest son of Jesse from the tribe of Judah, was anointed in secret (16:13) and spent years serving and then running from Saul, refusing to harm the LORD's anointed. The book sets the two

men side by side so we can see the difference between a king who looks right and a king whose heart belongs to God.

Purpose: To show how the LORD gave Israel a king, to explain why Saul's line lost the throne and David's line received it, and to teach that the LORD looks at the heart and wants obedience more than sacrifice. 1 Samuel also shows that God hears the prayers of the humble, that He holds leaders to a higher standard, and that He keeps His promises even when His people fail.

Chapter 1: Hannah's Prayer and the Birth of Samuel

Scripture

1:1-8 And 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 Ephrathite. And he ***had*** two wives: the name of the one ***was*** Hannah, and the name of the second ***was*** Peninnah. And Peninnah had children, and Hannah ***had*** no children. And that man went up from his city from year to year to bow down and to sacrifice to the LORD of armies at Shiloh; and there the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, ***were*** priests to the LORD. And the day came, and Elkanah sacrificed, and he would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and her daughters. And to Hannah he would give one double portion, for he loved Hannah, and the LORD had closed her womb. And her rival also provoked her ***with*** provocation, in order to make her fret, for the LORD had closed up her womb. And so he did year by year; as often as she went up to the house of the LORD, so she provoked her, and she wept and did not eat. And Elkanah her husband said to her, "Hannah, why do you weep? And why do you not eat? And why is your heart sad? Am I not better to you than ten sons?"

1:9-18 And Hannah arose after eating in Shiloh and after drinking. And Eli the priest ***was*** sitting on the seat by the doorpost of the temple of the LORD. And she ***was*** bitter of soul, and she prayed to the LORD and wept bitterly. And she vowed a vow and said, "LORD of armies, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant, and remember me and not forget Your maidservant, and give to Your maidservant a seed of men, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and a razor shall not go up on his head." And it was, as she prayed much before the LORD, and Eli ***was*** watching her mouth. And Hannah, she ***was*** speaking in her heart; only her lips ***were*** quivering, and her voice was not heard; and Eli considered her a drunken ***woman***. And Eli said to her, "How long will you be drunk? Put away your wine from you." And Hannah answered and said, "No, my lord, I ***am*** a woman hard of spirit; and wine and strong drink I have not drunk, and I have poured out my soul before the LORD. Do not set your maidservant before ***you as*** a daughter of worthlessness, for from the greatness of my complaint and my provocation I have spoken until now." And Eli answered and said, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant your petition which you have asked from Him." And she said, "Let your maidservant find favor in your eyes." And the woman went on her way and ate, and her face was no longer ***sad***.

1:19-28 And they rose early in the morning and bowed down before the LORD, and they returned and came to their house at Ramah. And Elkanah knew Hannah his wife, and the LORD remembered her. And it was at the turning of the days, and Hannah conceived and bore a son; and she called his name Samuel, "For from the LORD I asked for him." And the man Elkanah and all his household went up to sacrifice to the LORD the yearly sacrifice and his vow. And Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, "Until the lad is weaned; and I will bring him, and he shall appear in the presence of the LORD and dwell there forever." And Elkanah her husband said to her, "Do what ***is*** good in your eyes; remain until you have weaned him; only may the LORD establish His word." And the woman remained and nursed her son until she had weaned him. And she brought him up with her when she had weaned him, with three bulls and approximately 3/5 bushel (one ephah) of flour and a skin of wine; and she brought him ***to*** the house of the LORD

at Shiloh; and the lad ***was*** a lad. And they slaughtered the bull and brought the lad to Eli. And she said, "Please, my lord, ***as*** your soul lives, my lord, I ***am*** the woman who stood with you in this ***place*** to pray to the LORD. For this lad I prayed, and the LORD has granted me my petition which I asked from Him. And also I have lent him to the LORD; all the days that he is, he ***is*** asked for the LORD." And he bowed down there to the LORD.

Chapter 1 Preview

1 Samuel does not open in a palace or on a battlefield. It opens in a family. Elkanah has two wives. Peninnah has children, and Hannah has none, and every year when the family goes up to worship at Shiloh, Peninnah torments her about it. Hannah weeps and cannot eat. Then one year she goes to the tabernacle alone, pours out her soul to the LORD, and makes a vow: if He gives her a son, she will give him back to the LORD for his whole life.

Eli the priest thinks she is drunk. Once he understands, he blesses her, and the LORD remembers her. Hannah has a son and names him Samuel. When the boy is weaned, she keeps her word and brings him to Shiloh to serve the LORD. This chapter is about prayer, about honest grief brought to God, and about a woman who kept a costly promise. God was about to change the history of Israel, and He started with the tears of one woman nobody noticed.

Chapter 1 Study

1:1-2 *And 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 Ephrathite. And he **had** two wives: the name of the one **was** Hannah, and the name of the second **was** Peninnah. And Peninnah had children, and Hannah **had** no children.*

"There was a certain man from Ramathaim-zophim." Ramathaim is the longer name of Ramah, a town in the hill country north of Jerusalem. It will be Samuel's home all his life. The writer gives Elkanah's family line back four generations. Calling him "an Ephrathite" here most likely means he lived in the land of Ephraim. 1 Chronicles 6 shows that Elkanah's family were Levites, from the line of Kohath.

"He had two wives." The Bible records polygamy, but it never holds it up as God's plan. From the start God made one man and one woman (Genesis 2:24), and nearly every home in Scripture with two wives is a home with trouble. This one is no different. Peninnah had children. Hannah had none. In that world a woman without children often felt shame, and people sometimes took it as a sign that God was against her.

1:3 *And that man went up from his city from year to year to bow down and to sacrifice to the LORD of armies at Shiloh; and there the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, **were** priests to the LORD.*

Every year Elkanah went up "to bow down and to sacrifice to the LORD of armies at Shiloh." This is the first time in the Bible that God is called "the LORD of armies." Many Bibles say the LORD of hosts. It means God commands every army, the stars, the angels, and the armies of Israel. In days when Israel was weak, that name reminded them who was really in charge.

Shiloh was where the tabernacle stood. The tabernacle was the large tent God had told Moses to build, where He met with His people and where the priests offered sacrifices (Joshua 18:1). The law called every man to appear before the LORD at the feasts (Deuteronomy 16:16). In a time when many in Israel did what was right in their own eyes, Elkanah kept going.

Then the writer drops a name we need to remember: "the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests to the LORD." A priest was a man from Aaron's family who served at the altar and stood between God and the people. These two will come up again in chapter 2, and not for good reasons.

1:4-7 *And the day came, and Elkanah sacrificed, and he would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and her daughters. And to Hannah he would give one double portion, for he loved Hannah, and the LORD had closed her womb. And her rival also provoked her* ***with*** *provocation, in order to make her fret, for the LORD had closed up her womb. And so he did year by year; as often as she went up to the house of the LORD, so she provoked her, and she wept and did not eat.*

When Elkanah offered a peace offering, part of the meat was eaten by the family in a meal before the LORD. He gave portions to Peninnah and all her children, but "to Hannah he would give one double portion, for he loved Hannah." He wanted her to know she mattered to him.

Twice we are told, "the LORD had closed her womb." Scripture does not hide that God was at work in Hannah's waiting. That can be hard to hear if you have waited for a child. It does not mean God was punishing her. As we will see, He had a plan she could not see yet. He did something similar with Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel.

Peninnah, "her rival," saw Hannah's pain and used it. She "provoked her" to make her fret. This went on "year by year," and it was worst at the house of the LORD, of all places. Hannah "wept and did not eat." Some of the deepest wounds people carry come from those closest to them, and sometimes they get hurt worst at church. God saw it all.

1:8 *And Elkanah her husband said to her, "Hannah, why do you weep? And why do you not eat? And why is your heart sad? Am I not better to you than ten sons?"*

Elkanah meant well. "Hannah, why do you weep? And why do you not eat? And why is your heart sad? Am I not better to you than ten sons?" He loved her, and he wanted to fix her sadness. But he did not really understand it. Husbands, and friends too, sometimes try to talk people out of grief when what they need is someone to sit with them in it. Hannah's answer was not to argue with Elkanah. Her answer was to take her pain to the LORD.

1:9-11 *And Hannah arose after eating in Shiloh and after drinking. And Eli the priest **was** sitting on the seat by the doorpost of the temple of the LORD. And she **was** bitter of soul, and she prayed to the LORD and wept bitterly. And she vowed a vow and said, "LORD of armies, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant, and remember me and not forget Your maidservant, and give to Your maidservant a seed of men, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and a razor shall not go up on his head."*

After the meal, Hannah got up. Eli the priest was sitting by the doorpost of "the temple of the LORD." The tabernacle at Shiloh had by now some lasting buildings around it, so it could be called a temple or house of the LORD (1:7).

"She was bitter of soul, and she prayed to the LORD and wept bitterly." Hannah did not hide her feelings from God or pretend things were fine. She brought her bitterness to Him. God can handle our honest prayers. The Psalms are full of them.

Then she made a vow. She called on "LORD of armies," the God who commands heaven's armies, and she called herself "Your maidservant" three times. She asked Him to "look on the affliction," to "remember me and not forget." If He gave her "a seed of men," a son, she would give him back "to the LORD all the days of his life, and a razor shall not go up on his head." Leaving the hair uncut was a mark of the Nazirite, a person set apart to God by a special vow (Numbers 6:1-8). Samson had been a Nazirite from birth (Judges 13:5). Hannah promised a son set apart for life.

Was Hannah bargaining with God? I don't think so. She was not trying to buy a child. She was asking for a son she would give right back. Her prayer had moved from wanting something for herself to wanting God to be honored.

1:12-14 *And it was, as she prayed much before the LORD, and Eli **was** watching her mouth. And Hannah, she **was** speaking in her heart; only her lips **were** quivering, and her voice was not heard; and Eli considered her a drunken **woman**. And Eli said to her, "How long will you be drunk? Put away your wine from you."*

Hannah "was speaking in her heart; only her lips were quivering, and her voice was not heard." In that day people usually prayed out loud. Silent prayer was unusual enough that Eli, watching her lips move, decided she was drunk. "How long will you be drunk? Put away your wine from you."

It says something about those days that a priest at the house of God would assume a woman praying was drunk. Perhaps he had seen plenty of drinking at the feasts. As we will learn in chapter 2, his own sons were doing far worse at the tabernacle, and he had not stopped them. Eli was quick to judge a hurting woman and slow to deal with his own house. We should be careful about jumping to conclusions about people who are hurting.

1:15-16 *And Hannah answered and said, "No, my lord, I **am** a woman hard of spirit; and wine and strong drink I have not drunk, and I have poured out my soul before the LORD. Do not set your maidservant before **you as** a daughter of worthlessness, for from the greatness of my complaint and my provocation I have spoken until now."*

Hannah answered with respect. "No, my lord, I am a woman hard of spirit; and wine and strong drink I have not drunk, and I have poured out my soul before the LORD." That is a good picture of prayer: pouring out your soul before the LORD, holding nothing back (Psalm 62:8).

She asked him not to count her "a daughter of worthlessness," a worthless woman. The same Hebrew phrase, sons of worthlessness, will describe Eli's own sons in 2:12. The irony is plain. The woman Eli thought was worthless was the godliest person at Shiloh that day, and the men he let serve at the altar were the worthless ones.

1:17-18 *And Eli answered and said, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant your petition which you have asked from Him." And she said, "Let your maidservant find favor in your eyes." And the woman went on her way and ate, and her face was no longer **sad**.*

To his credit, Eli listened and changed his mind. "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant your petition which you have asked from Him." He did not know what she had asked, but he blessed her.

Look at what happened next. "The woman went on her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad." Nothing had changed yet. She was not pregnant. She had no promise of a son, only a priest's blessing. But she had left her burden with the LORD, and she went away at peace. Paul says the same thing to us: bring everything to God in prayer, and the peace of God will guard your heart (Philippians 4:6-7). Peace often comes before the answer does.

1:19-20 *And they rose early in the morning and bowed down before the LORD, and they returned and came to their house at Ramah. And Elkanah knew Hannah his wife, and the LORD remembered her. And it was at the turning of the days, and Hannah conceived and bore a son; and she called his name Samuel, "For from the LORD I asked for him."*

The family rose early, worshiped, and went home to Ramah. "Elkanah knew Hannah his wife, and the LORD remembered her." To remember, in the Bible, does not mean God had forgotten. It means He acted on what He had promised or what was asked of Him (Genesis 8:1; 30:22). Hannah had prayed, "remember me" (1:11). Now He did.

"Hannah conceived and bore a son; and she called his name Samuel, For from the LORD I asked for him." The name Samuel sounds like the Hebrew words for heard of God or name of God, and Hannah ties it to her asking. Every time she called him, she would remember that God hears prayer.

1:21-23 *And the man Elkanah and all his household went up to sacrifice to the LORD the yearly sacrifice and his vow. And Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, "Until the lad is weaned; and I will bring him, and he shall appear in the presence of the LORD and dwell there forever." And Elkanah her husband said to her, "Do what **is** good in your eyes; remain until you have weaned him; only may the LORD establish His word." And the woman remained and nursed her son until she had weaned him.*

The next year Elkanah went up again "to sacrifice to the LORD the yearly sacrifice and his vow." It seems Elkanah had joined in Hannah's vow. Under the law a husband could cancel his wife's vow when he heard it (Numbers 30:6-8). He did not. He stood with her.

Hannah stayed home "until the lad is weaned." In that time children were often nursed until two or three years old. Then she would bring him, and he would "appear in the presence of the LORD and dwell there forever." Elkanah agreed: "Do what is good in your eyes." Then he added, "only may the LORD establish His word." Hannah had made a promise, and both of them wanted to see God's purpose for this child come true.

1:24-25 *And she brought him up with her when she had weaned him, with three bulls and approximately 3/5 bushel (one ephah) of flour and a skin of wine; and she brought him **to** the house of the LORD **at** Shiloh; and the lad **was** a lad. And they slaughtered the bull and brought the lad to Eli.*

When the boy was weaned, Hannah brought him to Shiloh with "three bulls," flour, and a skin of wine for offerings. That was a large and costly gift. "And the lad was a lad." In other words, he was still very young.

"They slaughtered the bull and brought the lad to Eli." It is hard to picture a mother handing over her little boy, the son she had wept for, to live at the tabernacle under an old priest with wicked sons. But Hannah did what she said she would do.

1:26-28 *And she said, "Please, my lord, **as** your soul lives, my lord, I **am** the woman who stood with you in this **place** to pray to the LORD. For this lad I prayed, and the LORD has granted me my petition which I asked from Him. And also I have lent him to the LORD; all the days that he is, he **is** asked for the LORD." And he bowed down there to the LORD.*

Hannah reminded Eli who she was. "I am the woman who stood with you in this place to pray to the LORD. For this lad I prayed, and the LORD has granted me my petition which I asked from Him." She wanted Eli to know that this boy was God's answer.

"And also I have lent him to the LORD; all the days that he is, he is asked for the LORD." The words asked and lent come from the same Hebrew root. She asked the LORD for him, and now she gives him back as one asked for the LORD. This was not a loan she expected back. It was for life.

"And he bowed down there to the LORD." Even the little boy worshiped. Hannah's gift cost her more than anything else she had. Did she lose by it? The next chapter tells us she sang for joy, and God gave her five more children (2:21). We never lose by giving to God what He has given us. Our children, our plans, our dreams, all of it is safest in His hands.

Chapter 1 Summary

Elkanah of Ramah had two wives. Peninnah had children, but the LORD had closed Hannah's womb, and every year at Shiloh Peninnah provoked her until she wept and would not eat. One year Hannah went to the tabernacle, poured out her soul to the LORD in bitter prayer, and vowed that if He gave her a son she would give him to the LORD for life, with no razor on his head. Eli the priest thought she was drunk, but when she explained, he blessed her, and she went away at peace. The LORD remembered Hannah, and she bore a son and named him Samuel, because she had asked him from the LORD. After he was weaned, she brought him to Eli at Shiloh with offerings and gave him to the LORD for all his days.

People and Places

- Ramathaim-zophim (Ramah): the home of Elkanah and Hannah, and later of Samuel, in the hill country north of Jerusalem.
- Shiloh: the town in Ephraim where the tabernacle stood in the days of the judges.
- Elkanah: Samuel's father, a Levite who lived in Ephraim.
- Hannah: Samuel's mother, a woman of prayer.
- Peninnah: Elkanah's other wife, who had children and mocked Hannah.
- Eli: the high priest at Shiloh, who also judged Israel (4:18).
- Hophni and Phinehas: Eli's sons, priests at Shiloh.
- Nazirite: a person set apart to God by a vow, who did not cut his hair or drink wine (Numbers 6).

Chapter 1 Study Questions

1. How was Hannah treated by Peninnah, and when was it worst? (1:6-7)

2. What did Elkanah say to comfort Hannah, and why do you think it did not help? (1:8)

3. What did Hannah vow to the LORD? (1:11)

4. Why did Eli think Hannah was drunk, and how did she answer him? (1:12-16)

5. What changed in Hannah after Eli blessed her, even before anything else happened? (1:18)

6. What does the name Samuel remind Hannah of? (1:20)

7. How did Hannah keep her vow, and what did it cost her? (1:24-28)

8. Hannah "poured out" her soul before the LORD. What keeps us from praying that honestly?

9. Have you ever been hurt by someone close to you, or at church? What would it look like to take that pain to God the way Hannah did?

10. Is there something God has given you that you need to give back to Him, as Hannah gave Samuel?

Chapter 2: Hannah's Song and the Sins of Eli's Sons

Scripture

2:1-10 And Hannah prayed and said, "My heart has rejoiced in the LORD; my horn has been exalted in the LORD; my mouth has opened wide over my enemies, for I have rejoiced in Your salvation. There is none holy like the LORD, for there is none besides You, and there is no rock like our God. Do not multiply speaking lofty, lofty ***things***; ***let not*** arrogance go out from your mouth; for the LORD ***is*** a God of knowledge, and by Him deeds are weighed. The bow of the mighty ***is*** shattered, and those who stumble have girded on strength. The satisfied have hired themselves out for bread, and the hungry have ceased; even the barren has borne seven, and she ***who is*** many ***in*** sons languishes. The LORD kills and makes alive; He brings down ***to*** Sheol and brings up. The LORD makes poor and makes rich; He brings low, also He exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust; from the ash heap He lifts up the needy, to make ***them*** sit with nobles; and a throne of glory He makes them inherit. For the pillars of the earth ***are*** the LORD's, and He has set the world on them. The feet of His godly ones He will guard, and the wicked shall be silenced in darkness; for not by strength shall a man prevail. The LORD, those who contend against Him shall be shattered; against him in the heavens He will thunder. The LORD will judge the ends of the earth, and He will give strength to His king and exalt the horn of His anointed."

2:11-21 And Elkanah went to Ramah, to his house. And the lad was serving the LORD in the presence of Eli the priest. And the sons of Eli ***were*** sons of worthlessness; they did not know the LORD. And the custom of the priests with the people ***was this***: ***when*** any man was sacrificing a sacrifice, the servant of the priest would come while the flesh was boiling, and the fork of three prongs ***was*** in his hand; and he would thrust ***it*** into the pan or into the kettle or into the caldron or into the pot; all that the fork brought up the priest would take for himself. Thus they did to all Israel who came there, at Shiloh. Also before they made the fat smoke, the servant of the priest would come and say to the man who was sacrificing, "Give flesh to roast for the priest; and he will not take boiled flesh from you, but raw." And the man would say to him, "Let them surely make the fat smoke first, and ***then*** take for yourself as your soul desires." And he would say, "No, but now you shall give ***it***; and if not, I will take ***it*** by force." And the sin of the young men was very great in the presence of the LORD, for the men treated the offering of the LORD with contempt. And Samuel was serving in the presence of the LORD, a lad girded ***with*** an ephod of linen. And his mother would make him a little robe and bring it up to him from year to year, when she went up with her husband to sacrifice the yearly sacrifice. And Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife and say, "May the LORD appoint for you seed from this woman in place of the petition which he asked for the LORD." And they would go to his place. For the LORD visited Hannah, and she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters. And the lad Samuel grew up with the LORD.

2:22-36 And Eli was very old, and he heard all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they were lying with the women who served ***at*** the entrance of the tent of meeting. And he said to them, "Why do you do according to these things which I am hearing, your evil things, from all these people? No, my sons; for the report which I am hearing the people of the LORD spreading ***is*** not good. If a man sins against a man, God will mediate for him; and if a man sins against the LORD, who will intercede for him?" And they did not listen to the voice of their father, for the

LORD desired to put them to death. And the lad Samuel was going on and growing, and ***was*** good both with the LORD and also with men. And a man of God came to Eli and said to him, "Thus says the LORD: 'Did I indeed reveal Myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt, ***belonging*** to the house of Pharaoh? And I chose him from all the tribes of Israel for Myself for a priest, to go up on My altar, to make incense smoke, to bear an ephod before Me; and I gave to the house of your father all the fire offerings of the sons of Israel. Why do you kick at My sacrifice and at My offering which I commanded ***for My*** dwelling place, and honor your sons more than Me, by fattening yourselves from the choicest of every offering of Israel, of My people? Therefore, declares the LORD, the God of Israel: I surely said, "Your house and the house of your father shall walk about before Me forever." And now, declares the LORD, far be it from Me! For those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me shall be lightly esteemed. Look, days are coming, and I will cut off your arm and the arm of the house of your father, so that there will not be an old man in your house. And you will look ***on the*** distress of ***My*** dwelling place in all ***the good*** that He does to Israel; and there shall not be an old man in your house all the days. And a man of yours whom I do not cut off from My altar ***shall be*** to make your eyes fail and to grieve your soul; and all the increase of your house shall die ***as*** men. And this ***shall be*** the sign for you which shall come to your two sons, to Hophni and Phinehas: on one day the two of them shall die. And I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest; according to what ***is*** in My heart and in My soul he shall do; and I will build for him a sure house, and he shall walk about before My anointed all the days. And it shall be ***that*** everyone who is left in your house shall come to bow down to him for a piece of silver and a round loaf of bread, and shall say, "Attach me, please, to one of the priestly offices, to eat a morsel of bread."'"

Chapter 2 Preview

Hannah has just handed her little boy over to Eli at Shiloh. You might expect her to cry. Instead she sings. Her song is one of the great prayers of the Bible. She praises the LORD as holy, as the Rock, as the God who weighs every deed, who brings down the proud and lifts up the poor, who kills and makes alive. She ends by speaking of His king and His anointed, long before Israel had any king at all. About a thousand years later, another young mother, Mary, would sing a song that sounds very much like it.

The rest of the chapter switches back and forth between two pictures. On one side is the boy Samuel, faithfully serving the LORD and growing in favor. On the other side are Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, priests who steal from God's offerings, sleep with the women who serve at the tabernacle, and refuse to listen to their father. A man of God comes to Eli with a hard word: his house will be cut off, both his sons will die on one day, and God will raise up a faithful priest.

Chapter 2 Study

2:1 *And Hannah prayed and said, "My heart has rejoiced in the LORD; my horn has been exalted in the LORD; my mouth has opened wide over my enemies, for I have rejoiced in Your salvation.*

"My heart has rejoiced in the LORD." Hannah's joy is in the LORD Himself, not only in the gift He gave. "My horn has been exalted in the LORD." A horn in the Bible is a picture of strength, like the

horns of a strong animal. To have your horn lifted up means God has given you strength and honor after shame.

"My mouth has opened wide over my enemies." For years Hannah kept quiet while Peninnah mocked her. Now she can speak. But notice that she does not gloat over Peninnah by name. She says, "for I have rejoiced in Your salvation." Salvation here means rescue, God stepping in to deliver. Hannah saw her son as God's salvation in her life.

Hannah's song is Hebrew poetry. Hebrew poetry does not rhyme sounds. It rhymes thoughts. One line says something, and the next line says it again in other words, or adds to it, or gives the opposite. This is called parallelism. "My heart has rejoiced" and "my horn has been exalted" say the same thing two ways. Watch for it as you read.

2:2 *There is none holy like the LORD, for there is none besides You, and there is no rock like our God.*

"There is none holy like the LORD, for there is none besides You, and there is no rock like our God." Holy means set apart, completely different from us, pure and without sin. The LORD is not just the best of the gods. He is the only God. There is "none besides You."

A rock was a place of safety in that hill country, solid and unmoving, a place to hide from enemies. Moses had called God the Rock (Deuteronomy 32:4). Hannah had been shaken for years, but her God had not moved.

2:3 *Do not multiply speaking lofty, lofty* ***things****;* ***let not*** *arrogance go out from your mouth; for the LORD* ***is*** *a God of knowledge, and by Him deeds are weighed.*

Now Hannah warns the proud: "Do not multiply speaking lofty, lofty things." She may have Peninnah in mind, but her words reach anyone who talks big. Why should the proud keep quiet? "For the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by Him deeds are weighed." God knows everything, and He weighs every act on His scales. He knows what was done to Hannah. He knows what is done to us. We do not need to take revenge. We can leave it with the God who weighs deeds (Romans 12:19).

2:4-5 *The bow of the mighty* ***is*** *shattered, and those who stumble have girded on strength. The satisfied have hired themselves out for bread, and the hungry have ceased; even the barren has borne seven, and she* ***who is*** *many* ***in*** *sons languishes.*

Hannah gives a set of reversals. "The bow of the mighty is shattered, and those who stumble have girded on strength." The strong soldier is broken, and the weak man gets up strong. "The satisfied have hired themselves out for bread, and the hungry have ceased." The rich go hungry, and the hungry stop being hungry.

Then she comes to her own story: "even the barren has borne seven, and she who is many in sons languishes." Seven is the number of completeness. Hannah would have six children in all (2:21), so seven here is a picture of a full and complete blessing. The woman who had many children, Peninnah, is the one who now fades away. God turns the world upside down.

2:6-8 *The LORD kills and makes alive; He brings down **to** Sheol and brings up. The LORD makes poor and makes rich; He brings low, also He exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust; from the ash heap He lifts up the needy, to make **them** sit with nobles; and a throne of glory He makes them inherit. For the pillars of the earth **are** the LORD's, and He has set the world on them.*

"The LORD kills and makes alive; He brings down to Sheol and brings up." Sheol is the Hebrew name for the place of the dead, the grave. Life and death are in God's hand alone. Hannah had felt dead inside, and God gave her life. But her words go further than that. A God who can bring up from Sheol can raise the dead. This is one of the early places in the Old Testament that hints at resurrection (compare Deuteronomy 32:39).

"The LORD makes poor and makes rich; He brings low, also He exalts." Nothing happens to us outside His rule. That does not mean every hard thing is a punishment. It means no hard thing is out of His control.

"He raises up the poor from the dust; from the ash heap He lifts up the needy, to make them sit with nobles; and a throne of glory He makes them inherit." The ash heap was the town dump, where beggars and outcasts sat. God lifts people from there to a seat among princes. That is exactly what He did for David, the shepherd boy who became king, and it is what He does for every sinner saved by grace. We were in the dust, and He seated us with Christ (Ephesians 2:4-6).

"The pillars of the earth are the LORD's." He made the world and holds it up. If He can hold up the earth, He can hold up one hurting woman.

2:9 *The feet of His godly ones He will guard, and the wicked shall be silenced in darkness; for not by strength shall a man prevail.*

"The feet of His godly ones He will guard." The godly are those who belong to Him and are loyal to Him. God watches over their steps. "The wicked shall be silenced in darkness." Those who speak against God will one day have nothing to say.

"For not by strength shall a man prevail." This sentence sums up the whole book of 1 Samuel. Saul will be tall and strong. Goliath will be a giant. Neither one wins. The people who win are the ones who trust the LORD. Zechariah 4:6 says the same: not by might, nor by power, but by God's Spirit.

2:10 *The LORD, those who contend against Him shall be shattered; against him in the heavens He will thunder. The LORD will judge the ends of the earth, and He will give strength to His king and exalt the horn of His anointed."*

"The LORD, those who contend against Him shall be shattered; against him in the heavens He will thunder." God's enemies will not stand. In chapter 7 the LORD will thunder in a real storm against the Philistines.

"The LORD will judge the ends of the earth." Hannah's song widens from her own home to the whole world. One day God will judge every nation.

Then come the last words, and they are remarkable: "He will give strength to His king and exalt the horn of His anointed." Israel had no king when Hannah sang this. The judges were not kings. Yet Hannah speaks of God's king. The word anointed is the Hebrew word mashiach. To anoint someone was to pour oil on his head to set him apart for a task God gave him. Priests were anointed, and soon kings would be. From mashiach we get the word Messiah, and its Greek form, Christos, gives us the word Christ (John 1:41). This is the first time the Bible speaks of the LORD's anointed king.

In the near view, Hannah's words point to the kings God would give Israel, and her own son would anoint the first two, Saul and David. But the song reaches past them. The king God strengthens and the anointed whose horn He lifts up is finally Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of David. Psalm 2:2 speaks of the rulers who stand "against the LORD and against His Anointed," and the apostles applied that psalm to Jesus (Acts 4:25-27). Hannah sang her prayer about the son she had given up. In time God would give up His own Son, the true Anointed One.

Many people have noticed how much Mary's song in Luke 1:46-55 sounds like Hannah's. Both women were given a son by God's power. Hannah says, "My heart has rejoiced in the LORD." Mary says, "my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior" (Luke 1:47). Hannah says God "brings low, also He exalts." Mary says, "He has brought down rulers from thrones and has exalted the lowly" (Luke 1:52). Hannah says the satisfied go hungry and the hungry are filled. Mary says, "Those who hunger He has filled with good things, and those who are rich He has sent away empty" (Luke 1:53). Mary knew her Scriptures, and she knew that her Son was the King Hannah had sung about.

2:11 *And Elkanah went to Ramah, to his house. And the lad was serving the LORD in the presence of Eli the priest.*

Elkanah went home to Ramah, and "the lad was serving the LORD in the presence of Eli the priest." Samuel was only a small boy, but he already had work to do at the tabernacle. Children can serve God too. The chapter now begins to set Samuel side by side with Eli's sons, and the difference is sharp.

2:12-14 *And the sons of Eli **were** sons of worthlessness; they did not know the LORD. And the custom of the priests with the people **was this**: **when** any man was sacrificing a sacrifice, the servant of the priest would come while the flesh was boiling, and the fork of three prongs **was** in his hand; and he would thrust **it** into the pan or into the kettle or into the caldron or into the pot; all that the fork brought up the priest would take for himself. Thus they did to all Israel who came there, at Shiloh.*

"And the sons of Eli were sons of worthlessness; they did not know the LORD." These were priests. They served at God's altar every day, and they did not know Him. It is possible to be busy with religious work and not know God at all. Jesus warned that some who did great things in His name would hear, "I never knew you" (Matthew 7:22-23).

Here is what they did. When a man brought a peace offering, part of the meat was boiled for the family meal. The law gave the priest certain parts, the breast and the right thigh

(Leviticus 7:31-34). But Eli's sons sent a servant with a three-pronged fork. He would jab it into the pot, and "all that the fork brought up the priest would take for himself." They took what they wanted, not what God gave them.

2:15-17 *Also before they made the fat smoke, the servant of the priest would come and say to the man who was sacrificing, "Give flesh to roast for the priest; and he will not take boiled flesh from you, but raw." And the man would say to him, "Let them surely make the fat smoke first, and **then** take for yourself as your soul desires." And he would say, "No, but now you shall give **it**; and if not, I will take **it** by force." And the sin of the young men was very great in the presence of the LORD, for the men treated the offering of the LORD with contempt.*

It got worse. Before the fat was even burned on the altar, the servant demanded raw meat to roast. The fat belonged to the LORD. It was to be burned first, as the best part, given to God (Leviticus 3:16; 7:23-25). Eli's sons wanted their share before God got His.

When a worshiper tried to do things the right way, "Let them surely make the fat smoke first," the servant answered, "if not, I will take it by force." The priests had become bullies.

"And the sin of the young men was very great in the presence of the LORD, for the men treated the offering of the LORD with contempt." The worst part of their sin was not just greed. It was that they despised what belonged to God. When leaders treat holy things as if they were cheap, they teach the people to do the same. Some of the people may have stopped bringing offerings at all.

2:18-21 *And Samuel was serving in the presence of the LORD, a lad girded **with** an ephod of linen. And his mother would make him a little robe and bring it up to him from year to year, when she went up with her husband to sacrifice the yearly sacrifice. And Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife and say, "May the LORD appoint for you seed from this woman in place of the petition which he asked for the LORD." And they would go to his place. For the LORD visited Hannah, and she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters. And the lad Samuel grew up with the LORD.*

In the middle of all this sin, "Samuel was serving in the presence of the LORD, a lad girded with an ephod of linen." An ephod was a simple linen garment worn by those who served before the LORD. The high priest had a special one, but others wore plain linen ones (22:18; 2 Samuel 6:14). Little Samuel had his own.

Every year his mother made him "a little robe" and brought it to him. Picture Hannah sewing that robe at home, a bit bigger each year as he grew. She had given him to the LORD, but she never stopped loving him or praying for him.

Eli blessed Elkanah and Hannah and asked the LORD to give them more children "in place of the petition which he asked for the LORD." And God did. "The LORD visited Hannah, and she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters." God is no man's debtor. Hannah gave one son, and God gave her five more children.

"And the lad Samuel grew up with the LORD." Not just near the tabernacle. With the LORD.

2:22-25 *And Eli was very old, and he heard all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they were lying with the women who served **at** the entrance of the tent of meeting. And he said to them, "Why do you do according to these things which I am hearing, your evil things, from all these people? No, my sons; for the report which I am hearing the people of the LORD spreading **is** not good. If a man sins against a man, God will mediate for him; and if a man sins against the LORD, who will intercede for him?" And they did not listen to the voice of their father, for the LORD desired to put them to death.*

"Eli was very old, and he heard all that his sons were doing to all Israel." He also heard "how they were lying with the women who served at the entrance of the tent of meeting." Women served at the tabernacle entrance in some way (Exodus 38:8). Eli's sons used their power as priests to take sexual advantage of them. That was immorality, and it was abuse of their office. It also looked like the pagan worship of Canaan, which mixed sexual sin with the worship of false gods. God's house was being turned into a place of shame.

Eli did speak to his sons. "Why do you do according to these things which I am hearing, your evil things, from all these people? No, my sons." He warned them: "If a man sins against a man, God will mediate for him; and if a man sins against the LORD, who will intercede for him?" When we wrong another person, God can judge between us. But when the priests themselves sin against God, who is left to stand for them?

But Eli only spoke. He did not remove them. He was the high priest and the judge of Israel. He had the authority to take them away from the altar, and he did not use it. God will say so in 3:13.

"And they did not listen to the voice of their father, for the LORD desired to put them to death." This is a sobering line. It does not mean God kept them from repenting when they wanted to. They had already sinned for a long time against light they knew. There comes a point when God gives a person over to the hardness he has chosen (Romans 1:24, 28). The LORD had decided to judge them, and their refusal to listen was the road to that judgment. God is patient, but His patience is not endless. Today is the day to listen (Hebrews 3:15).

2:26 *And the lad Samuel was going on and growing, and **was** good both with the LORD and also with men.*

"And the lad Samuel was going on and growing, and was good both with the LORD and also with men." Luke uses almost the same words about the boy Jesus: He "was advancing in wisdom and stature and favor with God and men" (Luke 2:52). Samuel's growing up is a small picture of the One who would grow up in Nazareth. Both grew in favor in a dark time, while the religious leaders around them failed.

2:27-29 *And a man of God came to Eli and said to him, "Thus says the LORD: 'Did I indeed reveal Myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt,* ***belonging*** *to the house of Pharaoh? And I chose him from all the tribes of Israel for Myself for a priest, to go up on My altar, to make incense smoke, to bear an ephod before Me; and I gave to the house of your father all the fire offerings of the sons of Israel. Why do you kick at My sacrifice and at My offering which I commanded* ***for My*** *dwelling place, and honor your sons more than Me, by fattening yourselves from the choicest of every offering of Israel, of My people?*

"A man of God came to Eli." We are not told his name. A man of God was a prophet, someone God sent to speak His word. The LORD reminds Eli of what He had done for his family. He revealed Himself to Aaron's house in Egypt. He chose them "for a priest, to go up on My altar, to make incense smoke, to bear an ephod before Me." He gave them a share of every offering. They lacked nothing.

Then the charge: "Why do you kick at My sacrifice and at My offering," and "honor your sons more than Me, by fattening yourselves from the choicest of every offering of Israel." God includes Eli in the sin. Eli had eaten from what his sons took. He was heavy (4:18), and he had grown fat on stolen offerings. By letting his sons go on, Eli honored them above God.

That is a warning for every parent and every leader. Loving our children does not mean protecting them from the consequences of sin. Sometimes the most loving thing a father can do is say no and mean it.

2:30 *Therefore, declares the LORD, the God of Israel: I surely said, "Your house and the house of your father shall walk about before Me forever." And now, declares the LORD, far be it from Me! For those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me shall be lightly esteemed.*

"I surely said, Your house and the house of your father shall walk about before Me forever." God had promised Aaron's family a lasting priesthood (Exodus 29:9). "And now, declares the LORD, far be it from Me!" The promise to Aaron's line as a whole would stand, but Eli's branch of that family would lose its place.

Then comes one of the great principles of the Bible: "For those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me shall be lightly esteemed." To honor God is to give Him the weight and first place He deserves. To despise Him is to treat Him as light, as if He does not matter. The rest of 1 Samuel shows this principle at work again and again. Samuel honored God, and God honored Samuel. Saul despised God's word, and he lost his kingdom. David honored God, even when it cost him. What does it look like for you to honor God this week?

2:31-34 *Look, days are coming, and I will cut off your arm and the arm of the house of your father, so that there will not be an old man in your house. And you will look **on the** distress of **My** dwelling place in all **the good** that He does to Israel; and there shall not be an old man in your house all the days. And a man of yours whom I do not cut off from My altar **shall be** to make your eyes fail and to grieve your soul; and all the increase of your house shall die **as** men. And this **shall be** the sign for you which shall come to your two sons, to Hophni and Phinehas: on one day the two of them shall die.*

The judgment was severe. "I will cut off your arm," meaning the strength of his family. "There will not be an old man in your house." Men in Eli's family would die young. Eli would live to see trouble come on God's dwelling place even while God did good to Israel. And the one man of Eli's family left serving at the altar would only bring his father's line grief.

"And this shall be the sign for you which shall come to your two sons, to Hophni and Phinehas: on one day the two of them shall die." This came true in 4:11. Later, Saul's men killed the priests of Nob, Eli's descendants (22:18-20), and Solomon finally removed Abiathar, the last of Eli's line, from the priesthood. 1 Kings 2:27 says Solomon did it "to fulfill the word of the LORD which He had spoken concerning the house of Eli in Shiloh."

2:35-36 *And I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest; according to what **is** in My heart and in My soul he shall do; and I will build for him a sure house, and he shall walk about before My anointed all the days. And it shall be **that** everyone who is left in your house shall come to bow down to him for a piece of silver and a round loaf of bread, and shall say, "Attach me, please, to one of the priestly offices, to eat a morsel of bread."'"*

"And I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest; according to what is in My heart and in My soul he shall do." In the near view this was fulfilled in Zadok, who became high priest in Solomon's day after Abiathar was removed (1 Kings 2:35). His family served as priests for centuries. Some also see Samuel himself, who served faithfully at the altar in Eli's place.

"I will build for him a sure house, and he shall walk about before My anointed all the days." This faithful priest would serve before God's anointed king. Here again, in the same chapter as Hannah's song, the anointed king shows up.

Every human priest died, and every priestly family failed in the end. But the promise of a faithful priest who does all that is in God's heart finds its full answer in Jesus. Hebrews says He became "a merciful and faithful high priest in the things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people" (Hebrews 2:17). Propitiation means a sacrifice that satisfies God's justice and turns away His wrath. Jesus is both the faithful Priest and the Anointed King.

The chapter ends with Eli's descendants begging for a piece of silver and a loaf of bread: "Attach me, please, to one of the priestly offices, to eat a morsel of bread." The men who grabbed the best meat would see their children beg for crumbs. Sin promises plenty and pays in poverty.

Chapter 2 Summary

Hannah sang a prayer of praise after giving Samuel to the LORD. She rejoiced in His salvation, praised Him as holy and as the Rock, warned the proud that the LORD weighs every deed, and praised Him as the God who kills and makes alive, brings low and lifts up, and raises the poor from the ash heap to sit with nobles. She ended by saying the LORD would judge the earth and give strength to His king, His anointed, words that point to Israel's kings and finally to the Messiah, and that Mary echoed in her own song. Samuel served the LORD at Shiloh, wore a linen ephod, and grew in favor with God and men, and God gave Hannah five more children. Meanwhile Eli's sons, who did not know the LORD, stole from the offerings, took the fat before it was burned, and lay with the women who served at the tabernacle. Eli rebuked them but did not stop them. A man of God told Eli that because he honored his sons more than God, his house would be cut off, his two sons would die on one day, and God would raise up a faithful priest.

People and Places

- Sheol: the Hebrew name for the place of the dead, the grave.
- Mashiach (anointed): a person set apart by God with oil for His service; the source of the word Messiah.
- Ephod: a linen garment worn by those who served before the LORD; the high priest had a special one.
- Peace offering: an offering in which part was burned, part given to the priest, and part eaten by the worshiper's family (Leviticus 3; 7:11-34).
- Man of God: a prophet sent with God's word.
- Zadok: the priest who replaced Abiathar, Eli's descendant, in Solomon's day (1 Kings 2:35).

Chapter 2 Study Questions

1. What does Hannah rejoice in, and what does she say about the LORD's holiness? (2:1-2)

2. What does Hannah say the LORD does to the proud and to the poor? (2:3-8)

3. What does Hannah say about the LORD's king and His anointed, and why is it surprising at that time? (2:10)

4. Compare Hannah's song with Mary's song in Luke 1:46-55. What do they have in common?

5. What did Eli's sons do with the offerings and with the women at the tabernacle? (2:12-17, 22)

6. How is Samuel described in contrast to Eli's sons? (2:11, 18, 21, 26)

7. What did Eli do about his sons, and what did he fail to do? (2:23-25, 29)

8. "Those who honor Me I will honor" (2:30). Where in your life do you find it hardest to honor God first?

9. Eli honored his sons more than God. Why is it so hard for parents or leaders to confront sin in those they love?

10. Hannah praised God for lifting the poor from the ash heap. When has God lifted you up, and have you thanked Him for it?

Chapter 3: The LORD Calls Samuel

Scripture

3:1-10 And the lad Samuel was serving the LORD before Eli. And the word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no vision spread abroad. And it was on that day, and Eli ***was*** lying in his place, and his eyes had begun ***to be*** dim; he was not able to see. And the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel ***was*** lying in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God ***was***. And the LORD called to Samuel, and he said, "Here I ***am***." And he ran to Eli and said, "Here I ***am***, for you called me." And he said, "I did not call; return, lie down." And he went and lay down. And the LORD continued to call Samuel again. And Samuel rose and went to Eli and said, "Here I ***am***, for you called me." And he said, "I did not call, my son; return, lie down." And Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. And the LORD continued to call Samuel a third ***time***. And he rose and went to Eli and said, "Here I ***am***, for you called me." And Eli understood that the LORD was calling the lad. And Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and it shall be, if He calls to you, that you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for Your servant is listening.'" And Samuel went and lay down in his place. And the LORD came and stood and called as time ***after*** time, "Samuel, Samuel." And Samuel said, "Speak, for Your servant is listening."

3:11-21 And the LORD said to Samuel, "Look, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it shall tingle. On that day I will carry out against Eli all that I have spoken against his house, beginning and ending. And I declare to him that I am about to judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knew, that his sons were bringing a curse on themselves, and he did not rebuke them. And therefore I have sworn to the house of Eli ***that*** the iniquity of the house of Eli shall not be atoned for by sacrifice and by offering forever." And Samuel lay until the morning, and he opened the doors of the house of the LORD. And Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. And Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son." And he said, "Here I ***am***." And he said, "What ***is*** the word which He spoke to you? Please do not hide ***it*** from me. Thus may God do to you, and thus may He add, if you hide from me a word from all the word which He spoke to you." And Samuel told him all the words and did not hide ***them*** from him. And he said, "He ***is*** the LORD; let Him do what ***is*** good in His eyes." And Samuel grew up, and the LORD was with him and did not let any of all his words fall to the ground. And all Israel, from Dan and to Beersheba, knew that Samuel ***was*** established as a prophet of the LORD. And the LORD continued to appear at Shiloh, for the LORD revealed Himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the LORD.

Chapter 3 Preview

It was a quiet time in Israel. The word of the LORD was rare, and the old priest Eli was losing his sight. One night, as the boy Samuel lay sleeping in the tabernacle near the ark of God, the LORD called his name. Samuel thought Eli was calling him. Three times he ran to the old man, and three times Eli sent him back to bed. Then Eli understood, and he told Samuel what to say: "Speak, LORD, for Your servant is listening."

The first message God gave Samuel was a hard one. It was a word of judgment against Eli's house. In the morning Samuel was afraid to tell it, but Eli made him, and Samuel told him everything.

From then on the LORD was with Samuel, and all Israel knew that God had raised up a prophet. This chapter is about hearing God's voice, about telling the truth when it is hard, and about God speaking again in a dark time.

Chapter 3 Study

3:1 *And the lad Samuel was serving the LORD before Eli. And the word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no vision spread abroad.*

"And the lad Samuel was serving the LORD before Eli." Samuel was no longer a toddler, but he was still a boy. Some think he was around twelve. Scripture does not tell us.

"And the word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no vision spread abroad." God was not speaking often. Why? Part of the answer is in chapter 2. When God's people, and especially their priests, despise what He has already said, He may stop speaking for a while (Amos 8:11-12). Silence from God can be a judgment. But it can also be the quiet before He does something new. The same was true in the four hundred silent years before John the Baptist came.

3:2-3 *And it was on that day, and Eli **was** lying in his place, and his eyes had begun **to be** dim; he was not able to see. And the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel **was** lying in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God **was**.*

Eli was "lying in his place, and his eyes had begun to be dim." His failing eyes match his failing spiritual sight. He could no longer see well, and he had not seen what God wanted done in his own house.

"And the lamp of God had not yet gone out." The lampstand in the holy place was to burn from evening until morning (Exodus 27:20-21). So this was in the night, before dawn. The writer may also be hinting at something more. Israel's light was low, but it had not gone out. God still had a light burning, and it was a boy named Samuel.

Samuel was "lying in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was." The ark of the covenant was the gold-covered wooden chest that held the stone tablets of the law. Its lid was the mercy seat, where God said He would meet with His people (Exodus 25:22). The ark stood in the Most Holy Place behind the veil, so Samuel was not sleeping beside it. He slept somewhere in the tabernacle area, near enough to tend the lamp and open the doors in the morning (3:15).

3:4-7 *And the LORD called to Samuel, and he said, "Here I **am**." And he ran to Eli and said, "Here I **am**, for you called me." And he said, "I did not call; return, lie down." And he went and lay down. And the LORD continued to call Samuel again. And Samuel rose and went to Eli and said, "Here I **am**, for you called me." And he said, "I did not call, my son; return, lie down." And Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.*

"The LORD called to Samuel, and he said, Here I am." That is the same answer Abraham and Moses gave when God called them (Genesis 22:1; Exodus 3:4). Samuel ran to Eli. "Here I am, for you called me." Eli said he had not called and sent him back. It happened again.

Why did Samuel not recognize the LORD's voice? Verse 7 explains: "Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him." Samuel served the LORD, but he had never yet heard God speak to him directly. He was faithful in the little he knew. Now God was about to show him more.

Notice Samuel's attitude. Three times he got up in the night and ran to answer. He did not grumble or roll over. He was ready to serve before he knew who was calling.

3:8-9 *And the LORD continued to call Samuel a third **time**. And he rose and went to Eli and said, "Here I **am**, for you called me." And Eli understood that the LORD was calling the lad. And Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and it shall be, if He calls to you, that you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for Your servant is listening.'" And Samuel went and lay down in his place.*

The third time, "Eli understood that the LORD was calling the lad." For all his failures, Eli still knew enough about God to recognize what was happening. He gave Samuel the right advice: "Go, lie down," and if He calls again, say, "Speak, LORD, for Your servant is listening."

This is one of the most important prayers a believer can pray. It puts God first and me second. It does not say, Listen, LORD, for Your servant is speaking, which is how many of our prayers sound. It is the prayer of someone ready to obey before he hears what God will ask.

There is something to learn from Eli here too. He was not able to fix everything in his own life, but he pointed a young person to God. Older believers, even those who have failed, can still help young people learn to hear God.

3:10 *And the LORD came and stood and called as time **after** time, "Samuel, Samuel." And Samuel said, "Speak, for Your servant is listening."*

"And the LORD came and stood and called as time after time, Samuel, Samuel." The LORD did not just speak from far off. He "came and stood." Some kind of appearance seems to be meant, and in 3:15 the writer calls it "the vision." The LORD said Samuel's name twice, the way He called "Abraham, Abraham" (Genesis 22:11) and "Moses, Moses" (Exodus 3:4). He knew this boy by name. He knows us by name too (John 10:3).

Samuel answered, "Speak, for Your servant is listening." He left out the word LORD. Perhaps he was nervous. Perhaps he was not yet sure. Either way, he was listening.

3:11-14 *And the LORD said to Samuel, "Look, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it shall tingle. On that day I will carry out against Eli all that I have spoken against his house, beginning and ending. And I declare to him that I am about to judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knew, that his sons were bringing a curse on themselves, and he did not rebuke them. And therefore I have sworn to the house of Eli **that** the iniquity of the house of Eli shall not be atoned for by sacrifice and by offering forever."*

The first message God gave Samuel was hard. "Look, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it shall tingle." The news would be so shocking that people's ears would ring. That happened when the ark was captured and Eli's sons died (chapter 4).

God would carry out "all that I have spoken against his house, beginning and ending." The man of God's message in chapter 2 would come true in full.

Why? "For the iniquity which he knew, that his sons were bringing a curse on themselves, and he did not rebuke them." The Hebrew word here means to restrain. Eli spoke to his sons (2:23-25), but he did not stop them. He knew, and he let it go on. A father who knows his children are destroying themselves and does nothing about it shares in the guilt.

"The iniquity of the house of Eli shall not be atoned for by sacrifice and by offering forever." To atone means to cover sin and make peace with God, usually through a sacrifice. Eli's sons had despised the very sacrifices God gave to cover sin. So there was no sacrifice left that could cover theirs. Hebrews 10:26-29 gives a similar warning: if we keep on sinning willingly after knowing the truth, rejecting the one sacrifice God has given, "there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins." The only sacrifice that saves is Christ's. To despise it is to have none.

3:15-18 *And Samuel lay until the morning, and he opened the doors of the house of the LORD. And Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. And Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son." And he said, "Here I **am**." And he said, "What **is** the word which He spoke to you? Please do not hide **it** from me. Thus may God do to you, and thus may He add, if you hide from me a word from all the word which He spoke to you." And Samuel told him all the words and did not hide **them** from him. And he said, "He **is** the LORD; let Him do what **is** good in His eyes."*

"Samuel lay until the morning, and he opened the doors of the house of the LORD." He went about his normal chores. But he was afraid to tell Eli what God had said. Who would want to tell the old man who raised him that his family was under God's judgment?

Eli called him: "Samuel, my son." And Samuel answered, as he had to the LORD, "Here I am." Eli pressed him. "Please do not hide it from me." He even put an oath on him: "Thus may God do to you, and thus may He add, if you hide from me a word." That was a way of saying, may God punish you if you hold anything back.

"And Samuel told him all the words and did not hide them from him." This was Samuel's first test as a prophet, and he passed it. A prophet's job is to say what God says, all of it, even when it hurts the people he loves. Paul said the same: "I did not hold back from declaring to you all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:27).

Eli's answer is hard to read: "He is the LORD; let Him do what is good in His eyes." Some hear humble faith in those words. Others hear a tired man giving up. I think there is some of both. Eli accepted God's judgment as right. But he still did not remove his sons. Accepting God's word is not the same as obeying it.

3:19-21 *And Samuel grew up, and the LORD was with him and did not let any of all his words fall to the ground. And all Israel, from Dan and to Beersheba, knew that Samuel **was** established as a prophet of the LORD. And the LORD continued to appear at Shiloh, for the LORD revealed Himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the LORD.*

"And Samuel grew up, and the LORD was with him and did not let any of all his words fall to the ground." When Samuel spoke for God, it came true. None of his words fell to the ground, wasted. That was the test of a true prophet (Deuteronomy 18:21-22).

"All Israel, from Dan and to Beersheba, knew that Samuel was established as a prophet of the LORD." Dan was the northernmost town in Israel and Beersheba the southernmost. The whole nation knew it. A prophet was a person God called to speak His word to the people. Samuel was the first of a long line. Peter said all the prophets "from Samuel" on spoke of the days of Christ (Acts 3:24).

"The LORD continued to appear at Shiloh, for the LORD revealed Himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the LORD." Remember verse 1: the word of the LORD was rare. Now it was not. God revealed Himself "by the word of the LORD." That is how He still reveals Himself today, through His Word. We have something Samuel did not: a complete Bible, and the Son Himself, God's final Word (Hebrews 1:1-2). The question is whether we are listening.

Chapter 3 Summary

In a time when the word of the LORD was rare, the boy Samuel served before Eli at Shiloh. One night, before the lamp of God went out, the LORD called Samuel by name. Three times Samuel ran to Eli, thinking he had called. Eli finally understood and told him to answer, "Speak, LORD, for Your servant is listening." The LORD came and stood and called again, and told Samuel that He would judge Eli's house forever because Eli knew his sons were bringing a curse on themselves and did not restrain them, and that no sacrifice would atone for it. In the morning Samuel was afraid to tell Eli, but Eli insisted, and Samuel told him everything. Eli said, "He is the LORD; let Him do what is good in His eyes." The LORD was with Samuel as he grew, none of his words failed, and all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew he was a prophet of the LORD.

People and Places

- Ark of God (ark of the covenant): the gold-covered chest holding the tablets of the law, where God said He would meet His people (Exodus 25:10-22).
- Lamp of God: the golden lampstand in the holy place, kept burning through the night (Exodus 27:20-21).
- Prophet: a person God calls to speak His word to His people.
- Dan to Beersheba: the northern and southern ends of Israel, a way of saying the whole land.

Chapter 3 Study Questions

1. What was the spiritual condition of Israel when God called Samuel? (3:1)

2. Why didn't Samuel recognize the LORD's voice at first? (3:7)

3. What did Eli tell Samuel to say, and why is that a good prayer for us? (3:9)

4. What did the LORD say He would do to Eli's house, and why? (3:11-14)

5. Why was Samuel afraid in the morning, and what did he finally do? (3:15-18)

6. How did Eli respond to the message? What do you think his words show about him? (3:18)

7. How did all Israel come to know Samuel was a prophet? (3:19-20)

8. Eli failed in his own home, but he pointed Samuel to God. Who has pointed you to God, and who could you help in the same way?

9. Is it easier for you to talk to God or to listen to Him? What would help you listen?

10. Is there something God has shown you in His Word that you have been afraid to obey or to say? What would it take to do it?

Chapter 4: The Ark Is Captured

Scripture

4:1-11 And the word of Samuel came to all Israel. And Israel went out to meet the Philistines for battle, and they encamped by Ebenezer, and the Philistines encamped at Aphek. And the Philistines arranged ***themselves*** to meet Israel, and the battle spread out, and Israel was defeated before the Philistines; and they struck down in the battle line in the field about four thousand men. And the people came into the camp, and the elders of Israel said, "Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines? Let us take to ourselves from Shiloh the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and let it come into our midst and save us from the hand of our enemies." And the people sent ***to*** Shiloh, and they carried from there the ark of the covenant of the LORD of armies, who sits ***on*** the cherubim; and the two sons of Eli ***were*** there with the ark of the covenant of God, Hophni and Phinehas. And it was, when the ark of the covenant of the LORD came into the camp, and all Israel shouted a great shout, and the earth resounded. And the Philistines heard the sound of the shout, and they said, "What ***is*** the sound of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews?" And they knew that the ark of the LORD had come into the camp. And the Philistines were afraid, for they said, "God has come into the camp." And they said, "Woe to us! For it has not been like this yesterday ***or the day*** before. Woe to us! Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck Egypt with every blow in the wilderness. Strengthen yourselves and be men, Philistines, lest you serve the Hebrews as they have served you; and be men and fight." And the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and they fled, each man to his tents; and the blow was very great; and there fell of Israel thirty thousand foot soldiers. And the ark of God was taken, and the two sons of Eli died, Hophni and Phinehas.

4:12-22 And a man of Benjamin ran from the battle line and came ***to*** Shiloh on that day, and his garments ***were*** torn, and soil ***was*** on his head. And he came, and look, Eli ***was*** sitting on the seat beside the road, watching, for his heart was trembling for the ark of God. And the man came to tell ***it*** in the city, and all the city cried out. And Eli heard the sound of the outcry and said, "What ***is*** the sound of this uproar?" And the man hurried and came and told Eli. And Eli ***was*** a son of ninety-eight years, and his eyes were set, and he was not able to see. And the man said to Eli, "I ***am*** the one who came from the battle line, and I fled from the battle line today." And he said, "What was the matter, my son?" And the one bringing the news answered and said, "Israel has fled before the Philistines, and also there has been a great slaughter among the people, and also your two sons have died, Hophni and Phinehas, and the ark of God has been taken." And it was, when he mentioned the ark of God, and he fell from on the seat backward beside the gate, and his neck was broken and he died; for the man was old and heavy. And he had judged Israel forty years. And his daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, ***was*** pregnant, about to give birth. And she heard the report concerning the taking of the ark of God, and ***that*** her father-in-law and her husband had died; and she bowed down and gave birth, for her pangs turned upon her. And about the time of her dying, those standing over her spoke, "Do not fear, for you have borne a son." And she did not answer, and she did not set her heart ***to it***. And she called the lad Ichabod, saying, "Glory has gone into exile from Israel," because of the taking of the ark of God and because of her father-in-law

and her husband. And she said, "Glory has gone into exile from Israel, for the ark of God has been taken."

Chapter 4 Preview

The word God gave Samuel in chapter 3 now comes true, and every ear that hears of it tingles. Israel goes to war against the Philistines and loses four thousand men. Instead of asking the LORD why, the elders decide to bring the ark of the covenant into the battle, as if it were a good luck charm. Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, carry it into camp. Israel shouts, and the Philistines are terrified, but they fight harder. Israel is crushed, thirty thousand men fall, Hophni and Phinehas are killed, and the ark of God is captured.

A runner brings the news to Shiloh. When old Eli hears that the ark is taken, he falls backward off his seat, breaks his neck and dies. His daughter-in-law goes into labor at the news and dies giving birth, naming her son Ichabod, because the glory has gone from Israel. This is one of the darkest days in Israel's history. It teaches us that God cannot be used, and that religious objects are no substitute for a right heart.

Chapter 4 Study

4:1-2 *And the word of Samuel came to all Israel. And Israel went out to meet the Philistines for battle, and they encamped by Ebenezer, and the Philistines encamped at Aphek. And the Philistines arranged **themselves** to meet Israel, and the battle spread out, and Israel was defeated before the Philistines; and they struck down in the battle line in the field about four thousand men.*

"And the word of Samuel came to all Israel." This line closes chapter 3. Samuel was now known as God's prophet across the land.

Then the scene changes. "Israel went out to meet the Philistines for battle." The Philistines were a sea people who had settled on the coastal plain in five main cities. They had pressed on Israel since the days of Samson (Judges 13:1). Israel camped at Ebenezer and the Philistines at Aphek, near the edge of the hill country.

Notice what is missing. There is no word that Israel asked the LORD whether to fight, and no word from Samuel about this battle. Israel lost, and "they struck down in the battle line in the field about four thousand men."

4:3-4 *And the people came into the camp, and the elders of Israel said, "Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines? Let us take to ourselves from Shiloh the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and let it come into our midst and save us from the hand of our enemies." And the people sent **to** Shiloh, and they carried from there the ark of the covenant of the LORD of armies, who sits **on** the cherubim; and the two sons of Eli **were** there with the ark of the covenant of God, Hophni and Phinehas.*

The elders asked a good question: "Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines?" They knew the LORD was behind it. But they did not wait for an answer. They did not pray, fast, or

ask Samuel. Instead they came up with their own plan: "Let us take to ourselves from Shiloh the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and let it come into our midst and save us."

Look closely at that last line. "Let it come" and "save us." They were trusting in the box, not in the God of the box. They remembered that the ark had gone before Israel at the Jordan and at Jericho (Joshua 3; 6). But in those days God had commanded it. Now they were trying to force His hand.

The writer calls it "the ark of the covenant of the LORD of armies, who sits on the cherubim." Cherubim are mighty angels. Two golden cherubim stood on the lid of the ark, with their wings spread over it, and God was pictured as enthroned above them. It was His throne on earth. The people treated His throne as a weapon.

Then a quiet, ominous line: "the two sons of Eli were there with the ark of the covenant of God, Hophni and Phinehas." The men God had sworn to judge were the ones carrying His ark into battle. That alone should have warned them.

4:5-9 *And it was, when the ark of the covenant of the LORD came into the camp, and all Israel shouted a great shout, and the earth resounded. And the Philistines heard the sound of the shout, and they said, "What **is** the sound of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews?" And they knew that the ark of the LORD had come into the camp. And the Philistines were afraid, for they said, "God has come into the camp." And they said, "Woe to us! For it has not been like this yesterday **or the day** before. Woe to us! Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck Egypt with every blow in the wilderness. Strengthen yourselves and be men, Philistines, lest you serve the Hebrews as they have served you; and be men and fight."*

"When the ark of the covenant of the LORD came into the camp, and all Israel shouted a great shout, and the earth resounded." Compare this shout with the one at Jericho (Joshua 6:20). That shout was obedience. This one was noise. You can shout loud and still be far from God.

The Philistines heard and were afraid. "God has come into the camp." They had heard the stories: "These are the gods who struck Egypt with every blow in the wilderness." They spoke as people who believed in many gods, and they mixed up the history a little. But they knew Israel's God was powerful.

Yet their fear made them fight harder. "Be men, Philistines, lest you serve the Hebrews as they have served you." Fear can make people desperate, and desperate armies are dangerous. The pagans had more courage that day than God's people had faith.

4:10-11 *And the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and they fled, each man to his tents; and the blow was very great; and there fell of Israel thirty thousand foot soldiers. And the ark of God was taken, and the two sons of Eli died, Hophni and Phinehas.*

"The Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and they fled, each man to his tents." This time "there fell of Israel thirty thousand foot soldiers." The first defeat cost four thousand. Bringing the ark without God's blessing cost thirty thousand.

"And the ark of God was taken, and the two sons of Eli died, Hophni and Phinehas." In one day both sons died, just as the man of God said (2:34). God's word came true to the letter.

Why did God let His ark be captured? Because Israel had turned the ark into an idol. They thought God was bound to fight for them as long as they had the right object in camp, no matter how they lived. God would not be used that way. He let the ark go to show them that He is not a charm, and to show the Philistines in the next chapters that He is not captured just because His ark is.

We can make the same mistake. A Bible on the shelf, a cross on the wall, a church membership, or a ritual can become something we trust in place of God Himself. None of these things are wrong, but they cannot save us. Only the living God can, and He looks for a heart that trusts and obeys Him.

4:12-15 *And a man of Benjamin ran from the battle line and came **to** Shiloh on that day, and his garments **were** torn, and soil **was** on his head. And he came, and look, Eli **was** sitting on the seat beside the road, watching, for his heart was trembling for the ark of God. And the man came to tell **it** in the city, and all the city cried out. And Eli heard the sound of the outcry and said, "What **is** the sound of this uproar?" And the man hurried and came and told Eli. And Eli **was** a son of ninety-eight years, and his eyes were set, and he was not able to see.*

"A man of Benjamin ran from the battle line and came to Shiloh on that day, and his garments were torn, and soil was on his head." Torn clothes and dirt on the head were signs of grief and disaster. Before he said a word, anyone who saw him knew the news was bad. From Aphek to Shiloh is about twenty miles, and he ran it in one day.

Eli was sitting by the road, "watching, for his heart was trembling for the ark of God." That says something good about Eli. With both his sons in the battle, his first fear was for the ark. He loved the things of God. His failure was not that he did not care. It was that he did not act.

The city cried out when the runner told the news. Eli heard the uproar and asked what it meant. He was "a son of ninety-eight years, and his eyes were set, and he was not able to see." He was blind and could only listen.

4:16-18 *And the man said to Eli, "I **am** the one who came from the battle line, and I fled from the battle line today." And he said, "What was the matter, my son?" And the one bringing the news answered and said, "Israel has fled before the Philistines, and also there has been a great slaughter among the people, and also your two sons have died, Hophni and Phinehas, and the ark of God has been taken." And it was, when he mentioned the ark of God, and he fell from on the seat backward beside the gate, and his neck was broken and he died; for the man was old and heavy. And he had judged Israel forty years.*

The runner told it all in four blows, each worse than the last. "Israel has fled before the Philistines." "There has been a great slaughter among the people." "Your two sons have died, Hophni and Phinehas." "And the ark of God has been taken."

"And it was, when he mentioned the ark of God, and he fell from on the seat backward beside the gate, and his neck was broken and he died; for the man was old and heavy." It was not the news

about his sons that killed Eli. It was the news about the ark. The word heavy in Hebrew is from the same root as the word for glory, kabod. Eli was heavy, perhaps from eating the best of the offerings (2:29), and now the glory, the weight, was gone from Israel.

"And he had judged Israel forty years." Eli was both high priest and judge. A judge, in the time before Israel's kings, was a leader God raised up to rescue and govern His people. Eli's forty years ended in sorrow. A long life of religious service can still end badly if sin at home is left alone.

4:19-22 *And his daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, **was** pregnant, about to give birth. And she heard the report concerning the taking of the ark of God, and **that** her father-in-law and her husband had died; and she bowed down and gave birth, for her pangs turned upon her. And about the time of her dying, those standing over her spoke, "Do not fear, for you have borne a son." And she did not answer, and she did not set her heart **to it**. And she called the lad Ichabod, saying, "Glory has gone into exile from Israel," because of the taking of the ark of God and because of her father-in-law and her husband. And she said, "Glory has gone into exile from Israel, for the ark of God has been taken."*

The tragedy did not stop with Eli. Phinehas' wife was pregnant and near her time. When she heard that the ark was taken and that her father-in-law and husband were dead, "she bowed down and gave birth, for her pangs turned upon her." The shock brought on labor.

As she was dying, the women with her tried to comfort her: "Do not fear, for you have borne a son." In that day a son was the greatest news a mother could hear. But "she did not answer, and she did not set her heart to it."

"And she called the lad Ichabod, saying, Glory has gone into exile from Israel." Ichabod means where is the glory, or no glory. The glory of God was His shining presence among His people, seen at Sinai and in the tabernacle (Exodus 40:34-35). With the ark gone, she felt God Himself had left.

The writer repeats her words: "Glory has gone into exile from Israel, for the ark of God has been taken." Her husband had been a wicked priest, yet she seems to have grieved most over the loss of God's presence. In a sad house, she understood what mattered most.

Did God's glory really leave Israel for good? No. In the next chapters God will show His glory among the Philistines, and the ark will come home. Psalm 78:60-61 looks back on this day and says that God "abandoned the tabernacle of Shiloh" and gave His splendor "into the hand of an adversary." Jeremiah later warned Jerusalem to remember what God did to Shiloh (Jeremiah 7:12). Shiloh never recovered its place. But God's purpose went on. Centuries later John would write of Jesus, "we beheld His glory" (John 1:14). The glory that left Shiloh came to dwell among us in the person of God's Son.

Chapter 4 Summary

Israel went out to fight the Philistines without seeking the LORD and lost four thousand men. Instead of asking God, the elders brought the ark of the covenant from Shiloh, carried by Hophni and Phinehas, to save them. Israel shouted, and the Philistines were afraid, but they fought like

men. Israel was defeated, thirty thousand fell, Eli's two sons died on one day as God had said, and the ark of God was captured. A runner brought the news to Shiloh. When blind, ninety-eight-year-old Eli heard the ark had been taken, he fell backward, broke his neck and died after judging Israel forty years. His daughter-in-law died in childbirth and named her son Ichabod, saying the glory had gone into exile from Israel because the ark of God had been taken.

People and Places

- Philistines: a people from across the sea who lived in five cities on Israel's southwest coast and were Israel's main enemy in Samuel's day.
- Ebenezer and Aphek: the places where Israel and the Philistines camped for the battle.
- Cherubim: mighty angels; two gold cherubim spread their wings over the lid of the ark.
- Judge: a leader God raised up to rescue and lead Israel before the time of the kings.
- Ichabod: Eli's grandson, whose name means no glory.

Chapter 4 Study Questions

1. What question did the elders ask after the first defeat, and what did they do instead of waiting for an answer? (4:3)

2. Who carried the ark into the camp, and why should that have been a warning? (4:4; 2:34)

3. How did the Philistines react to the ark coming into Israel's camp? (4:6-9)

4. What happened in the second battle? (4:10-11)

5. What news finally caused Eli's death, and what does that show about him? (4:13, 18)

6. Why did Phinehas' wife name her son Ichabod? (4:21-22)

7. Why do you think God allowed His ark to be captured?

8. Israel treated the ark like a good luck charm. What religious things are we tempted to trust in place of God Himself?

9. The elders asked "why" but did not wait for God's answer. Do you ever ask God questions and then rush ahead with your own plan?

10. Is there anything in your life that is taking the place of God's presence? What would it look like to seek Him first?

Chapter 5: The Ark Among the Philistines

Scripture

5:1-12 And the Philistines took the ark of God, and they brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. And the Philistines took the ark of God, and they brought it ***into*** the house of Dagon, and they set it beside Dagon. And the Ashdodites rose early on the next day, and look, Dagon ***was*** fallen on its face to the ground before the ark of the LORD. And they took Dagon and returned it to its place. And they rose early in the morning on the next day, and look, Dagon ***was*** fallen on its face to the ground before the ark of the LORD, and the head of Dagon and the two palms of its hands ***were*** cut off at the threshold; only Dagon was left on it. Therefore the priests of Dagon and all those who go into the house of Dagon do not tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod until this day. And the hand of the LORD was heavy on the Ashdodites, and He devastated them, and He struck them with tumors, Ashdod and its territories. And the men of Ashdod saw that ***it was*** so, and they said, "The ark of the God of Israel shall not remain with us, for His hand is hard on us and on Dagon our god." And they sent and gathered all the rulers of the Philistines to them, and they said, "What shall we do to the ark of the God of Israel?" And they said, "***To*** Gath let the ark of the God of Israel go around." And they brought around the ark of the God of Israel. And it was, after they had brought it around, and the hand of the LORD was against the city ***with*** a very great panic, and He struck the men of the city from young even to old, and tumors broke out on them. And they sent the ark of God ***to*** Ekron. And it was, when the ark of God came ***to*** Ekron, and the Ekronites cried out, saying, "They have brought around to me the ark of the God of Israel, to kill me and my people!" And they sent and gathered all the rulers of the Philistines, and they said, "Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it return to its place, and it will not kill me and my people." For there was a panic of death in all the city; the hand of God was very heavy there. And the men who did not die were struck with the tumors, and the cry for help of the city went up ***to*** the heavens.

Chapter 5 Preview

The Philistines have won. They carry the ark of God to Ashdod and set it in the temple of their god Dagon, beside his image, like a trophy. The message is plain: Dagon has beaten the God of Israel. But the next morning Dagon is lying face down before the ark. They set him back up. The next morning he is down again, with his head and hands broken off on the threshold.

Then the hand of the LORD falls heavy on the people of Ashdod, and they are struck with tumors. They move the ark to Gath, and the same thing happens there. They send it to Ekron, and the people of Ekron cry out before it even arrives. Israel could not protect the ark, but the ark did not need protecting. The LORD fought for His own name without a single Israelite soldier. This short chapter shows that God is never defeated, even when His people are.

Chapter 5 Study

5:1-2 *And the Philistines took the ark of God, and they brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. And the Philistines took the ark of God, and they brought it* ***into*** *the house of Dagon, and they set it beside Dagon.*

"The Philistines took the ark of God, and they brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod." Ashdod was one of the five great Philistine cities, near the coast.

"And they brought it into the house of Dagon, and they set it beside Dagon." Dagon was a main god of the Philistines. Samson pulled down a temple of Dagon in Gaza (Judges 16:23-30). In the ancient world, when one nation beat another, it often put the defeated nation's gods in its own temple to show that its god was stronger. Setting the ark beside Dagon was a way of saying that the LORD was now Dagon's prisoner.

They had it backwards. Israel lost because of Israel's sin, not because the LORD was weak. The Philistines were about to learn the difference.

5:3-5 *And the Ashdodites rose early on the next day, and look, Dagon* ***was*** *fallen on its face to the ground before the ark of the LORD. And they took Dagon and returned it to its place. And they rose early in the morning on the next day, and look, Dagon* ***was*** *fallen on its face to the ground before the ark of the LORD, and the head of Dagon and the two palms of its hands* ***were*** *cut off at the threshold; only Dagon was left on it. Therefore the priests of Dagon and all those who go into the house of Dagon do not tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod until this day.*

"The Ashdodites rose early on the next day, and look, Dagon was fallen on its face to the ground before the ark of the LORD." Their god was lying face down, the position of a worshiper bowing before his master. It was as if Dagon had bowed to the LORD. "They took Dagon and returned it to its place." Think about that. They had to pick their god up and set him back on his feet. A god you have to carry is no god at all (Isaiah 46:1-7).

The next morning it was worse. Dagon was down again, "and the head of Dagon and the two palms of its hands were cut off at the threshold; only Dagon was left on it." The head is a picture of thinking and ruling, and the hands of power and action. Both were broken off. In that day, cutting off an enemy's head and hands was what victors did to the defeated. The LORD had beaten Dagon in his own house, and nobody was there to see it but God.

"Therefore the priests of Dagon and all those who go into the house of Dagon do not tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod until this day." Instead of turning from Dagon, they made a superstition out of his fall. They stepped over the threshold where his pieces had lain. People will often build a whole religious custom around a sign of God's judgment rather than repent. Zephaniah 1:9 may point to the same custom many years later.

5:6-7 *And the hand of the LORD was heavy on the Ashdodites, and He devastated them, and He struck them with tumors, Ashdod and its territories. And the men of Ashdod saw that* ***it was*** *so, and they said, "The ark of the God of Israel shall not remain with us, for His hand is hard on us and on Dagon our god."*

"And the hand of the LORD was heavy on the Ashdodites, and He devastated them, and He struck them with tumors." The hand of the LORD is a picture of His power at work. God did not only judge Dagon. He judged the people who worshiped him.

The Hebrew word for tumors may mean swellings or boils, or a painful disease of the body. Many think this was a plague, perhaps spread by rats or mice, since mice come up in the next chapter (6:4-5). Scripture does not name the disease, and we do not need to know its name to get the point.

"The ark of the God of Israel shall not remain with us, for His hand is hard on us and on Dagon our god." The men of Ashdod knew exactly who was behind it. They did not blame bad luck. They named the God of Israel. But notice that they wanted to get rid of His ark, not to turn to Him. It is possible to know God is real, and to feel His hand, and still want Him to go away.

5:8-9 *And they sent and gathered all the rulers of the Philistines to them, and they said, "What shall we do to the ark of the God of Israel?" And they said, "****To*** *Gath let the ark of the God of Israel go around." And they brought around the ark of the God of Israel. And it was, after they had brought it around, and the hand of the LORD was against the city* ***with*** *a very great panic, and He struck the men of the city from young even to old, and tumors broke out on them.*

The men of Ashdod called the "rulers of the Philistines." Each of the five cities had its own ruler, and they made decisions together. Someone suggested Gath: "To Gath let the ark of the God of Israel go around." Perhaps they thought the trouble was Ashdod's bad luck and not the ark. Maybe they hoped a new place would be different.

It was not. "The hand of the LORD was against the city with a very great panic, and He struck the men of the city from young even to old, and tumors broke out on them." Gath was later the hometown of Goliath (17:4). The city of the giant learned that it could not stand against the LORD of armies.

5:10-12 *And they sent the ark of God* ***to*** *Ekron. And it was, when the ark of God came* ***to*** *Ekron, and the Ekronites cried out, saying, "They have brought around to me the ark of the God of Israel, to kill me and my people!" And they sent and gathered all the rulers of the Philistines, and they said, "Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it return to its place, and it will not kill me and my people." For there was a panic of death in all the city; the hand of God was very heavy there. And the men who did not die were struck with the tumors, and the cry for help of the city went up* ***to*** *the heavens.*

Next they sent the ark to Ekron, the closest Philistine city to Israel. This time the people cried out as soon as it came: "They have brought around to me the ark of the God of Israel, to kill me and my people!" The news had spread. Everyone knew what this ark did.

Again the rulers met, and this time Ekron demanded, "Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it return to its place." There was "a panic of death in all the city." Some died, and "the men who did not die were struck with the tumors, and the cry for help of the city went up to the heavens."

Look at what happened over these seven months (6:1). The Philistines thought they had captured Israel's God. In fact, He was going from city to city through their land, judging their idols and their people, and no one could stop Him. Israel had no army left to fight for the ark, and it did not matter. The LORD needs no one to defend Him.

That is a comfort for us. There are days when it looks like God's cause is losing. Churches close, believers fail, and the world mocks. But God is not in danger. His purposes cannot be captured. Our part is not to protect God, but to trust Him and turn to Him. The Philistines cried out to heaven, but they did not cry out to the LORD in repentance. They only wanted the pain to stop. True repentance wants God, not just relief.

Chapter 5 Summary

The Philistines brought the captured ark from Ebenezer to Ashdod and set it beside the image of their god Dagon in his temple. The next morning Dagon had fallen on his face before the ark. They set him back up, and the next morning he had fallen again, with his head and hands broken off on the threshold, and from then on Dagon's priests would not step on that threshold. The hand of the LORD was heavy on Ashdod, and He struck its people with tumors. The rulers sent the ark to Gath, and the LORD struck that city with panic and tumors. When they sent it to Ekron, the people cried out in fear, many died, and the rest were struck with tumors, so the Philistines called for the ark to be sent back to Israel.

People and Places

- Ashdod, Gath, Ekron: three of the five main Philistine cities (with Gaza and Ashkelon).
- Dagon: a main god of the Philistines, with temples in Ashdod and Gaza.
- Rulers of the Philistines: the five lords of the five Philistine cities, who ruled together.

Chapter 5 Study Questions

1. Where did the Philistines put the ark, and what were they trying to say by putting it there? (5:2)

2. What happened to Dagon on the first morning and on the second? (5:3-4)

3. How did the priests of Dagon respond to his fall? (5:5)

4. What did the men of Ashdod say about the hand of the God of Israel? (5:7)

5. What happened when the ark went to Gath and then to Ekron? (5:8-12)

6. Israel had no army left to protect the ark. What does this chapter teach about God's power when His people are weak?

7. The Philistines had to set Dagon back on his feet. What are some modern "gods" that people have to keep propping up?

8. The Philistines knew God's hand was on them, but they wanted Him to go away. Why do people sometimes push God away when they feel Him working?

9. Is there an area in your life where you have wanted relief from trouble more than you have wanted God Himself?

10. When it looks like God's cause is losing in the world, how does this chapter encourage you?

Chapter 6: The Ark Comes Home

Scripture

6:1-12 And the ark of the LORD was in the country of the Philistines seven months. And the Philistines called for the priests and for the diviners, saying, "What shall we do to the ark of the LORD? Make known to us with what we shall send it to its place." And they said, "If you ***are*** sending away the ark of the God of Israel, do not send it away empty, for you shall surely send back to Him a guilt offering. Then you will be healed, and it will be known to you why His hand does not turn aside from you." And they said, "What ***is*** the guilt offering which we shall send back to Him?" And they said, "***By*** the number of the rulers of the Philistines, five tumors of gold and five mice of gold, for one plague ***is*** to all of them and to your rulers. And you shall make images of your tumors and images of your mice that are ruining the land, and you shall give glory to the God of Israel; perhaps He will lighten His hand from on you and from on your gods and from on your land. And why will you make your heart heavy just as Egypt and Pharaoh made their heart heavy? Was it not when He had made a mockery of them, and they sent them away, and they went? And now, take and make one new cart, and two nursing cows on which a yoke has not come up; and harness the cows to the cart, and take their young back from after them to the house. And take the ark of the LORD and put it on the cart; and the articles of gold which you are sending back to Him ***as*** a guilt offering, put in the box at its side; and send it away, and it shall go. And see: if it goes up ***by*** the way of its own territory ***to*** Beth-shemesh, He has done to us this great harm; and if not, then we shall know that His hand did not touch us; it happened to us ***by*** chance." And the men did so, and they took two nursing cows and harnessed them to the cart, and their young they shut up in the house. And they put the ark of the LORD on the cart, and the box, and the mice of gold, and the images of their tumors. And the cows went straight on the road, on the road of Beth-shemesh; on one highway they went, going and lowing, and they did not turn aside ***to the*** right or left. And the rulers of the Philistines ***were*** going after them as far as the border of Beth-shemesh.

6:13-21 And Beth-shemesh ***was*** reaping the harvest of wheat in the valley, and they lifted up their eyes and saw the ark, and they rejoiced to see ***it***. And the cart came into the field of Joshua the Beth-shemeshite and stopped there, and there ***was*** a great stone. And they split the wood of the cart, and the cows they offered up ***as*** a burnt offering to the LORD. And the Levites brought down the ark of the LORD and the box that ***was*** with it, in which ***were*** the articles of gold, and they put ***them*** on the great stone. And the men of Beth-shemesh offered up burnt offerings and sacrificed sacrifices on that day to the LORD. And the five rulers of the Philistines saw, and they returned ***to*** Ekron on that day. And these ***are*** the tumors of gold which the Philistines sent back ***as*** a guilt offering to the LORD: for Ashdod one, for Gaza one, for Ashkelon one, for Gath one, for Ekron one. And the mice of gold ***were by*** the number of all the cities of the Philistines belonging to the five rulers, from fortified city even to the village of the open-country dweller, and even to the great Abel on which they set down the ark of the LORD, ***which is*** until this day in the field of Joshua the Beth-shemeshite. And He struck among the men of Beth-shemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the LORD; and He struck among the people seventy men, fifty thousand men. And the people mourned, because the LORD had struck among the people ***with*** a great blow.

And the men of Beth-shemesh said, "Who is able to stand before the LORD, this holy God? And to whom shall He go up from us?" And they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kiriath-jearim, saying, "The Philistines have brought back the ark of the LORD; come down, bring it up to you."

Chapter 6 Preview

After seven months of plague, the Philistines have had enough. Their priests and diviners tell them to send the ark back with a guilt offering of five gold tumors and five gold mice, one for each ruler. They set a test: put the ark on a new cart pulled by two nursing cows that have never worn a yoke, and shut their calves up at home. If the cows leave their calves and go straight up the road to Israel, then the LORD was behind the plagues. If not, it was chance.

The cows go straight to Beth-shemesh, lowing all the way. The people there are harvesting wheat, and they rejoice to see the ark. The Levites set it on a great stone, and they offer sacrifices. But then some of the men of Beth-shemesh look into the ark, and the LORD strikes many of them. The people cry, "Who is able to stand before the LORD, this holy God?" and send the ark on to Kiriath-jearim. This chapter shows that God's holiness is both a joy and a danger, and that He must be approached His way.

Chapter 6 Study

6:1-3 *And the ark of the LORD was in the country of the Philistines seven months. And the Philistines called for the priests and for the diviners, saying, "What shall we do to the ark of the LORD? Make known to us with what we shall send it to its place." And they said, "If you **are** sending away the ark of the God of Israel, do not send it away empty, for you shall surely send back to Him a guilt offering. Then you will be healed, and it will be known to you why His hand does not turn aside from you."*

"And the ark of the LORD was in the country of the Philistines seven months." Seven months of panic, sickness and death.

The Philistines called "for the priests and for the diviners." Diviners were pagan fortune-tellers who tried to learn the will of the gods by reading signs. God's law forbade divination (Deuteronomy 18:10-12). These men did not know the LORD, but they knew enough to fear Him.

Their advice: "do not send it away empty, for you shall surely send back to Him a guilt offering." A guilt offering in Israel's law was a sacrifice to make amends for wrong done against God or against another person (Leviticus 5:14-19). The Philistines did not know the law, but even pagans sensed that they had wronged this God and needed to pay something back. "Then you will be healed, and it will be known to you why His hand does not turn aside from you."

6:4-6 *And they said, "What **is** the guilt offering which we shall send back to Him?" And they said, "**By** the number of the rulers of the Philistines, five tumors of gold and five mice of gold, for one plague **is** to all of them and to your rulers. And you shall make images of your tumors and images of your mice that are ruining the land, and you shall give glory to the God of Israel; perhaps He will lighten His hand from on you and from on your gods and from on your land. And why will you make your heart heavy just as Egypt and Pharaoh made their heart heavy? Was it not when He had made a mockery of them, and they sent them away, and they went?*

"Five tumors of gold and five mice of gold," one for each Philistine ruler, "for one plague is to all of them and to your rulers." The images of the tumors and the mice were a way of saying, we know these came from You, and we give them back. In the ancient world people sometimes offered images of a disease to the god they believed sent it.

"You shall give glory to the God of Israel; perhaps He will lighten His hand." Even pagan priests saw that the God of Israel deserved glory. That is what the whole episode was about. God would get glory, either through people's worship or through His judgment.

Then a striking reminder: "why will you make your heart heavy just as Egypt and Pharaoh made their heart heavy?" They remembered the exodus. Pharaoh hardened his heart, and God "made a mockery of them," and Egypt finally let Israel go. The diviners warned the Philistines not to repeat Pharaoh's mistake. Sadly, many people in Scripture and today know the stories of God's power but still do not bow to Him. Knowing the facts is not the same as faith.

6:7-9 *And now, take and make one new cart, and two nursing cows on which a yoke has not come up; and harness the cows to the cart, and take their young back from after them to the house. And take the ark of the LORD and put it on the cart; and the articles of gold which you are sending back to Him **as** a guilt offering, put in the box at its side; and send it away, and it shall go. And see: if it goes up **by** the way of its own territory **to** Beth-shemesh, He has done to us this great harm; and if not, then we shall know that His hand did not touch us; it happened to us **by** chance."*

The plan was a test. "Make one new cart, and two nursing cows on which a yoke has not come up." A new cart had never been used for anything common. The cows had never been trained to pull. Their calves would be shut up at home. Any farmer knows that nursing cows will try to go back to their calves. Untrained cows will not pull in a straight line. Everything was set up against the cows going to Israel.

"If it goes up by the way of its own territory to Beth-shemesh, He has done to us this great harm; and if not, then we shall know that His hand did not touch us; it happened to us by chance." The Philistines wanted to know whether this was the LORD or bad luck. They made the test as hard as they could. If the cows went to Israel anyway, it would be God, plain and clear.

Note that the Philistines carried the ark on a cart. God's law said the ark was to be carried on poles on the shoulders of the Levites (Numbers 4:15; 7:9). God allowed the Philistines, who did not have His law, to move it this way. Years later, David would try the same method, and it ended in death (2 Samuel 6:3-7; 1 Chronicles 15:13). God's people are held to what He has told them.

6:10-12 *And the men did so, and they took two nursing cows and harnessed them to the cart, and their young they shut up in the house. And they put the ark of the LORD on the cart, and the box, and the mice of gold, and the images of their tumors. And the cows went straight on the road, on the road of Beth-shemesh; on one highway they went, going and lowing, and they did not turn aside* ***to the*** *right or left. And the rulers of the Philistines* ***were*** *going after them as far as the border of Beth-shemesh.*

"The men did so." They hitched the cows, shut up the calves, and set the ark and the box of gold on the cart.

"And the cows went straight on the road, on the road of Beth-shemesh; on one highway they went, going and lowing, and they did not turn aside to the right or left." Picture it. The cows were bawling for their calves the whole way, but they walked straight on toward Israel. Something stronger than their nature was driving them. The God who parted the sea and stopped the Jordan was guiding two cows down a country road.

"The rulers of the Philistines were going after them as far as the border of Beth-shemesh." They followed to see with their own eyes. They got their answer.

6:13-15 *And Beth-shemesh* ***was*** *reaping the harvest of wheat in the valley, and they lifted up their eyes and saw the ark, and they rejoiced to see* ***it****. And the cart came into the field of Joshua the Beth-shemeshite and stopped there, and there* ***was*** *a great stone. And they split the wood of the cart, and the cows they offered up* ***as*** *a burnt offering to the LORD. And the Levites brought down the ark of the LORD and the box that* ***was*** *with it, in which* ***were*** *the articles of gold, and they put* ***them*** *on the great stone. And the men of Beth-shemesh offered up burnt offerings and sacrificed sacrifices on that day to the LORD.*

"Beth-shemesh was reaping the harvest of wheat in the valley." It was early summer. The farmers in the fields looked up and saw the ark coming. "They rejoiced to see it." Seven months of grief were over.

The cart stopped in the field of a man named Joshua, by "a great stone." The people split up the wood of the cart for fire and offered the cows as "a burnt offering to the LORD." A burnt offering was wholly burned on the altar, given completely to God, an act of worship and dedication (Leviticus 1). The cart and the cows that had carried the ark were given to Him.

"The Levites brought down the ark of the LORD." The Levites were the tribe set apart to serve at the tabernacle and carry its holy things. Beth-shemesh was a town given to the priests (Joshua 21:13-16), so there were Levites there who knew what to do. They set the ark and the gold on the great stone, and more offerings were made "on that day to the LORD." So far, so good.

6:16-18 *And the five rulers of the Philistines saw, and they returned **to** Ekron on that day. And these **are** the tumors of gold which the Philistines sent back **as** a guilt offering to the LORD: for Ashdod one, for Gaza one, for Ashkelon one, for Gath one, for Ekron one. And the mice of gold **were by** the number of all the cities of the Philistines belonging to the five rulers, from fortified city even to the village of the open-country dweller, and even to the great Abel on which they set down the ark of the LORD, **which is** until this day in the field of Joshua the Beth-shemeshite.*

"The five rulers of the Philistines saw, and they returned to Ekron on that day." They had seen the proof. Scripture does not say they turned to the LORD.

The writer lists the gold tumors, one each "for Ashdod one, for Gaza one, for Ashkelon one, for Gath one, for Ekron one," the five great cities. The gold mice were by the number of all the Philistine towns, big and small. The plague had touched all of Philistia.

The great stone where they set the ark was still there "until this day in the field of Joshua the Beth-shemeshite." The SLB reads this stone as "the great Abel," which means meadow or mourning. Many Bibles read it as "the great stone," because the Hebrew words for stone and Abel look alike. Either way, the stone stood as a witness to what God had done.

6:19 *And He struck among the men of Beth-shemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the LORD; and He struck among the people seventy men, fifty thousand men. And the people mourned, because the LORD had struck among the people **with** a great blow.*

"And He struck among the men of Beth-shemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the LORD." The joy turned to mourning. Some of the men lifted the lid and looked inside.

Why was that so serious? The ark was the most holy object in Israel. Even the Levites who carried it were never to see it uncovered. The priests covered it before anyone else came near, and the law said plainly that the Kohathites "shall not go in to see the holy thing for an instant, and die" (Numbers 4:20). The men of Beth-shemesh lived in a priestly town. They knew, or should have known. Maybe it was curiosity. Maybe they wanted to see whether the tablets were still there, or whether the Philistines had taken anything. Whatever their reason, they treated the throne of the holy God as an object to poke into.

This is a hard verse, and I don't want to pass over it quickly. Many people died that day, and the people of the town mourned. Why would God strike people who had just been rejoicing and offering sacrifices? The answer the chapter itself gives is in verse 20: He is "this holy God." His holiness is not a mood. It is who He is. Coming near Him carelessly is deadly, because sinful people cannot stand in the full presence of perfect holiness. That is why God gave Israel such careful rules about the tabernacle. The rules were not to keep people away from Him for no reason. They were His way of letting sinful people draw near without being destroyed. To throw those rules aside was to throw away the protection He gave.

It is also worth seeing that the Philistines who handled the ark without the law were struck with plagues that were meant to turn them, while the men of Beth-shemesh, who had the law, were judged more severely. God holds those who know His will to a higher standard (Luke 12:47-48).

Now, the number. The Hebrew text here reads, "He struck among the people seventy men, fifty thousand men." The way the Hebrew puts the two numbers side by side, without the usual connecting word, is very unusual. Beth-shemesh was a small town, and fifty thousand men seems far too many for it. For that reason, many Bible scholars believe the large number came into the text by a copying error long ago, and that the original said seventy men. Some Bibles print seventy. Others print fifty thousand and seventy. Others take the fifty thousand as a count of the whole region. I do not know for certain which is right. What I do know is that the Bible we have tells us truly what happened: many men died for treating God's holiness lightly, and the people mourned.

What does this mean for us? Hebrews 12:28-29 tells us to serve God "with reverence and godly fear; for our God is also a consuming fire." We do not draw near to God through an ark. We come boldly to His throne of grace through Jesus Christ, our High Priest (Hebrews 4:14-16). Jesus is the one way sinful people can come into the presence of the holy God and live. But boldness is not carelessness. The same God who welcomes us in Christ is still holy.

6:20-21 *And the men of Beth-shemesh said, "Who is able to stand before the LORD, this holy God? And to whom shall He go up from us?" And they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kiriath-jearim, saying, "The Philistines have brought back the ark of the LORD; come down, bring it up to you."*

"Who is able to stand before the LORD, this holy God?" That is the right question, and the answer is no one, unless God Himself makes a way. The men of Beth-shemesh asked it in fear. We can ask it with hope, because God has made a way in Christ. Psalm 24:3-4 asks almost the same question and answers it: the one with clean hands and a pure heart. Only Jesus fits that description, and He gives His righteousness to all who trust Him (2 Corinthians 5:21).

"And to whom shall He go up from us?" Sadly, their answer to God's holiness was to send Him somewhere else. They did not want to change. They wanted the ark gone. They sent messengers to Kiriath-jearim, a town about ten miles away: "The Philistines have brought back the ark of the LORD; come down, bring it up to you."

The Philistines wanted the ark gone because of judgment. Now Israelites wanted it gone too. When we meet God's holiness, we can run from it or we can bow before it. Isaiah, when he saw the holy God, cried "Woe to me!" and was cleansed (Isaiah 6:5-7). The men of Beth-shemesh asked the right question but gave the wrong answer.

Chapter 6 Summary

After seven months of plague, the Philistine priests and diviners told the rulers to send the ark back with a guilt offering of five gold tumors and five gold mice, and to give glory to the God of Israel rather than harden their hearts like Pharaoh. They set the ark on a new cart pulled by two nursing cows that had never been yoked, with their calves shut up at home, and said that if the cows went to Beth-shemesh, the LORD had sent the plague. The cows went straight there, lowing all the way. The people of Beth-shemesh rejoiced, offered the cows as a burnt offering, and the Levites set the ark on a great stone. But the LORD struck men of Beth-shemesh because they

looked into the ark, and the people mourned and asked, "Who is able to stand before the LORD, this holy God?" They sent to Kiriath-jearim to come and take the ark.

People and Places

- Diviners: pagan fortune-tellers who tried to read the will of the gods by signs.
- Guilt offering: an offering to make amends for wrong done against God or others (Leviticus 5:14-19).
- Burnt offering: an offering wholly burned on the altar, given completely to God (Leviticus 1).
- Levites: the tribe of Levi, set apart to serve at the tabernacle and carry its holy things.
- Beth-shemesh: a town of the priests on the border between Judah and the Philistines.
- Kiriath-jearim: a town in the hills west of Jerusalem where the ark stayed for many years.

Chapter 6 Study Questions

1. What did the Philistine priests tell the rulers to send back with the ark, and why? (6:3-5)

2. What did the diviners remember about Pharaoh, and what was their warning? (6:6)

3. Describe the test with the cart and the cows. Why was it a hard test? (6:7-9)

4. What did the cows do, and what did that prove? (6:12)

5. How did the people of Beth-shemesh first respond to the ark? (6:13-15)

6. Why did the LORD strike the men of Beth-shemesh? (6:19; Numbers 4:20)

7. What question did the people ask, and what did they decide to do? (6:20-21)

8. The Philistines knew the story of the exodus but did not turn to God. How can people know about God and still not trust Him?

9. How does knowing that God is holy change the way you pray and worship?

10. Through Christ we can come boldly to God (Hebrews 4:16). How do you hold together boldness and reverence before God?

Chapter 7: Samuel Judges Israel

Scripture

7:1-11 And the men of Kiriath-jearim came and brought up the ark of the LORD, and they brought it into the house of Abinadab on the hill; and Eleazar his son they consecrated to keep the ark of the LORD. And it was, from the day the ark dwelt in Kiriath-jearim, and the days increased, and they were twenty years; and all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD. And Samuel said to all the house of Israel, saying, "If with all your heart you ***are*** returning to the LORD, remove the foreign gods from your midst, and the Ashtaroth, and direct your heart to the LORD, and serve Him alone; and He may deliver you from the hand of the Philistines." And the sons of Israel removed the Baals and the Ashtaroth, and they served the LORD alone. And Samuel said, "Gather all Israel to Mizpah, and I will pray for you to the LORD." And they gathered together to Mizpah, and they drew water and poured ***it*** out before the LORD, and they fasted on that day, and they said there, "We have sinned against the LORD." And Samuel judged the sons of Israel at Mizpah. And the Philistines heard that the sons of Israel had gathered together to Mizpah, and the rulers of the Philistines went up against Israel. And the sons of Israel heard, and they were afraid of the Philistines. And the sons of Israel said to Samuel, "Do not keep silent from us, from crying out to the LORD our God, and He may save us from the hand of the Philistines." And Samuel took one suckling lamb and offered it up ***as*** a burnt offering, a whole offering, to the LORD; and Samuel cried out to the LORD for Israel, and the LORD answered him. And Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, and the Philistines drew near for battle against Israel; and the LORD thundered with a great sound on that day against the Philistines and threw them into confusion, and they were defeated before Israel. And the men of Israel went out from Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, and they struck them as far as below Beth-car.

7:12-17 And Samuel took one stone and set ***it*** between Mizpah and Shen, and he called its name Ebenezer, and he said, "Until now the LORD has helped us." And the Philistines were subdued, and they did not continue anymore to come into the territory of Israel; and the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel. And the cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel returned to Israel, from Ekron even to Gath; and their territory Israel delivered from the hand of the Philistines. And there was peace between Israel and the Amorite. And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. And he went from year to year, and he went around Bethel and Gilgal and Mizpah, and he judged Israel ***in*** all these places. And his return ***was*** to Ramah, for there ***was*** his house, and there he judged Israel; and he built there an altar to the LORD.

Chapter 7 Preview

The ark comes to rest in the house of Abinadab at Kiriath-jearim, and there it stays for twenty years. During those years Israel mourns after the LORD. Then Samuel steps forward. He tells the people that if they are really coming back to the LORD with all their heart, they must put away their foreign gods and serve Him alone. They do it. Samuel gathers all Israel at Mizpah, where they pour out water before the LORD, fast, and confess, "We have sinned against the LORD."

While Samuel is offering a lamb as a burnt offering, the Philistines attack. The LORD thunders against them, throws them into confusion, and Israel wins. Samuel sets up a stone and names it Ebenezer, saying, "Until now the LORD has helped us." The Philistines are pushed back, the lost towns are returned, and Samuel judges Israel for the rest of his life. This chapter is a picture of true revival: repentance, prayer, sacrifice, and God fighting for His people.

Chapter 7 Study

7:1-2 *And the men of Kiriath-jearim came and brought up the ark of the LORD, and they brought it into the house of Abinadab on the hill; and Eleazar his son they consecrated to keep the ark of the LORD. And it was, from the day the ark dwelt in Kiriath-jearim, and the days increased, and they were twenty years; and all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD.*

"The men of Kiriath-jearim came and brought up the ark of the LORD." They took it to "the house of Abinadab on the hill" and consecrated his son Eleazar "to keep the ark." To consecrate means to set apart for God's service. They did not leave it lying about. They set a man apart to guard it.

"From the day the ark dwelt in Kiriath-jearim, and the days increased, and they were twenty years." The ark never went back to Shiloh. It stayed at Kiriath-jearim until David brought it to Jerusalem many years later (2 Samuel 6:2-3). The twenty years seems to count to the time of the gathering at Mizpah in this chapter.

"And all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD." Twenty years of defeat and Philistine rule had broken their pride. They began to long for God. That longing was the first step back. Sometimes God lets us feel His absence so that we will start to miss Him.

7:3-4 *And Samuel said to all the house of Israel, saying, "If with all your heart you **are** returning to the LORD, remove the foreign gods from your midst, and the Ashtaroth, and direct your heart to the LORD, and serve Him alone; and He may deliver you from the hand of the Philistines." And the sons of Israel removed the Baals and the Ashtaroth, and they served the LORD alone.*

Samuel spoke to all Israel. "If with all your heart you are returning to the LORD, remove the foreign gods from your midst, and the Ashtaroth, and direct your heart to the LORD, and serve Him alone." This is the first time since his call that we hear Samuel speak to the nation, and he goes straight to the heart of the problem.

The Baals and the Ashtaroth (7:4) were the gods and goddesses of Canaan. Baal was the storm god, believed to bring rain and good crops. Ashtoreth, plural Ashtaroth, was a goddess of fertility and war. Israel had been mixing the worship of these gods with the worship of the LORD for generations (Judges 2:11-13).

Samuel's message was simple. Mourning is not enough. Feeling sorry is not enough. If you mean it, get rid of the idols. True repentance always has two sides: turning from sin and turning to God. "Serve Him alone." The LORD will not share His people with other gods.

"And the sons of Israel removed the Baals and the Ashtaroth, and they served the LORD alone." They did it. What idols do we need to remove? An idol is anything we trust, love or serve in God's

place: money, comfort, approval, a relationship, a habit we will not give up. Revival starts when we put those things away.

7:5-6 *And Samuel said, "Gather all Israel to Mizpah, and I will pray for you to the LORD." And they gathered together to Mizpah, and they drew water and poured **it** out before the LORD, and they fasted on that day, and they said there, "We have sinned against the LORD." And Samuel judged the sons of Israel at Mizpah.*

"Gather all Israel to Mizpah, and I will pray for you to the LORD." Mizpah was a town in Benjamin, a few miles north of Jerusalem, where Israel had gathered before (Judges 20:1). Samuel's first act as leader was to pray. That is who Samuel was all his life, a man of prayer.

At Mizpah "they drew water and poured it out before the LORD." This is not a ritual from the law, and Scripture does not explain it. It seems to have been a sign of pouring out their hearts in sorrow, the way Hannah "poured out" her soul (1:15; Lamentations 2:19). "They fasted on that day," going without food to humble themselves before God. "And they said there, We have sinned against the LORD." No excuses, no blaming the Philistines. They named their sin as sin against God.

"And Samuel judged the sons of Israel at Mizpah." He led them, settled their cases, and set things right among them.

7:7-8 *And the Philistines heard that the sons of Israel had gathered together to Mizpah, and the rulers of the Philistines went up against Israel. And the sons of Israel heard, and they were afraid of the Philistines. And the sons of Israel said to Samuel, "Do not keep silent from us, from crying out to the LORD our God, and He may save us from the hand of the Philistines."*

"The Philistines heard that the sons of Israel had gathered together to Mizpah." They thought Israel was gathering for war, so they came up to strike first. It often happens that way. When God's people get serious about repentance, the enemy attacks.

"The sons of Israel heard, and they were afraid of the Philistines." They had no army ready. But this time they did not run for the ark. They ran to prayer. "Do not keep silent from us, from crying out to the LORD our God, and He may save us from the hand of the Philistines." What a change from chapter 4. Then they trusted a box. Now they asked a praying man to keep praying.

7:9-10 *And Samuel took one suckling lamb and offered it up **as** a burnt offering, a whole offering, to the LORD; and Samuel cried out to the LORD for Israel, and the LORD answered him. And Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, and the Philistines drew near for battle against Israel; and the LORD thundered with a great sound on that day against the Philistines and threw them into confusion, and they were defeated before Israel.*

"Samuel took one suckling lamb and offered it up as a burnt offering, a whole offering, to the LORD." Samuel was a Levite, not from Aaron's family, but as God's prophet and judge in a time when the tabernacle had been ruined, he led Israel's worship. The burnt offering was wholly burned, a sign of complete surrender to God. The lamb died, and Samuel prayed.

"And Samuel cried out to the LORD for Israel, and the LORD answered him." Psalm 99:6 remembers this: Samuel was "among those who call on His name; they called to the LORD, and He answered them."

"And Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, and the Philistines drew near for battle against Israel." Think of the scene. The enemy is charging, and Samuel keeps on worshiping. "And the LORD thundered with a great sound on that day against the Philistines and threw them into confusion, and they were defeated before Israel." Hannah had sung that the LORD would thunder against His enemies from heaven (2:10). Now He did. Israel did not win by their own strength. God won, and they followed.

The order matters. Repentance, then sacrifice and prayer, then victory. Israel was saved while a lamb was on the altar. We are saved the same way, through the Lamb of God offered for us (John 1:29).

7:11-12 *And the men of Israel went out from Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, and they struck them as far as below Beth-car. And Samuel took one stone and set **it** between Mizpah and Shen, and he called its name Ebenezer, and he said, "Until now the LORD has helped us."*

"The men of Israel went out from Mizpah and pursued the Philistines." Once God had won the battle, they did their part and chased the enemy as far as Beth-car.

"And Samuel took one stone and set it between Mizpah and Shen, and he called its name Ebenezer." Ebenezer means stone of help. Remember that Israel camped at a place called Ebenezer back in 4:1 and lost badly. Now Samuel gives the name a new meaning. The place of defeat was replaced with a place of help.

"Until now the LORD has helped us." That is a good sentence for any believer to say. It looks back: God has brought us this far. It also looks ahead: the God who helped us until now will help us still. What would you write on your own stone of help? Where can you look back and say, "Until now the LORD has helped us"?

7:13-14 *And the Philistines were subdued, and they did not continue anymore to come into the territory of Israel; and the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel. And the cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel returned to Israel, from Ekron even to Gath; and their territory Israel delivered from the hand of the Philistines. And there was peace between Israel and the Amorite.*

"And the Philistines were subdued, and they did not continue anymore to come into the territory of Israel." The Philistines would fight Israel again in Saul's day (chapter 13), but "the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel." While Samuel led, God held them back.

"The cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel returned to Israel, from Ekron even to Gath." The land God had given was restored. "And there was peace between Israel and the Amorite." Amorite here is a general name for the Canaanite peoples still living in the land. When Israel was right with God, even their old enemies made peace (Proverbs 16:7).

7:15-17 *And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. And he went from year to year, and he went around Bethel and Gilgal and Mizpah, and he judged Israel **in** all these places. And his return **was** to Ramah, for there **was** his house, and there he judged Israel; and he built there an altar to the LORD.*

"And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life." Samuel was the last of the judges, but unlike most of them, his work was not one battle and then quiet. He led for the rest of his life, even after Saul became king.

"He went from year to year, and he went around Bethel and Gilgal and Mizpah, and he judged Israel in all these places." Samuel traveled a circuit each year, like a circuit-riding preacher or judge. He went to the people. Bethel and Gilgal were old places of worship with deep roots in Israel's history (Genesis 28:19; Joshua 4:19-20).

"And his return was to Ramah, for there was his house." Ramah, where his mother had prayed for him and where he was born. "And he built there an altar to the LORD." With Shiloh destroyed and the ark at Kiriath-jearim, Samuel made his own home a center of worship. Wherever he lived, he made room for God.

Samuel gives us a picture of faithful leadership: a man who prayed for the people, called them to turn from idols, led them in worship, judged them fairly, and kept going year after year. That kind of steady faithfulness is rare. It is also what God uses most.

Chapter 7 Summary

The men of Kiriath-jearim brought the ark to the house of Abinadab, where it stayed twenty years while Israel mourned after the LORD. Samuel told the people that if they were returning with all their heart, they must remove the Baals and the Ashtaroth and serve the LORD alone, and they did. At Mizpah they poured out water before the LORD, fasted and confessed their sin, and Samuel judged them. When the Philistines came up against them, Israel begged Samuel to keep crying out to the LORD. Samuel offered a suckling lamb as a burnt offering and prayed, and the LORD thundered against the Philistines and threw them into confusion. Israel chased them, and Samuel set up a stone called Ebenezer, saying, "Until now the LORD has helped us." The Philistines were subdued all Samuel's days, Israel's cities were returned, and Samuel judged Israel all his life, traveling from Ramah to Bethel, Gilgal and Mizpah.

People and Places

- Kiriath-jearim: the town where the ark stayed at the house of Abinadab until David's day.
- Mizpah: a town in Benjamin where Israel gathered to repent and where Samuel judged.
- Baals and Ashtaroth: the false gods and goddesses of Canaan.
- Ebenezer: stone of help, the name Samuel gave the memorial stone.
- Bethel, Gilgal, Mizpah, Ramah: the towns on Samuel's yearly circuit as judge.

Chapter 7 Study Questions

1. How long was the ark at Kiriath-jearim, and how did Israel feel during that time? (7:2)

2. What did Samuel tell Israel to do if they were really returning to the LORD? (7:3)

3. What did Israel do at Mizpah to show their repentance? (7:6)

4. How was Israel's response to the Philistine threat different from chapter 4? (7:7-8; 4:3)

5. What was Samuel doing when the Philistines attacked, and what did the LORD do? (7:9-10)

6. What does Ebenezer mean, and why did Samuel set up the stone? (7:12)

7. What happened in Israel during the rest of Samuel's days? (7:13-17)

8. Samuel said mourning was not enough: the idols had to go. Is there anything in your life that you need to put away to serve the LORD alone?

9. Israel asked Samuel not to stop praying for them. Who prays for you, and who are you praying for?

10. Where in your life can you set up an Ebenezer and say, "Until now the LORD has helped us"?

Chapter 8: Israel Asks for a King

Scripture

8:1-9 And it was, when Samuel was old, and he made his sons judges for Israel. And the name of his firstborn son was Joel, and the name of his second Abijah; ***they were*** judges in Beersheba. And his sons did not walk in his ways, and they turned aside after unjust gain, and they took a bribe, and they turned justice aside. And all the elders of Israel gathered together, and they came to Samuel at Ramah. And they said to him, "Look, you have become old, and your sons have not walked in your ways. Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations." And the matter was evil in the eyes of Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." And Samuel prayed to the LORD. And the LORD said to Samuel, "Listen 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 reigning over them. According to all the deeds which they have done from the day I brought them up from Egypt and until this day, and they have forsaken Me and served other gods, so they ***are*** doing also to you. And now listen to their voice; only you shall surely warn them, and you shall tell them the practice of the king who will reign over them."

8:10-22 And Samuel said all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking from him a king. And he said, "This will be the practice of the king who will reign over you: your sons he will take, and he will appoint ***them*** for himself in his chariot and among his horsemen, and they will run before his chariot; and to appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and to plow his plowing, and to reap his harvest, and to make the equipment of his war and the equipment of his chariotry. And your daughters he will take for perfumers and for cooks and for bakers. And your fields and your vineyards and your olive groves, the good ***ones***, he will take, and he will give ***them*** to his servants. And your seed and your vineyards he will tithe, and he will give ***it*** to his officials and to his servants. And your male servants and your female servants and your young men, the good ***ones***, and your donkeys he will take, and he will use ***them*** for his work. Your flock he will tithe, and you yourselves will become servants to him. And you will cry out on that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, and the LORD will not answer you on that day." And the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel, and they said, "No, but a king shall be over us, and we also, we will be like all the nations, and our king will judge us, and he will go out before us, and he will fight our battles." And Samuel heard all the words of the people, and he spoke them in the ears of the LORD. And the LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to their voice, and make a king reign for them." And Samuel said to the men of Israel, "Go, each man to his city."

Chapter 8 Preview

Samuel is old, and he has made his sons judges, but they take bribes and twist justice. The elders of Israel come to Ramah with a request: "appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations." Samuel is hurt and takes it to the LORD in prayer. The LORD's answer is surprising. Give them what they ask, He says, because they have not rejected you, they have rejected Me. But warn them first what a king will cost them.

Samuel does. A king will take your sons for his army and your daughters for his kitchen. He will take your best fields, a tenth of your crops and flocks, and your servants, and you will become his servants. One day you will cry out because of him, and the LORD will not answer. The people refuse to listen. "No, but a king shall be over us." This chapter is a turning point in Israel's history, and a warning about wanting to be like everyone else instead of trusting God.

Chapter 8 Study

8:1-3 *And it was, when Samuel was old, and he made his sons judges for Israel. And the name of his firstborn son was Joel, and the name of his second Abijah; **they were** judges in Beersheba. And his sons did not walk in his ways, and they turned aside after unjust gain, and they took a bribe, and they turned justice aside.*

"When Samuel was old, and he made his sons judges for Israel." Joel and Abijah served "in Beersheba," at the far south of the land, while Samuel worked in the hill country.

"And his sons did not walk in his ways, and they turned aside after unjust gain, and they took a bribe, and they turned justice aside." The law said plainly that judges must not take bribes, "for the bribe blinds the eyes of the wise" (Deuteronomy 16:19). Samuel's sons sold their verdicts.

This is painful to read after chapters 2 and 3. Samuel watched Eli's sons ruin themselves, and now his own sons go wrong. Scripture does not say that Samuel tolerated their sin the way Eli did, and he was not judged as Eli was. But it is a sad truth that godly parents do not always have godly children. Each person must choose to follow God for himself. Parents can teach, pray and set an example, but they cannot choose for their children.

8:4-5 *And all the elders of Israel gathered together, and they came to Samuel at Ramah. And they said to him, "Look, you have become old, and your sons have not walked in your ways. Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations."*

"All the elders of Israel gathered together, and they came to Samuel at Ramah." This was a formal delegation from the whole nation.

They had two reasons. "Look, you have become old, and your sons have not walked in your ways." Both were true. Samuel was aging, and his sons were corrupt. Then came the request: "Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations."

The problem was not that they wanted good leadership. That was a fair concern. The problem was in the last words: "like all the nations." God had called Israel to be different, a holy nation, His own people (Exodus 19:5-6). They wanted to be like everyone else. They looked at the nations around them, saw kings, palaces and armies, and decided that was what they needed.

8:6 *And the matter was evil in the eyes of Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." And Samuel prayed to the LORD.*

"And the matter was evil in the eyes of Samuel when they said, Give us a king to judge us." Samuel was displeased. Maybe he felt pushed aside after a lifetime of service. Maybe he saw clearly what they were really saying about God.

"And Samuel prayed to the LORD." That is the right response. He did not argue with the elders or lash out at them. He took it to God. When we feel hurt or rejected, prayer should come before our reply.

8:7-8 *And the LORD said to Samuel, "Listen 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 reigning over them. According to all the deeds which they have done from the day I brought them up from Egypt and until this day, and they have forsaken Me and served other gods, so they **are** doing also to you.*

"Listen 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 reigning over them." This is the heart of the chapter. The LORD was Israel's King. Gideon had said it long before: "the LORD shall rule over you" (Judges 8:23). By asking for a king like the nations, they were telling God they would rather trust a man they could see than the God they could not.

God also comforted Samuel. Don't take it personally, He said, in effect. They are doing to you what they have always done to Me. "According to all the deeds which they have done from the day I brought them up from Egypt and until this day, and they have forsaken Me and served other gods, so they are doing also to you." Faithful servants of God will sometimes be rejected. When it happens, it helps to remember that God has been rejected far more than we have. Jesus told His followers the same: if the world hates you, know that it hated Me first (John 15:18).

Was it wrong for Israel to have a king at all? Not in itself. God told Abraham that kings would come from him (Genesis 17:6). Jacob said the scepter would not depart from Judah (Genesis 49:10). Moses gave laws for a king whom the LORD would choose (Deuteronomy 17:14-20). God planned for Israel to have a king, His king, in His time. The sin was in the reason they asked and the timing. They wanted a king to replace their trust in God, not a king who would lead them in trusting God.

8:9-10 *And now listen to their voice; only you shall surely warn them, and you shall tell them the practice of the king who will reign over them." And Samuel said all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking from him a king.*

"And now listen to their voice; only you shall surely warn them." God would give them what they wanted, but not without telling them the cost. "You shall tell them the practice of the king who will reign over them." The word practice here is the Hebrew mishpat, which can mean justice, custom, or way of doing things. Samuel was to tell them how kings really behave.

"And Samuel said all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking from him a king." He gave them all of it, as he gave Eli all of it in chapter 3.

Sometimes God's hardest judgment is to give people what they insist on (Psalm 106:15). It is a sobering thought. If we keep demanding our own way, God may let us have it, and we will learn the cost the hard way.

8:11-13 *And he said, "This will be the practice of the king who will reign over you: your sons he will take, and he will appoint **them** for himself in his chariot and among his horsemen, and they will run before his chariot; and to appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and to plow his plowing, and to reap his harvest, and to make the equipment of his war and the equipment of his chariotry. And your daughters he will take for perfumers and for cooks and for bakers.*

Samuel described what a king would take. Notice how often the word "take" comes up. "Your sons he will take," for his chariots and horsemen, to run before his chariot, to command his troops, to plow his fields and reap his harvest, and to make his weapons. A king needs a standing army and a royal estate, and that means men taken from their families' farms.

"Your daughters he will take for perfumers and for cooks and for bakers." The royal household would need many workers. Young women would be taken away from home to serve in the palace.

8:14-17 *And your fields and your vineyards and your olive groves, the good **ones**, he will take, and he will give **them** to his servants. And your seed and your vineyards he will tithe, and he will give **it** to his officials and to his servants. And your male servants and your female servants and your young men, the good **ones**, and your donkeys he will take, and he will use **them** for his work. Your flock he will tithe, and you yourselves will become servants to him.*

"Your fields and your vineyards and your olive groves, the good ones, he will take, and he will give them to his servants." The king would reward his officials with other people's land. That is exactly what happened later when Ahab and Jezebel took Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21).

"Your seed and your vineyards he will tithe." A tithe is a tenth. Israel already gave a tenth to the LORD for the Levites and the poor (Numbers 18:21; Deuteronomy 14:28-29). Now the king would take a tenth too. "Your male servants and your female servants and your young men, the good ones, and your donkeys he will take." He would take workers and animals for his own projects.

"Your flock he will tithe, and you yourselves will become servants to him." That is the end of the list. The people who had been slaves in Egypt and set free by God would make themselves servants of a king. Solomon's heavy taxes and forced labor proved it (1 Kings 12:4).

8:18 *And you will cry out on that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, and the LORD will not answer you on that day."*

"And you will cry out on that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, and the LORD will not answer you on that day." Notice the words "whom you have chosen for yourselves." This king would be their choice, and they would have to live with it.

In the book of Judges, every time Israel cried out, God answered and sent a deliverer. Now Samuel warned that there would come a day when they cried out about the king, and God would not

rescue them from their own choice. That does not mean God would stop hearing them forever. It means some consequences of our choices He will not take away, even when we cry about them.

8:19-20 *And the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel, and they said, "No, but a king shall be over us, and we also, we will be like all the nations, and our king will judge us, and he will go out before us, and he will fight our battles."*

"And the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel, and they said, No, but a king shall be over us." The warning made no difference. They had made up their minds.

They gave their reasons: "we also, we will be like all the nations, and our king will judge us, and he will go out before us, and he will fight our battles." But who had just fought their battles? In chapter 7 the LORD thundered against the Philistines while Samuel prayed. In Judges God raised up deliverer after deliverer. They had the King of heaven fighting for them, and they wanted a man instead.

It is easy to judge Israel. But we do the same thing whenever we trust something we can see more than the God we cannot see. We want security, a plan, a person in charge, something solid. God asks us to trust Him. "These trust in chariotry and these in horses," but God's people "will make mention of the name of the LORD our God" (Psalm 20:7).

8:21-22 *And Samuel heard all the words of the people, and he spoke them in the ears of the LORD. And the LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to their voice, and make a king reign for them." And Samuel said to the men of Israel, "Go, each man to his city."*

"Samuel heard all the words of the people, and he spoke them in the ears of the LORD." Samuel once again went to God in prayer. He told the LORD everything the people said.

"Listen to their voice, and make a king reign for them." For the third time in this chapter God says, "Listen to their voice" (8:7, 9, 22). God would give them a king. He would even use that king, and the kingship itself, to bring about His plan. Out of the line of kings would come David, and from David would come Jesus, the King of kings. God works even through our wrong choices. But that does not make the choices right.

"And Samuel said to the men of Israel, Go, each man to his city." The king was coming, but not yet. God would choose him in His way, and the next chapter shows how.

Chapter 8 Summary

When Samuel was old, he made his sons Joel and Abijah judges in Beersheba, but they took bribes and perverted justice. The elders of Israel came to Samuel at Ramah and asked him to appoint a king to judge them like all the nations. Samuel was displeased and prayed. The LORD told him to listen to the people, because they had not rejected Samuel but had rejected the LORD from reigning over them, as they had done since the exodus. He told Samuel to warn them. Samuel told them a king would take their sons for his army and fields, their daughters for his household, their best land for his servants, a tenth of their crops and flocks, and their workers, until they became his servants, and that they would cry out because of the king they chose and the LORD would not

answer. The people refused to listen and said they wanted a king to judge them and fight their battles like all the nations. The LORD told Samuel to give them a king, and Samuel sent them home.

People and Places

- Joel and Abijah: Samuel's sons, who served as judges in Beersheba.
- Beersheba: a town in the far south of Israel.
- Elders: the older leaders of the tribes and towns of Israel.
- Tithe: a tenth of a person's crops or flocks.

Chapter 8 Study Questions

1. What were Samuel's sons doing wrong? (8:3)

2. What did the elders ask for, and what reasons did they give? (8:4-5)

3. How did Samuel respond to their request? (8:6)

4. Whom did the LORD say the people had really rejected? (8:7-8)

5. List some of the things Samuel said a king would take. (8:11-17)

6. What did Samuel warn would happen when they cried out because of their king? (8:18)

7. Why did the people say they wanted a king? Who had actually been fighting their battles? (8:19-20; 7:10)

8. God planned for Israel to have a king, yet their request was wrong. How can a good thing be asked for in a wrong way?

9. In what areas of life are you tempted to want to be "like all the nations" instead of being different for God?

10. When you feel rejected, especially while serving God, what can you learn from the way Samuel and the LORD handled it?

Chapter 9: Saul Meets Samuel

Scripture

9:1-14 And there was a man from Benjamin, and his name ***was*** Kish, the son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Becorath, the son of Aphiah, the son of a Benjaminite man, a mighty ***man*** of wealth. And he had a son, and his name ***was*** Saul, a young man and good, and there was not a man from the sons of Israel better than he; from his shoulder and upward ***he was*** taller than all the people. And the she-donkeys of Kish, the father of Saul, were lost; and Kish said to Saul his son, "Take, please, one of the servants with you, and arise, go, seek the she-donkeys." And he passed through the hill country of Ephraim, and he passed through the land of Shalishah, and they did not find ***them***; and they passed through the land of Shaalim, and ***they were*** not ***there***; and he passed through the land of the Benjaminite, and they did not find ***them***. They came into the land of Zuph, and Saul said to his servant who ***was*** with him, "Come, and let us return, lest my father stop ***thinking*** about the she-donkeys and become anxious about us." And he said to him, "Look, please, a man of God ***is*** in this city, and the man ***is*** honored; all that he speaks surely comes ***to pass***. Now let us go there; perhaps he will tell us our way on which we have gone." And Saul said to his servant, "And look, we will go, and what shall we bring to the man? For the bread has gone from our bags, and there is no gift to bring to the man of God. What ***is*** with us?" And the servant again answered Saul, and he said, "Look, there is found in my hand approximately 1/10 ounce (a fourth of a shekel) of silver, and I will give ***it*** to the man of God, and he will tell us our way." Formerly in Israel, thus the man said when he went to inquire of God: "Come, and let us go to the seer"; for the prophet of today was formerly called the seer. And Saul said to his servant, "Your word ***is*** good; come, let us go." And they went to the city where the man of God ***was***. They were going up the ascent of the city, and they found young women going out to draw water, and they said to them, "Is the seer in this ***place***?" And they answered them and said, "***He*** is; look, ***he is*** before you. Hurry now, for today he has come to the city, for ***there is*** a sacrifice today for the people at the high place. As you come into the city, so you will find him, before he goes up to the high place to eat; for the people will not eat until he comes, for he will bless the sacrifice; afterward those who are invited will eat. And now go up, for about now you will find him." And they went up ***to*** the city. They were coming into the midst of the city, and look, Samuel ***was*** coming out to meet them, to go up ***to*** the high place.

9:15-27 And the LORD had uncovered the ear of Samuel one day before Saul came, saying, "About this time tomorrow I will send to you a man from the land of Benjamin, and you shall anoint him as leader over My people Israel, and he will save My people from the hand of the Philistines; for I have seen My people, for its cry has come to Me." And Samuel saw Saul, and the LORD answered him, "Look, the man of whom I spoke to you! This ***one*** will restrain My people." And Saul approached Samuel in the midst of the gate, and he said, "Tell me, please, where ***is*** the house of the seer?" And Samuel answered Saul and said, "I ***am*** the seer. Go up before me ***to*** the high place, and you shall eat with me today, and I will send you away in the morning, and all that ***is*** in your heart I will tell you. And as for the she-donkeys that were lost to you three days ***ago*** today, do not set your heart on them, for they have been found. And for whom ***is*** all the desire of Israel? ***Is it*** not for you and for all the house of your father?" And Saul answered and said, "***Am*** I not a

Benjaminite, from the smallest of the tribes of Israel? And my clan ***is*** the least of all the clans of the tribes of Benjamin. And why have you spoken to me according to this matter?" And Samuel took Saul and his servant, and he brought them into the chamber, and he gave them a place at the head of those who were invited; and they ***were*** about thirty men. And Samuel said to the cook, "Give the portion which I gave to you, of which I said to you, 'Put it with you.'" And the cook lifted up the thigh and what ***was*** on it, and he set ***it*** before Saul. And he said, "Look, what remains ***is*** set before you. Eat, for to the appointed time ***it was*** kept for you, saying, 'I have invited the people.'" And Saul ate with Samuel on that day. And they went down from the high place ***to*** the city, and he spoke with Saul on the roof. And they rose early; and it was, when the dawn came up, and Samuel called to Saul on the roof, saying, "Arise, and I will send you away." And Saul arose, and the two of them, he and Samuel, went outside. They were going down at the edge of the city, and Samuel said to Saul, "Say to the servant that he should pass on before us"; and he passed on; "and you, stand now, and I will cause you to hear the word of God."

Chapter 9 Preview

God had told Samuel to give the people a king. Now we meet him, and he is not looking for a crown. He is looking for his father's lost donkeys. Saul, the son of Kish from the tribe of Benjamin, is young, handsome, and a head taller than everyone else. After days of searching, his servant suggests they ask the man of God in the nearby town. That man is Samuel.

The day before, the LORD had told Samuel that He would send him a man from Benjamin to anoint as leader over His people. When Saul walks up, the LORD says, "Look, the man of whom I spoke to you!" Samuel invites Saul to a feast, seats him at the head of the table, gives him the best portion, and talks with him on the roof. In the morning Samuel sends the servant ahead so he can give Saul the word of God. This chapter shows God guiding ordinary events, even lost donkeys, to bring about His plan.

Chapter 9 Study

9:1-2 *And there was a man from Benjamin, and his name **was** Kish, the son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Becorath, the son of Aphiah, the son of a Benjaminite man, a mighty **man** of wealth. And he had a son, and his name **was** Saul, a young man and good, and there was not a man from the sons of Israel better than he; from his shoulder and upward **he was** taller than all the people.*

"There was a man from Benjamin, and his name was Kish." Kish was "a mighty man of wealth," a man of standing in his tribe. Benjamin was the smallest tribe, and it had nearly been wiped out in the civil war at the end of Judges (Judges 20-21). It is surprising that Israel's first king came from there.

"He had a son, and his name was Saul, a young man and good, and there was not a man from the sons of Israel better than he; from his shoulder and upward he was taller than all the people." The word good here means fine, handsome, of good appearance. Saul looked like a king. He stood head

and shoulders above everyone. If the people wanted a king like the nations, Saul was exactly what they would have picked.

That is worth noticing. Later, when God chooses David, He will tell Samuel not to look at appearance or height (16:7). Saul was the people's kind of king. David would be God's.

9:3-5 *And the she-donkeys of Kish, the father of Saul, were lost; and Kish said to Saul his son, "Take, please, one of the servants with you, and arise, go, seek the she-donkeys." And he passed through the hill country of Ephraim, and he passed through the land of Shalishah, and they did not find* ***them****; and they passed through the land of Shaalim, and* ***they were*** *not* ***there****; and he passed through the land of the Benjaminite, and they did not find* ***them****. They came into the land of Zuph, and Saul said to his servant who* ***was*** *with him, "Come, and let us return, lest my father stop* ***thinking*** *about the she-donkeys and become anxious about us."*

"The she-donkeys of Kish, the father of Saul, were lost." Donkeys were valuable animals, used for riding and carrying loads. Kish sent Saul and a servant to look for them.

They searched the hill country of Ephraim, Shalishah, Shaalim, and the land of Benjamin. They did not find them. Finally they came to the land of Zuph. Saul was ready to quit: "let us return, lest my father stop thinking about the she-donkeys and become anxious about us." That shows Saul cared about his father. He was a thoughtful young man.

It looks like an ordinary story, a farmer's son on a wasted trip. But the land of Zuph was Samuel's area. Elkanah was a descendant of Zuph (1:1). Saul's lost donkeys were leading him straight to the prophet. God often works through what seems like bad luck or a waste of time. Joseph was sold as a slave and ended up in Pharaoh's palace. Ruth "happened" to glean in Boaz's field. God guides our steps even when we cannot see it (Proverbs 16:9).

9:6-8 *And he said to him, "Look, please, a man of God* ***is*** *in this city, and the man* ***is*** *honored; all that he speaks surely comes* ***to pass****. Now let us go there; perhaps he will tell us our way on which we have gone." And Saul said to his servant, "And look, we will go, and what shall we bring to the man? For the bread has gone from our bags, and there is no gift to bring to the man of God. What with us?" And the servant again answered Saul, and he said, "Look, there is found in my hand approximately 1/10 ounce (a fourth of a shekel) of silver, and I will give* ***it*** *to the man of God, and he will tell us our way."*

The servant had an idea. "Look, please, a man of God is in this city, and the man is honored; all that he speaks surely comes to pass." This fits what we learned in 3:19: none of Samuel's words fell to the ground. Even a servant knew his reputation.

Saul worried that they had nothing to give the man of God. It was polite to bring a gift to a prophet when asking for his help (1 Kings 14:3). The bread was gone. The servant had "a fourth of a shekel of silver," about a tenth of an ounce. He offered to give it.

It is interesting that the servant thought of the man of God and Saul did not. Saul seems not to have known Samuel, even though Samuel was famous across Israel. That may tell us something about how little Saul had paid attention to the things of God before this day.

9:9-10 *Formerly in Israel, thus the man said when he went to inquire of God: "Come, and let us go to the seer"; for the prophet of today was formerly called the seer. And Saul said to his servant, "Your word **is** good; come, let us go." And they went to the city where the man of God **was**.*

The writer stops to explain a word: "Formerly in Israel, thus the man said when he went to inquire of God: Come, and let us go to the seer; for the prophet of today was formerly called the seer." A seer is one who sees, someone to whom God shows things. By the time the book was finished, people said prophet instead. This little note shows that the writer was explaining an older story to later readers.

"Your word is good; come, let us go." Saul agreed, and they went to the town.

9:11-14 *They were going up the ascent of the city, and they found young women going out to draw water, and they said to them, "Is the seer in this **place**?" And they answered them and said, "**He** is; look, **he is** before you. Hurry now, for today he has come to the city, for **there is** a sacrifice today for the people at the high place. As you come into the city, so you will find him, before he goes up to the high place to eat; for the people will not eat until he comes, for he will bless the sacrifice; afterward those who are invited will eat. And now go up, for about now you will find him." And they went up **to** the city. They were coming into the midst of the city, and look, Samuel **was** coming out to meet them, to go up **to** the high place.*

As they climbed toward the town, they met young women coming out to draw water, and asked, "Is the seer in this place?" The women told them to hurry. Samuel had just come to town because there was "a sacrifice today for the people at the high place."

A high place was a hilltop place of worship with an altar. Later in Israel's history, high places became centers of idol worship and were condemned (2 Kings 23:8). But in Samuel's day, with Shiloh destroyed and no central sanctuary, God's people worshiped the LORD at high places, and Samuel led the sacrifice. Until the temple was built, this was allowed (1 Kings 3:2).

"The people will not eat until he comes, for he will bless the sacrifice." Samuel would pray over the meal, and then the guests would eat. Saul and his servant came at just the right moment. "Look, Samuel was coming out to meet them." The timing was God's.

9:15-17 *And the LORD had uncovered the ear of Samuel one day before Saul came, saying, "About this time tomorrow I will send to you a man from the land of Benjamin, and you shall anoint him as leader over My people Israel, and he will save My people from the hand of the Philistines; for I have seen My people, for its cry has come to Me." And Samuel saw Saul, and the LORD answered him, "Look, the man of whom I spoke to you! This **one** will restrain My people."*

Now we learn what Saul did not know. "The LORD had uncovered the ear of Samuel one day before Saul came." To uncover the ear means to reveal something privately. God told Samuel, "About this time tomorrow I will send to you a man from the land of Benjamin, and you shall anoint him as leader over My people Israel."

The word leader here is not king. It is the Hebrew nagid, a prince or ruler appointed by someone above him. God was reminding everyone that Israel's king would rule under Him, as His servant.

"He will save My people from the hand of the Philistines; for I have seen My people, for its cry has come to Me." Look at the grace of God. The people had rejected Him in chapter 8, but He still called them "My people" four times in these verses. He still heard their cry. God's love does not depend on our getting everything right.

When Saul came into view, "the LORD answered him, Look, the man of whom I spoke to you! This one will restrain My people." God pointed Saul out to Samuel. Saul was God's choice, given to the people in answer to what they asked for.

9:18-20 *And Saul approached Samuel in the midst of the gate, and he said, "Tell me, please, where **is** the house of the seer?" And Samuel answered Saul and said, "I **am** the seer. Go up before me **to** the high place, and you shall eat with me today, and I will send you away in the morning, and all that **is** in your heart I will tell you. And as for the she-donkeys that were lost to you three days **ago** today, do not set your heart on them, for they have been found. And for whom **is** all the desire of Israel? **Is it** not for you and for all the house of your father?"*

Saul walked right up to Samuel in the gate and asked, "Tell me, please, where is the house of the seer?" He was speaking to the seer and did not know it.

"I am the seer." Samuel told him to come to the high place and eat with him, and promised to tell him "all that is in your heart" in the morning. Then he answered Saul's problem before Saul could mention it: "as for the she-donkeys that were lost to you three days ago today, do not set your heart on them, for they have been found." Samuel knew things only God could have told him.

Then Samuel turned to something much bigger. "And for whom is all the desire of Israel? Is it not for you and for all the house of your father?" Israel wanted a king, and that desire was going to land on Saul. Saul came looking for donkeys and was about to be offered a kingdom.

9:21 *And Saul answered and said, "**Am** I not a Benjaminite, from the smallest of the tribes of Israel? And my clan **is** the least of all the clans of the tribes of Benjamin. And why have you spoken to me according to this matter?"*

Saul's answer was humble. "Am I not a Benjaminite, from the smallest of the tribes of Israel? And my clan is the least of all the clans of the tribes of Benjamin. And why have you spoken to me according to this matter?"

That sounds a lot like Gideon (Judges 6:15) and Moses (Exodus 3:11). Saul did not think himself worthy. This was good. Samuel would later remind Saul, "Though you were small in your eyes, were you not the head of the tribes of Israel?" (15:17). Saul began small in his own eyes. The sad thing is that he did not stay that way. Humility at the start is good. Humility kept through power is rare.

9:22-24 *And Samuel took Saul and his servant, and he brought them into the chamber, and he gave them a place at the head of those who were invited; and they **were** about thirty men. And Samuel said to the cook, "Give the portion which I gave to you, of which I said to you, 'Put it with you.'" And the cook lifted up the thigh and what **was** on it, and he set **it** before Saul. And he said, "Look, what remains **is** set before you. Eat, for to the appointed time **it was** kept for you, saying, 'I have invited the people.'" And Saul ate with Samuel on that day.*

Samuel brought Saul and his servant into the hall and sat them "at the head of those who were invited; and they were about thirty men." The guests were likely the leaders of the town. Saul, the stranger, was given the place of honor.

Then Samuel told the cook to bring the portion he had set aside. "The cook lifted up the thigh and what was on it, and he set it before Saul." The thigh was a choice portion, the one normally given to the priest (Leviticus 7:32-34). Samuel had set it aside for Saul the day before. "Eat, for to the appointed time it was kept for you." Without saying it yet, Samuel was telling everyone at that table that this young man was special.

9:25-27 *And they went down from the high place **to** the city, and he spoke with Saul on the roof. And they rose early; and it was, when the dawn came up, and Samuel called to Saul on the roof, saying, "Arise, and I will send you away." And Saul arose, and the two of them, he and Samuel, went outside. They were going down at the edge of the city, and Samuel said to Saul, "Say to the servant that he should pass on before us"; and he passed on; "and you, stand now, and I will cause you to hear the word of God."*

After the meal they went back down to town, and Samuel "spoke with Saul on the roof." Flat roofs in Israel were used as living space, and guests often slept there in warm weather. Scripture does not tell us what they talked about. Perhaps Samuel told him about Israel's request for a king and God's purpose.

Early in the morning Samuel called to Saul on the roof: "Arise, and I will send you away." He walked with Saul to the edge of town. Then he told Saul to send the servant ahead: "and you, stand now, and I will cause you to hear the word of God." What came next was private, between Saul, Samuel and God.

Saul had set out to find donkeys. He was about to hear the word of God. God's plans for us are often much bigger than the errand we are on. Are you paying attention to what God might be doing in your ordinary days?

Chapter 9 Summary

Kish, a wealthy man of Benjamin, had a son named Saul, a handsome young man taller than anyone in Israel. When Kish's donkeys were lost, Saul and a servant searched for days without finding them. In the land of Zuph, the servant suggested they ask the man of God in the town, whose words always came true, and offered a quarter shekel of silver as a gift. The day before, the LORD had told Samuel that He would send him a man from Benjamin to anoint as leader over His people to save them from the Philistines. When Saul came, the LORD told Samuel this was the

man. Samuel told Saul the donkeys had been found and that the desire of Israel was for him. Saul humbly said he was from the smallest tribe and least clan. Samuel seated him at the head of the feast, gave him the portion he had saved, spoke with him on the roof, and in the morning sent the servant ahead so Saul could hear the word of God.

People and Places

- Kish: Saul's father, a wealthy man of the tribe of Benjamin.
- Saul: the son of Kish, who would become Israel's first king.
- Benjamin: the smallest tribe of Israel, whose land lay just north of Jerusalem.
- Zuph: the area of Samuel's family home in Ephraim.
- Seer: an older word for a prophet, one to whom God shows things.
- High place: a hilltop place of worship with an altar.

Chapter 9 Study Questions

1. How is Saul described when we first meet him? (9:2)

2. Why did Saul set out from home, and how did he end up meeting Samuel? (9:3-6)

3. What did the servant say about the man of God? (9:6)

4. What had the LORD told Samuel the day before Saul came? (9:15-16)

5. How did Saul respond when Samuel spoke of the desire of Israel? (9:21)

6. How did Samuel honor Saul at the feast? (9:22-24)

7. Why do you think the writer tells us so much about Saul's looks and height? (9:2; 16:7)

8. God used lost donkeys to bring Saul to Samuel. Can you look back and see a time when God used something frustrating to guide you?

9. Saul started out small in his own eyes. Why is humility often easier at the beginning than later on?

10. Saul came looking for donkeys and heard the word of God. How can you stay open to what God may be doing in your ordinary days?

Chapter 10: Saul Anointed and Chosen King

Scripture

10:1-16 And Samuel took the flask of oil and poured ***it*** on his head, and he kissed him and said, "Is it not that the LORD has anointed you as leader over His inheritance? When you go from me today, then you will find two men by the tomb of Rachel in the territory of Benjamin at Zelzah, and they will say to you, 'The she-donkeys which you went to seek have been found; and look, your father has abandoned the matter of the she-donkeys and is anxious about you, saying, "What shall I do for my son?"' And you will pass on from there and beyond, and you will come to the terebinth of Tabor, and three men going up to God ***at*** Bethel will find you there, one carrying three young goats, and one carrying three round loaves of bread, and one carrying a skin of wine. And they will ask you about ***your*** welfare, and they will give you two ***loaves of*** bread, and you shall take ***them*** from their hand. After that you will come ***to*** Gibeah of God, where the garrisons of the Philistines ***are***. And it will be, when you come there to the city, then you will meet a company of prophets coming down from the high place, and before them ***will be*** harp and tambourine and flute and lyre, and they ***will be*** prophesying. And the Spirit of the LORD will rush on you, and you will prophesy with them, and you will be changed into another man. And it will be, when these signs come to you, do for yourself what your hand finds, for God ***is*** with you. And you shall go down before me ***to*** Gilgal; and look, I ***am*** coming down to you to offer up burnt offerings, to sacrifice sacrifices of peace offerings. Seven days you shall wait, until I come to you, and I will make known to you what you shall do." And it was, when he turned his shoulder to go from Samuel, and God changed for him another heart; and all these signs came on that day. And they came there, to Gibeah; and look, a company of prophets ***came*** to meet him; and the Spirit of God rushed on him, and he prophesied in their midst. And it was, all who knew him formerly, and they saw, and look, he ***was*** prophesying with prophets; and the people said each to his neighbor, "What ***is*** this ***that*** has happened to the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?" And a man from there answered and said, "And who ***is*** their father?" Therefore it became a proverb: "Is Saul also among the prophets?" And he finished prophesying, and he came ***to*** the high place. And the uncle of Saul said to him and to his servant, "Where did you go?" And he said, "To seek the she-donkeys; and we saw that ***they were*** not ***there***, and we came to Samuel." And the uncle of Saul said, "Tell me, please, what Samuel said to you." And Saul said to his uncle, "He surely told us that the she-donkeys had been found." And the matter of the kingship, of which Samuel had spoken, he did not tell him.

10:17-27 And Samuel called the people together to the LORD at Mizpah. And he said to the sons of Israel, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: 'I brought up Israel from Egypt, and I delivered you from the hand of Egypt and from the hand of all the kingdoms that were oppressing you.' And you today have rejected your God, who Himself ***is*** a Savior to you from all your calamities and your distresses; and you have said to Him, 'Rather, a king you shall set over us.' And now present yourselves before the LORD by your tribes and by your thousands." And Samuel brought near all the tribes of Israel, and the tribe of Benjamin was taken. And he brought near the tribe of Benjamin by its clans, and the clan of the Matrites was taken; and Saul the son of Kish was taken. And they sought him, and he was not found. And they inquired again of the LORD, "Has the man

yet come here?" And the LORD said, "Look, he ***is*** hiding himself among the baggage." And they ran and took him from there, and he presented himself in the midst of the people, and he was taller than all the people from his shoulder and upward. And Samuel said to all the people, "Do you see him whom the LORD has chosen, for there is none like him among all the people?" And all the people shouted and said, "Let the king live!" And Samuel spoke to the people the practice of the kingship, and he wrote ***it*** in the book and set ***it*** before the LORD. And Samuel sent away all the people, each man to his house. And Saul also went to his house, to Gibeah; and there went with him the force, whom God had touched in their heart. And sons of worthlessness said, "How will this one save us?" And they despised him, and they did not bring him a gift. And he was like one keeping silent.

Chapter 10 Preview

Samuel pours a flask of oil on Saul's head, kisses him, and tells him the LORD has anointed him as leader over His inheritance. Then he gives Saul three signs that will happen on his way home, so Saul will know this is from God. The last sign is the greatest: the Spirit of the LORD will rush on him, he will prophesy with a band of prophets, and he will be changed into another man. Every sign comes true that same day. But when Saul gets home and his uncle asks what Samuel said, he tells him only about the donkeys.

Then Samuel calls the nation together at Mizpah. He reminds them that by asking for a king they have rejected the God who saved them. Then, by lot, the LORD points out the tribe of Benjamin, the clan of Matri, and Saul the son of Kish. But Saul cannot be found. He is hiding among the baggage. They bring him out, he stands head and shoulders above them all, and the people shout, "Let the king live!" Some brave men go home with him, while some worthless men sneer. Saul says nothing.

Chapter 10 Study

10:1 *And Samuel took the flask of oil and poured **it** on his head, and he kissed him and said, "Is it not that the LORD has anointed you as leader over His inheritance?*

"Samuel took the flask of oil and poured it on his head, and he kissed him." To anoint means to pour oil on someone to set him apart for a task from God. Priests were anointed this way (Exodus 29:7). Now the first king is. The kiss was a sign of respect and loyalty, and maybe of an old man's affection.

"Is it not that the LORD has anointed you as leader over His inheritance?" Samuel poured the oil, but the LORD did the anointing. And Israel was "His inheritance," God's own people. Saul was not being given his own kingdom. He was being made a steward over God's people. Every leader in God's church needs to remember the same thing: the people are not ours, they are His (1 Peter 5:2-3).

This anointing was private. The public choosing would come later in the chapter.

10:2-4 *When you go from me today, then you will find two men by the tomb of Rachel in the territory of Benjamin at Zelzah, and they will say to you, 'The she-donkeys which you went to seek have been found; and look, your father has abandoned the matter of the she-donkeys and is anxious about you, saying, "What shall I do for my son?"' And you will pass on from there and beyond, and you will come to the terebinth of Tabor, and three men going up to God* ***at*** *Bethel will find you there, one carrying three young goats, and one carrying three round loaves of bread, and one carrying a skin of wine. And they will ask you about* ***your*** *welfare, and they will give you two* ***loaves of*** *bread, and you shall take* ***them*** *from their hand.*

Samuel gave Saul three signs. First, "two men by the tomb of Rachel" at Zelzah would tell him the donkeys had been found, and that his father was now worried about him. Rachel, Jacob's wife and the mother of Benjamin, was buried near Bethlehem (Genesis 35:19-20). Saul, a Benjaminite, would get his first sign at the grave of his tribe's mother.

Second, at "the terebinth of Tabor," a large tree that served as a landmark, he would meet three men "going up to God at Bethel." One would carry three young goats, one three loaves of bread, and one a skin of wine, offerings for worship. They would greet him and give him two loaves. "You shall take them from their hand." Bread meant for God's worship would be given to God's anointed.

These signs were small and specific. They were God's way of saying to Saul, I know every step of your road. You can trust what Samuel told you.

10:5-6 *After that you will come* ***to*** *Gibeah of God, where the garrisons of the Philistines* ***are****. And it will be, when you come there to the city, then you will meet a company of prophets coming down from the high place, and before them* ***will be*** *harp and tambourine and flute and lyre, and they* ***will be*** *prophesying. And the Spirit of the LORD will rush on you, and you will prophesy with them, and you will be changed into another man.*

The third sign would come at "Gibeah of God, where the garrisons of the Philistines are." Saul's home region had Philistine soldiers posted in it. The king God was giving Israel would have work to do.

There he would meet "a company of prophets coming down from the high place," with harp, tambourine, flute and lyre, and they would be prophesying. These were groups of men who gathered around God's worship and spoke His praises, often with music (1 Chronicles 25:1). Samuel seems to have led such groups (19:20).

"And the Spirit of the LORD will rush on you, and you will prophesy with them, and you will be changed into another man." In the Old Testament, the Spirit of God came on certain people to equip them for a task God gave them, as He did with the judges (Judges 14:6). To prophesy here likely means Saul would speak out God's praise or message under the Spirit's power, as the others were doing. He would be "changed into another man." God was giving Saul what he needed to lead.

10:7-8 *And it will be, when these signs come to you, do for yourself what your hand finds, for God **is** with you. And you shall go down before me **to** Gilgal; and look, I **am** coming down to you to offer up burnt offerings, to sacrifice sacrifices of peace offerings. Seven days you shall wait, until I come to you, and I will make known to you what you shall do."*

"When these signs come to you, do for yourself what your hand finds, for God is with you." After the signs, Saul was free to act as the situation called for, trusting that God was with him.

Then came one clear command: "you shall go down before me to Gilgal." Samuel would come there to offer burnt offerings and peace offerings. "Seven days you shall wait, until I come to you, and I will make known to you what you shall do." Remember this verse. It will be Saul's first big test in chapter 13. God gave Saul freedom to act, but there was one thing he must not do: he must not go ahead without God's word through His prophet.

10:9-10 *And it was, when he turned his shoulder to go from Samuel, and God changed for him another heart; and all these signs came on that day. And they came there, to Gibeah; and look, a company of prophets **came** to meet him; and the Spirit of God rushed on him, and he prophesied in their midst.*

"When he turned his shoulder to go from Samuel, and God changed for him another heart." Before the signs happened, God was already at work inside him. "And all these signs came on that day."

At Gibeah the company of prophets met him, "and the Spirit of God rushed on him, and he prophesied in their midst." Everything Samuel said came true.

What does it mean that God gave Saul "another heart"? Some read it as Saul being born again. Others read it as God giving Saul a new mind and courage for the work of a king, the way the Spirit gave the judges strength for their tasks. Those who hold the second view point to the rest of Saul's life, which shows a man who often did not have a heart for God, and to chapter 16, where the Spirit of the LORD departs from him. Those who hold the first point to the plain words, a changed heart given by God. Good Bible teachers hold both views. Scripture does not tell us for sure about Saul's soul. What it does show is that a person can be gifted by God, have powerful spiritual experiences, and still not walk in obedience. Gifts are not the same as faithfulness (Matthew 7:22-23).

10:11-13 *And it was, all who knew him formerly, and they saw, and look, he **was** prophesying with prophets; and the people said each to his neighbor, "What **is** this **that** has happened to the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?" And a man from there answered and said, "And who **is** their father?" Therefore it became a proverb: "Is Saul also among the prophets?" And he finished prophesying, and he came **to** the high place.*

People who knew Saul saw him prophesying and were amazed. "What is this that has happened to the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?" Saul was the last person they expected to see among the prophets. Nothing in his life had suggested it.

Someone asked, "And who is their father?" That may mean, who is the leader of these prophets? Or it may mean, prophets don't get their gift from their family, so why not Saul? It may also be a

jab: these prophets don't come from anyone important. Either way, the saying stuck. "Is Saul also among the prophets?" became a proverb, the kind of thing people say when someone surprises them by showing up where they did not belong. It comes up again in 19:24.

10:14-16 *And the uncle of Saul said to him and to his servant, "Where did you go?" And he said, "To seek the she-donkeys; and we saw that **they were** not **there**, and we came to Samuel." And the uncle of Saul said, "Tell me, please, what Samuel said to you." And Saul said to his uncle, "He surely told us that the she-donkeys had been found." And the matter of the kingship, of which Samuel had spoken, he did not tell him.*

Saul's uncle asked where he had been. "To seek the she-donkeys; and we saw that they were not there, and we came to Samuel." The uncle wanted to know what Samuel said. Saul answered, "He surely told us that the she-donkeys had been found." "And the matter of the kingship, of which Samuel had spoken, he did not tell him."

Why did Saul keep quiet? It may have been humility. It may have been wisdom, waiting for God's timing. It may also have been fear. Saul often seems unsure of himself in these early chapters. There is a time to speak of what God has done, and a time to wait. Here Saul waited, and the public choosing came soon.

10:17-19 *And Samuel called the people together to the LORD at Mizpah. And he said to the sons of Israel, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: 'I brought up Israel from Egypt, and I delivered you from the hand of Egypt and from the hand of all the kingdoms that were oppressing you.' And you today have rejected your God, who Himself **is** a Savior to you from all your calamities and your distresses; and you have said to Him, 'Rather, a king you shall set over us.' And now present yourselves before the LORD by your tribes and by your thousands."*

"Samuel called the people together to the LORD at Mizpah." This was the same place where Israel had repented and seen God's victory in chapter 7.

Before the king was named, Samuel delivered God's word. "I brought up Israel from Egypt, and I delivered you from the hand of Egypt and from the hand of all the kingdoms that were oppressing you." God reminded them of everything He had done.

"And you today have rejected your God, who Himself is a Savior to you from all your calamities and your distresses." They had a Savior. They wanted a king. "Rather, a king you shall set over us." God was going to give them what they asked, but He wanted it on record that they had chosen a man over the God who saved them. That warning hung over Saul's kingdom from the first day.

"And now present yourselves before the LORD by your tribes and by your thousands." The choosing would be done in the LORD's presence, by His decision.

10:20-22 *And Samuel brought near all the tribes of Israel, and the tribe of Benjamin was taken. And he brought near the tribe of Benjamin by its clans, and the clan of the Matrites was taken; and Saul the son of Kish was taken. And they sought him, and he was not found. And they inquired again of the LORD, "Has the man yet come here?" And the LORD said, "Look, he **is** hiding himself among the baggage."*

"Samuel brought near all the tribes of Israel, and the tribe of Benjamin was taken." This was done by lot, a way of letting God show His choice, something like drawing straws (Proverbs 16:33). Joshua had used the same method to find Achan (Joshua 7:16-18). Then the clan of the Matrites was taken, "and Saul the son of Kish was taken." God confirmed in public what He had already shown Samuel in private.

"And they sought him, and he was not found." The new king was missing. They asked the LORD, "Has the man yet come here?" and the LORD answered, "Look, he is hiding himself among the baggage." It is almost funny, but it is also sad. The tallest man in Israel was trying to hide behind the luggage. Was it humility? Fear? Probably both. Saul knew already that he had been chosen, and he still hid. A man who hides from his calling may struggle to carry it.

10:23-24 *And they ran and took him from there, and he presented himself in the midst of the people, and he was taller than all the people from his shoulder and upward. And Samuel said to all the people, "Do you see him whom the LORD has chosen, for there is none like him among all the people?" And all the people shouted and said, "Let the king live!"*

They ran and brought him out, "and he was taller than all the people from his shoulder and upward." Standing up, he was impossible to miss.

"Do you see him whom the LORD has chosen, for there is none like him among all the people?" Samuel did not say he was the best man spiritually. He said there was none like him. He was the most impressive man in Israel. That was the kind of king they had asked for.

"And all the people shouted and said, Let the king live!" Many Bibles translate it Long live the king. Israel had its king.

10:25 *And Samuel spoke to the people the practice of the kingship, and he wrote **it** in the book and set **it** before the LORD. And Samuel sent away all the people, each man to his house.*

"And Samuel spoke to the people the practice of the kingship, and he wrote it in the book and set it before the LORD." Samuel wrote down the rules for the king, likely based on Deuteronomy 17:14-20: the king must not multiply horses, wives or riches, must write a copy of the law, read it all his life, and not lift himself above his brothers. He placed this document "before the LORD," probably with the ark or another holy place. Israel's king was not above God's law. He was under it. That was very different from the kings of the nations, who made their own law.

"And Samuel sent away all the people, each man to his house."

10:26-27 *And Saul also went to his house, to Gibeah; and there went with him the force, whom God had touched in their heart. And sons of worthlessness said, "How will this one save us?" And they despised him, and they did not bring him a gift. And he was like one keeping silent.*

Saul went home to Gibeah, "and there went with him the force, whom God had touched in their heart." God gave Saul a group of loyal, brave men. When God calls someone to lead, He often gives them people to stand with them.

"And sons of worthlessness said, How will this one save us?" Not everyone was happy. These troublemakers "despised him, and they did not bring him a gift." A gift was a sign of loyalty to a new king, and they refused it.

"And he was like one keeping silent." Saul did not answer them or punish them. At this point, that was wise. Not every insult needs a reply. Proverbs 19:11 says it is a man's glory to overlook an offense. The next chapter will show whether he could save them.

Chapter 10 Summary

Samuel anointed Saul with oil as leader over the LORD's inheritance and gave him three signs: two men at Rachel's tomb would say the donkeys were found, three men going to Bethel would give him two loaves, and at Gibeah he would meet prophets, the Spirit of the LORD would rush on him, and he would prophesy and be changed. Samuel told him to wait seven days at Gilgal for him. God gave Saul another heart, all the signs came true that day, and people asked, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" Saul told his uncle about the donkeys but not the kingship. At Mizpah Samuel told Israel they had rejected the God who saved them by asking for a king. By lot Benjamin, the Matrites, and Saul were taken, but Saul was hiding among the baggage. They brought him out, he stood taller than all, and the people shouted, "Let the king live!" Samuel wrote down the rules of the kingship and set them before the LORD. Valiant men went home with Saul, but some worthless men despised him, and Saul kept silent.

People and Places

- Rachel's tomb: the burial place of Jacob's wife Rachel, mother of Benjamin, near Bethlehem.
- Terebinth of Tabor: a large tree used as a landmark on the way to Bethel.
- Gibeah: Saul's hometown in Benjamin, also called Gibeah of God and Gibeah of Saul.
- Company of prophets: a group of men devoted to God's worship who prophesied, often with music.
- Lot: a way of casting stones or markers to let God show His choice (Proverbs 16:33).

Chapter 10 Study Questions

1. What did Samuel do to Saul, and whose leader did he say Saul was? (10:1)

2. What were the three signs Samuel gave Saul? (10:2-6)

3. What command did Samuel give Saul about Gilgal? (10:8)

4. What did God do for Saul as he left Samuel, and what happened at Gibeah? (10:9-10)

5. What did Saul tell his uncle, and what did he leave out? (10:14-16)

6. What did Samuel say Israel had done by asking for a king? (10:18-19)

7. Where was Saul found when he was chosen, and what do you think that says about him? (10:21-22)

8. Saul had powerful spiritual experiences but later disobeyed. Why is it important not to confuse gifts or experiences with faithfulness?

9. Samuel wrote down the rules for the king and set them before the LORD. How does it help leaders to know they are under God's Word?

10. Saul kept silent when men despised him. When is silence the best answer to criticism, and when is it not?

Chapter 11: Saul Rescues Jabesh-gilead

Scripture

11:1-15 And Nahash the Ammonite went up and encamped against Jabesh-gilead; and all the men of Jabesh said to Nahash, "Make a covenant with us, and we will serve you." And Nahash the Ammonite said to them, "On this ***condition*** I will make ***a covenant*** with you: by gouging out every right eye of yours; and I will make it a reproach on all Israel." And the elders of Jabesh said to him, "Let us alone seven days, and let us send messengers into all the territory of Israel; and if there is no one saving us, then we will come out to you." And the messengers came ***to*** Gibeah of Saul, and they spoke the words in the ears of the people; and all the people lifted up their voice and wept. And look, Saul ***was*** coming after the oxen from the field. And Saul said, "What ***is the matter*** with the people, that they are weeping?" And they recounted to him the words of the men of Jabesh. And the Spirit of God rushed on Saul when he heard these words, and his anger burned exceedingly. And he took a pair of oxen and cut it in pieces, and he sent ***them*** into all the territory of Israel by the hand of the messengers, saying, "Whoever is not coming out after Saul and after Samuel, thus it shall be done to his oxen." And the dread of the LORD fell on the people, and they came out as one man. And he mustered them at Bezek, and the sons of Israel were three hundred thousand, and the men of Judah thirty thousand. And they said to the messengers who had come, "Thus you shall say to the men of Jabesh-gilead: 'Tomorrow, by the heat of the sun, you shall have salvation.'" And the messengers came and told the men of Jabesh, and they were glad. And the men of Jabesh said, "Tomorrow we will come out to you, and you may do to us according to all that ***is*** good in your eyes." And it was on the next day, and Saul put the people ***in*** three companies, and they came into the midst of the camp in the morning watch, and they struck Ammon until the heat of the day. And it was, those who remained, and they were scattered, and there were not left among them two together. And the people said to Samuel, "Who ***is*** the one who said, 'Shall Saul reign over us?' Give up the men, and we will put them to death." And Saul said, "Not a man shall be put to death on this day, for today the LORD has worked salvation in Israel." And Samuel said to the people, "Come, and let us go ***to*** Gilgal, and let us renew the kingship there." And all the people went ***to*** Gilgal, and they made Saul king there before the LORD in Gilgal, and they sacrificed there sacrifices of peace offerings before the LORD; and Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced there exceedingly.

Chapter 11 Preview

Some people doubted that Saul could save anyone. Now comes his first test. Nahash, king of the Ammonites, surrounds the town of Jabesh-gilead east of the Jordan. When the men of Jabesh offer to surrender, Nahash says he will make peace only if he can gouge out every man's right eye, to shame all Israel. The elders ask for seven days to look for help.

The messengers reach Gibeah, and when Saul comes in from plowing and hears the news, the Spirit of God rushes on him. He cuts up a pair of oxen and sends the pieces through Israel with a warning, and the people come out as one man. Saul leads a dawn attack and scatters the Ammonites. When the people want to execute the men who had despised him, Saul refuses,

saying the LORD has worked salvation that day. Then Samuel gathers everyone at Gilgal, and they make Saul king before the LORD with great joy. This is Saul at his best.

Chapter 11 Study

11:1-2 *And Nahash the Ammonite went up and encamped against Jabesh-gilead; and all the men of Jabesh said to Nahash, "Make a covenant with us, and we will serve you." And Nahash the Ammonite said to them, "On this* ***condition*** *I will make* ***a covenant*** *with you: by gouging out every right eye of yours; and I will make it a reproach on all Israel."*

"Nahash the Ammonite went up and encamped against Jabesh-gilead." The Ammonites were descendants of Lot (Genesis 19:38) and lived east of the Jordan. Jabesh-gilead was an Israelite town in Gilead, on the east side of the river. In 12:12 Samuel will say that this threat from Nahash was one reason the people pushed for a king.

The men of Jabesh did not fight. They asked for terms: "Make a covenant with us, and we will serve you." A covenant was a binding agreement. They were ready to become Nahash's subjects.

Nahash's answer was cruel. "By gouging out every right eye of yours; and I will make it a reproach on all Israel." Some explain that a soldier without his right eye could not fight well, since he held his shield on the left and looked past it with his right eye. But Nahash's main goal was shame. He wanted every Israelite to hear what he had done and feel helpless. The enemy of God's people often aims at more than harm. He wants to disgrace them and make them feel that God cannot help.

11:3-5 *And the elders of Jabesh said to him, "Let us alone seven days, and let us send messengers into all the territory of Israel; and if there is no one saving us, then we will come out to you." And the messengers came* ***to*** *Gibeah of Saul, and they spoke the words in the ears of the people; and all the people lifted up their voice and wept. And look, Saul* ***was*** *coming after the oxen from the field. And Saul said, "What* ***is the matter*** *with the people, that they are weeping?" And they recounted to him the words of the men of Jabesh.*

The elders asked for seven days to send messengers "into all the territory of Israel; and if there is no one saving us, then we will come out to you." It is surprising that Nahash agreed. He must have been sure no one would come. Israel had no strong leader yet, and he expected to win without a fight.

There was also a family tie. In Judges 21, after the war against Benjamin, four hundred young women from Jabesh-gilead became wives for the men of Benjamin. Many in Benjamin, perhaps even Saul's own family, had roots in Jabesh. So the messengers came "to Gibeah of Saul."

"All the people lifted up their voice and wept." They felt as helpless as Nahash hoped they would.

"And look, Saul was coming after the oxen from the field." Israel had a king, and he was out plowing. Saul had not yet set up a court. He was still a farmer. When he heard the people weeping, he asked what was wrong.

11:6-7 *And the Spirit of God rushed on Saul when he heard these words, and his anger burned exceedingly. And he took a pair of oxen and cut it in pieces, and he sent **them** into all the territory of Israel by the hand of the messengers, saying, "Whoever is not coming out after Saul and after Samuel, thus it shall be done to his oxen." And the dread of the LORD fell on the people, and they came out as one man.*

"And the Spirit of God rushed on Saul when he heard these words, and his anger burned exceedingly." This was not sinful temper. It was righteous anger, given by the Spirit, at the cruelty and shame being done to God's people. There is a right kind of anger, at injustice and evil, that moves us to act (Ephesians 4:26).

"He took a pair of oxen and cut it in pieces, and he sent them into all the territory of Israel." The message was clear: "Whoever is not coming out after Saul and after Samuel, thus it shall be done to his oxen." It was a vivid way to call the nation to war. It also echoes the terrible event in Judges 19:29, when a man sent the pieces of his concubine through Israel. That time it led to civil war against Benjamin. This time a man of Benjamin used a similar sign to unite Israel against a real enemy.

Notice that Saul named Samuel with himself. He was not acting alone. He knew the people trusted the old prophet.

"And the dread of the LORD fell on the people, and they came out as one man." The people were moved by God. Israel had not stood together like this in a long time. When God moves, people who could not agree on anything come together.

11:8 *And he mustered them at Bezek, and the sons of Israel were three hundred thousand, and the men of Judah thirty thousand.*

Saul counted the army at Bezek, west of the Jordan near the crossing to Jabesh: "the sons of Israel were three hundred thousand, and the men of Judah thirty thousand." Judah is counted on its own, a hint of the division that would come later between Judah and the northern tribes.

These are large numbers. I take them as written. Some scholars think the Hebrew word for thousand, eleph, can also mean a clan or a military unit, and that the numbers here and in other places describe units rather than individual men. Good Bible teachers hold both views. Either way, the point is that Israel came out in force, as one man.

11:9-11 *And they said to the messengers who had come, "Thus you shall say to the men of Jabesh-gilead: 'Tomorrow, by the heat of the sun, you shall have salvation.'" And the messengers came and told the men of Jabesh, and they were glad. And the men of Jabesh said, "Tomorrow we will come out to you, and you may do to us according to all that **is** good in your eyes." And it was on the next day, and Saul put the people **in** three companies, and they came into the midst of the camp in the morning watch, and they struck Ammon until the heat of the day. And it was, those who remained, and they were scattered, and there were not left among them two together.*

Saul sent the messengers back with a promise: "Tomorrow, by the heat of the sun, you shall have salvation." Salvation here means rescue. The men of Jabesh "were glad."

Then the men of Jabesh told Nahash, "Tomorrow we will come out to you, and you may do to us according to all that is good in your eyes." It was a clever answer. It was true that they would come out, but not to surrender. Nahash thought he had won.

"Saul put the people in three companies, and they came into the midst of the camp in the morning watch." The morning watch was the last part of the night, just before dawn. Gideon had used three companies in a night attack too (Judges 7:16). The Ammonites were caught off guard, and Israel "struck Ammon until the heat of the day." The enemy was so scattered that "there were not left among them two together."

Saul's first battle as king was a complete victory. The town that was about to be shamed was saved.

11:12-13 *And the people said to Samuel, "Who **is** the one who said, 'Shall Saul reign over us?' Give up the men, and we will put them to death." And Saul said, "Not a man shall be put to death on this day, for today the LORD has worked salvation in Israel."*

After the victory, the people remembered the worthless men from 10:27. "Who is the one who said," they asked, "Shall Saul reign over us?" Then they demanded, "Give up the men, and we will put them to death."

Saul's answer is one of his finest moments. "Not a man shall be put to death on this day, for today the LORD has worked salvation in Israel." He refused to take revenge. He also gave the credit for the victory to the LORD, not to himself. A great day of God's grace was no day for killing fellow Israelites.

This is the Saul who could have been. He was humble, generous, quick to act for others and quick to honor God. Sadly, the Saul of later chapters will hunt down a faithful man out of jealousy and kill the priests of Nob. Power and pride changed him. We should pray that God keeps us humble when things go well, because success can be more dangerous to the soul than failure.

11:14-15 *And Samuel said to the people, "Come, and let us go **to** Gilgal, and let us renew the kingship there." And all the people went **to** Gilgal, and they made Saul king there before the LORD in Gilgal, and they sacrificed there sacrifices of peace offerings before the LORD; and Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced there exceedingly.*

"Come, and let us go to Gilgal, and let us renew the kingship there." Saul had been chosen at Mizpah, but not everyone had accepted him. Now, after the victory, the whole nation was ready.

Gilgal was where Israel had camped after crossing the Jordan under Joshua, where they were circumcised and kept the Passover (Joshua 4:19-20; 5:9-10). It was a place of new beginnings. "And they made Saul king there before the LORD in Gilgal, and they sacrificed there sacrifices of peace offerings before the LORD." A peace offering was a sacrifice shared in a meal, a sign of fellowship with God and with one another.

"And Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced there exceedingly." It was a day of great joy. Israel had its king, and God had given them victory. But Samuel knew the people still needed to hear some hard truths, and the next chapter gives his farewell speech at this same gathering.

Chapter 11 Summary

Nahash the Ammonite besieged Jabesh-gilead and offered peace only if he could gouge out every man's right eye to disgrace Israel. The elders of Jabesh asked for seven days to look for help. When the messengers reached Gibeah and Saul heard the news as he came in from the field, the Spirit of God rushed on him and he burned with anger. He cut up a pair of oxen and sent the pieces through Israel, warning that anyone who did not follow Saul and Samuel would have his oxen treated the same way. The dread of the LORD fell on the people, and they came out as one man, 330,000 strong. Saul attacked the Ammonite camp in three companies at dawn and scattered them. When the people wanted to kill the men who had despised Saul, he refused, saying the LORD had worked salvation that day. Samuel then led the people to Gilgal, where they made Saul king before the LORD, offered peace offerings, and rejoiced greatly.

People and Places

- Nahash: king of the Ammonites.
- Ammonites: descendants of Lot who lived east of the Jordan.
- Jabesh-gilead: an Israelite town east of the Jordan, in Gilead.
- Bezek: the place west of the Jordan where Saul gathered the army.
- Gilgal: the first camp of Israel in the land under Joshua, near Jericho, where Saul was made king.

Chapter 11 Study Questions

1. What terms did Nahash offer the men of Jabesh, and what was his purpose? (11:1-2)

2. What was Saul doing when the messengers came, and how did he react to the news? (11:5-6)

3. How did Saul call Israel to battle, and how did the people respond? (11:7)

4. How did Saul defeat the Ammonites? (11:11)

5. What did the people want to do afterward, and what did Saul say? (11:12-13)

6. What happened at Gilgal? (11:14-15)

7. What is the difference between sinful anger and the kind of anger the Spirit gave Saul? (11:6; Ephesians 4:26)

8. Saul gave God the credit for the victory and refused revenge. Why is it so hard to do that when we have been insulted?

9. Nahash wanted to bring shame on all Israel. How does the enemy try to shame God's people today, and how does God answer it?

10. Saul's best moments came early. What can you do to stay humble and faithful when things are going well?

Chapter 12: Samuel's Farewell Address

Scripture

12:1-12 And Samuel said to all Israel, "Look, I have listened to your voice in all that you have said to me, and I have made a king reign over you. And now, look, the king ***is*** walking before you; and I, I am old and gray, and my sons, look, they ***are*** with you; and I, I have walked before you from my youth until this day. Here I ***am***; testify against me before the LORD and before His anointed: whose ox have I taken, and whose donkey have I taken, and whom have I oppressed, whom have I crushed, and from whose hand have I taken a ransom, and hidden my eyes with it? And I will restore ***it*** to you." And they said, "You have not oppressed us, and you have not crushed us, and you have not taken anything from the hand of anyone." And he said to them, "The LORD ***is*** a witness against you, and His anointed ***is*** a witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand." And they said, "***He is*** a witness." And Samuel said to the people, "***It is*** the LORD who made Moses and Aaron, and who brought up your fathers from the land of Egypt. And now, present yourselves, and let me enter into judgment with you before the LORD ***concerning*** all the righteous acts of the LORD which He did with you and with your fathers. When Jacob came ***to*** Egypt, and your fathers cried out to the LORD, and the LORD sent Moses and Aaron, and they brought out your fathers from Egypt, and they caused them to dwell in this place. And they forgot the LORD their God, and He sold them into the hand of Sisera, the commander of the army of Hazor, and into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand of the king of Moab, and they fought against them. And they cried out to the LORD and said, 'We have sinned, for we have forsaken the LORD and have served the Baals and the Ashtaroth; and now deliver us from the hand of our enemies, and we will serve You.' And the LORD sent Jerubbaal and Bedan and Jephthah and Samuel, and He delivered you from the hand of your enemies all around, and you dwelt securely. And you saw that Nahash the king of the sons of Ammon came against you, and you said to me, 'No, but a king shall reign over us,' and the LORD your God ***was*** your king.

12:13-25 And now, look, the king whom you have chosen, whom you have asked for; and look, the LORD has set a king over you. If you will fear the LORD and serve Him and listen to His voice, and not rebel against the mouth of the LORD, and both you and also the king who reigns over you will be after the LORD your God— And if you will not listen to the voice of the LORD, and you rebel against the mouth of the LORD, then the hand of the LORD will be against you and against your fathers. Even now, present yourselves and see this great thing which the LORD ***is*** doing before your eyes. Is it not wheat harvest today? I will call to the LORD, and He will give thunder and rain; and know and see that your evil which you have done in the eyes of the LORD ***is*** great, in asking for yourselves a king." And Samuel called to the LORD, and the LORD gave thunder and rain on that day; and all the people feared the LORD and Samuel exceedingly. And all the people said to Samuel, "Pray for your servants to the LORD your God, and let us not die; for we have added to all our sins an evil, in asking for ourselves a king." And Samuel said to the people, "Do not be afraid. You, you have done all this evil; only do not turn aside from after the LORD, and serve the LORD with all your heart. And you shall not turn aside, for ***you would go*** after futility, which cannot profit and cannot deliver, for they ***are*** futility. For the LORD will not abandon His people, for the sake of His great name, for the LORD has been pleased to make you a people for Himself. Also as

for me, far be it from me to sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you; and I will teach you the good and the upright way. Only fear the LORD and serve Him in faithfulness with all your heart, for consider what great ***things*** He has done with you. And if you surely do evil, both you and your king will be swept away."

Chapter 12 Preview

At the great gathering at Gilgal, Samuel stands before Israel to hand leadership over to the new king. First he asks the people to testify: has he ever cheated or oppressed anyone? They say no. Then he takes them through their history: how God brought them out of Egypt, how they forgot Him, how He sold them to their enemies, how they cried out, and how He sent deliverers. Yet when Nahash came, they asked for a king, even though the LORD was their King.

Samuel tells them that all will still be well if both they and their king fear the LORD and obey Him. To show that their request was evil, he calls on the LORD, and in the dry wheat harvest God sends thunder and rain. The terrified people beg Samuel to pray for them. His answer is full of grace: do not be afraid, do not turn aside, the LORD will not abandon His people, and "far be it from me to sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you." This chapter is about faithful leadership, honest repentance, and a God who keeps His people for His own name's sake.

Chapter 12 Study

12:1-2 *And Samuel said to all Israel, "Look, I have listened to your voice in all that you have said to me, and I have made a king reign over you. And now, look, the king **is** walking before you; and I, I am old and gray, and my sons, look, they **are** with you; and I, I have walked before you from my youth until this day.*

"I have listened to your voice in all that you have said to me, and I have made a king reign over you." Samuel had done what the people asked, even though he did not like it. Now he stepped back. "The king is walking before you; and I, I am old and gray."

"And my sons, look, they are with you." This may be a quiet admission that his sons had not been good judges, or a way of saying, they are no different from you now, hold them to account. Then Samuel pointed to his own life: "I have walked before you from my youth until this day." Every person there had known Samuel his whole life, from the boy in the linen ephod to the gray-haired prophet.

12:3-5 *Here I **am**; testify against me before the LORD and before His anointed: whose ox have I taken, and whose donkey have I taken, and whom have I oppressed, whom have I crushed, and from whose hand have I taken a ransom, and hidden my eyes with it? And I will restore **it** to you." And they said, "You have not oppressed us, and you have not crushed us, and you have not taken anything from the hand of anyone." And he said to them, "The LORD **is** a witness against you, and His anointed **is** a witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand." And they said, "**He is** a witness."*

"Here I am; testify against me before the LORD and before His anointed." Samuel put his whole record on trial, in front of God and the new king. "Whose ox have I taken, and whose donkey have I taken, and whom have I oppressed, whom have I crushed, and from whose hand have I taken a ransom, and hidden my eyes with it?" A ransom here means a bribe, money paid so a judge would look the other way. Samuel's sons took bribes (8:3). Samuel never had.

Notice the list. These were exactly the things Samuel had warned a king would do: take, take, take (8:11-17). Samuel had led Israel for years and taken nothing.

"You have not oppressed us, and you have not crushed us, and you have not taken anything from the hand of anyone." The whole nation agreed. Samuel called God and the king as witnesses, and they said, "He is a witness."

Could you stand before the people who know you best and ask that question? Paul could (Acts 20:33-34). A leader's greatest sermon is his life. Samuel did not have to defend himself with words. His years spoke for him.

12:6-8 *And Samuel said to the people, "**It is** the LORD who made Moses and Aaron, and who brought up your fathers from the land of Egypt. And now, present yourselves, and let me enter into judgment with you before the LORD **concerning** all the righteous acts of the LORD which He did with you and with your fathers. When Jacob came **to** Egypt, and your fathers cried out to the LORD, and the LORD sent Moses and Aaron, and they brought out your fathers from Egypt, and they caused them to dwell in this place.*

Now Samuel turned from his own record to God's. "It is the LORD who made Moses and Aaron, and who brought up your fathers from the land of Egypt." God had given them leaders before. He did not need a king to save them.

"Present yourselves, and let me enter into judgment with you before the LORD concerning all the righteous acts of the LORD." Samuel spoke like a lawyer laying out a case in court. The evidence was God's "righteous acts," the things He had done to save them.

He started with Jacob going down to Egypt. "Your fathers cried out to the LORD, and the LORD sent Moses and Aaron." God answered their cry, brought them out, and "caused them to dwell in this place."

12:9-11 *And they forgot the LORD their God, and He sold them into the hand of Sisera, the commander of the army of Hazor, and into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand of the king of Moab, and they fought against them. And they cried out to the LORD and said, 'We have sinned, for we have forsaken the LORD and have served the Baals and the Ashtaroth; and now deliver us from the hand of our enemies, and we will serve You.' And the LORD sent Jerubbaal and Bedan and Jephthah and Samuel, and He delivered you from the hand of your enemies all around, and you dwelt securely.*

"And they forgot the LORD their God." That simple sentence is the beginning of every disaster in Judges. They did not stop believing God existed. They simply forgot Him and lived as if He did not matter.

"He sold them into the hand of Sisera," the commander of Hazor's army (Judges 4), "and into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand of the king of Moab." God gave them over to the enemies they had made room for.

"They cried out to the LORD," confessing, "We have sinned, for we have forsaken the LORD and have served the Baals and the Ashtaroth." When they confessed and called out, God answered. "The LORD sent Jerubbaal and Bedan and Jephthah and Samuel." Jerubbaal is Gideon (Judges 6:32). Jephthah is in Judges 11. Bedan is not named in Judges. Some Hebrew and Greek copies read Barak, Deborah's commander (Judges 4), and Hebrews 11:32 names Gideon, Barak and Jephthah together. Others think Bedan was another name for one of the judges. Samuel even named himself, since God had used him to save Israel at Mizpah (7:10). "He delivered you from the hand of your enemies all around, and you dwelt securely."

12:12-13 *And you saw that Nahash the king of the sons of Ammon came against you, and you said to me, 'No, but a king shall reign over us,' and the LORD your God **was** your king. And now, look, the king whom you have chosen, whom you have asked for; and look, the LORD has set a king over you.*

"You saw that Nahash the king of the sons of Ammon came against you," Samuel said, and you told me, "No, but a king shall reign over us," and yet "the LORD your God was your king." Here we learn the threat from Nahash had been building before the people asked for a king. Instead of crying out to God as their fathers did, they asked for a man.

"Look, the king whom you have chosen, whom you have asked for." Saul was the king they chose and asked for. The name Saul, in Hebrew Sha'ul, even sounds like the word asked. "And look, the LORD has set a king over you." Both are true. The people chose, and God gave. God was still in charge, even of their wrong request.

12:14-15 *If you will fear the LORD and serve Him and listen to His voice, and not rebel against the mouth of the LORD, and both you and also the king who reigns over you will be after the LORD your God— And if you will not listen to the voice of the LORD, and you rebel against the mouth of the LORD, then the hand of the LORD will be against you and against your fathers.*

Samuel set out the terms. "If you will fear the LORD and serve Him and listen to His voice, and not rebel against the mouth of the LORD," and if both the people and the king would follow after the

LORD, then it would go well. The Hebrew sentence breaks off in the middle, as if Samuel stopped and left the good result unspoken. The blessing would follow obedience.

"And if you will not listen to the voice of the LORD, and you rebel against the mouth of the LORD, then the hand of the LORD will be against you and against your fathers." Having a king changed nothing about the covenant. The king did not replace God. The same rule held for king and people alike: obey and be blessed, rebel and be judged. It is the same choice Moses set before Israel (Deuteronomy 30:15-20).

12:16-18 *Even now, present yourselves and see this great thing which the LORD **is** doing before your eyes. Is it not wheat harvest today? I will call to the LORD, and He will give thunder and rain; and know and see that your evil which you have done in the eyes of the LORD **is** great, in asking for yourselves a king." And Samuel called to the LORD, and the LORD gave thunder and rain on that day; and all the people feared the LORD and Samuel exceedingly.*

"Present yourselves and see this great thing which the LORD is doing before your eyes." Samuel was about to give a sign. "Is it not wheat harvest today?" Wheat harvest in Israel came in May or June, during the dry season. Rain at that time was almost unheard of, and it could ruin a harvest.

"I will call to the LORD, and He will give thunder and rain." Why? "Know and see that your evil which you have done in the eyes of the LORD is great, in asking for yourselves a king." The people had been rejoicing at Gilgal (11:15). Samuel wanted them to see their sin before they got too comfortable.

"And Samuel called to the LORD, and the LORD gave thunder and rain on that day." Just as in chapter 7, God thundered at Samuel's prayer. This time the thunder was not against the Philistines but a warning to Israel. "And all the people feared the LORD and Samuel exceedingly."

12:19 *And all the people said to Samuel, "Pray for your servants to the LORD your God, and let us not die; for we have added to all our sins an evil, in asking for ourselves a king."*

"Pray for your servants to the LORD your God, and let us not die; for we have added to all our sins an evil, in asking for ourselves a king." Finally the people saw it. They called Him "your God," as if they did not dare to call Him theirs. They confessed that asking for a king was one more evil on top of all their sins. This is true repentance: naming the sin, and asking for prayer and mercy.

12:20-21 *And Samuel said to the people, "Do not be afraid. You, you have done all this evil; only do not turn aside from after the LORD, and serve the LORD with all your heart. And you shall not turn aside, for **you would go** after futility, which cannot profit and cannot deliver, for they **are** futility.*

Samuel's answer is beautiful. "Do not be afraid." He did not pile on. "You, you have done all this evil; only do not turn aside from after the LORD, and serve the LORD with all your heart." He did not pretend their sin was small. But he did not leave them in despair either. The past could not be undone, but the future could still be faithful.

That is the word many of us need. You may have made choices you cannot undo. You may be living with their consequences. God's word is still, do not be afraid, do not turn aside now, serve Him with all your heart from here on.

"You shall not turn aside, for you would go after futility, which cannot profit and cannot deliver, for they are futility." The word futility is the same word used in Genesis 1:2 for the earth being formless, empty. Idols are empty things. They promise much and give nothing. They cannot help and cannot save.

12:22 *For the LORD will not abandon His people, for the sake of His great name, for the LORD has been pleased to make you a people for Himself.*

"For the LORD will not abandon His people, for the sake of His great name, for the LORD has been pleased to make you a people for Himself." This is the anchor of the whole chapter. Why would God not abandon them after all they had done? Not because they deserved to be kept. "For the sake of His great name." God's honor was tied to His people. He had chosen them because it pleased Him to (Deuteronomy 7:7-8). His faithfulness rested on His own character, not on theirs.

I believe this promise still stands for Israel as a nation. Paul asks, "did God reject His people?" and answers, "May it not be!" (Romans 11:1-2). God still has a future for Israel, and He will keep His covenants with them (Romans 11:25-29). The same faithful God keeps every believer in Christ. Our security does not rest on how well we hold on to Him, but on how well He holds on to us (John 10:28-29).

12:23 *Also as for me, far be it from me to sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you; and I will teach you the good and the upright way.*

"Also as for me, far be it from me to sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you." Samuel had been pushed aside. The people had rejected his leadership and his sons. He could have walked away and said, you wanted a king, let your king pray for you. Instead he said it would be a sin against God to stop praying for them.

Do we think of prayerlessness as a sin? Samuel did. If God has put people in our lives, we owe it to Him to pray for them, even when they have hurt us. Jesus told us to pray for those who mistreat us (Luke 6:28). Samuel's anger was set aside for the sake of his people.

"And I will teach you the good and the upright way." Samuel would still pray and still teach. He was retiring from judging, not from ministry.

12:24-25 *Only fear the LORD and serve Him in faithfulness with all your heart, for consider what great **things** He has done with you. And if you surely do evil, both you and your king will be swept away."*

"Only fear the LORD and serve Him in faithfulness with all your heart, for consider what great things He has done with you." This is Samuel's whole message in one verse. To fear the LORD is to hold Him in awe and reverence, so that we trust and obey Him above all. The reason is God's

goodness: "consider what great things He has done." When we remember what God has done for us, serving Him is not a burden. It is a thank-you.

"And if you surely do evil, both you and your king will be swept away." The warning closes the speech. More than four hundred and fifty years later it came true, when Judah and its king were carried off to Babylon (2 Kings 25). God's warnings are as sure as His promises.

Chapter 12 Summary

At Gilgal, Samuel asked the people to testify whether he had ever taken anything, oppressed anyone or accepted a bribe, and they said he had not, with the LORD and His anointed as witnesses. He reviewed the LORD's righteous acts: sending Moses and Aaron, giving Israel over to Sisera, the Philistines and Moab when they forgot Him, and sending deliverers like Jerubbaal, Bedan, Jephthah and Samuel when they cried out. Yet when Nahash came, they asked for a king though the LORD was their king. Samuel said that if people and king feared and obeyed the LORD, all would be well, but if they rebelled, His hand would be against them. He called on the LORD, who sent thunder and rain in the wheat harvest, and the people feared and confessed that asking for a king was evil. Samuel told them not to fear, not to turn aside to empty idols, and to serve the LORD with all their heart, because the LORD would not abandon His people for the sake of His great name. He said it would be a sin to stop praying for them, urged them to fear the LORD and remember His great deeds, and warned that if they did evil, they and their king would be swept away.

People and Places

- Jerubbaal: another name for Gideon (Judges 6:32).
- Bedan: a deliverer not named in Judges; possibly Barak.
- Jephthah: the judge who delivered Israel from the Ammonites (Judges 11).
- Sisera: the commander of the army of Hazor defeated in Deborah's day (Judges 4).
- Wheat harvest: the late spring harvest, in the dry season when rain was rare.

Chapter 12 Study Questions

1. What did Samuel ask the people to testify about, and what was their answer? (12:3-5)

2. How did Samuel's record compare with what he warned a king would do? (12:3; 8:11-17)

3. What pattern from Israel's history did Samuel describe? (12:8-11)

4. What did the people say when Nahash came, and who was their king? (12:12)

5. What sign did God give, and why was it so striking at that time of year? (12:16-18)

6. What did Samuel tell the people after they confessed their sin? (12:20-22)

7. Why will the LORD not abandon His people? (12:22)

8. Samuel said it would be a sin to stop praying for the people. Who has God put in your life that you need to keep praying for, even if they have hurt you?

9. Samuel told people who could not undo their sin, "Do not be afraid." How does that encourage you about choices in your past?

10. "Consider what great things He has done." Take a moment to list some great things God has done for you. How should that change how you serve Him?

Chapter 13: Saul's Unlawful Offering

Scripture

13:1-15 Saul ***was*** a year old when he became king, and two years he reigned over Israel. And Saul chose for himself three thousand from Israel; and two thousand were with Saul at Michmash and in the hill country of Bethel, and a thousand were with Jonathan at Gibeah of Benjamin. And the rest of the people he sent away, each man to his tents. And Jonathan struck the garrison of the Philistines which ***was*** at Geba, and the Philistines heard. And Saul blew the trumpet in all the land, saying, "Let the Hebrews hear." And all Israel heard, saying, "Saul has struck the garrison of the Philistines, and also Israel has made itself a stench to the Philistines." And the people were called together after Saul ***to*** Gilgal. And the Philistines gathered to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen, and people like the sand which ***is*** on the shore of the sea for multitude; and they came up and encamped at Michmash, east of Beth-aven. And the men of Israel saw that ***it was*** distress for them, for the people were hard pressed; and the people hid themselves in caves and in thickets and in crags and in strongholds and in cisterns. And Hebrews crossed the Jordan ***to*** the land of Gad and Gilead. And Saul ***was*** still at Gilgal, and all the people trembled after him. And he waited seven days, to the appointed time which Samuel ***had set***, and Samuel did not come ***to*** Gilgal; and the people scattered from him. And Saul said, "Bring near to me the burnt offering and the peace offerings." And he offered up the burnt offering. And it was, when he finished offering up the burnt offering, and look, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, to bless him. And Samuel said, "What have you done?" And Saul said, "Because I saw that the people were scattered from me, and you, you did not come at the appointed time of the days, and the Philistines ***were*** gathering ***at*** Michmash, and I said, 'Now the Philistines will come down against me ***at*** Gilgal, and the face of the LORD I have not entreated'; and I forced myself, and I offered up the burnt offering." And Samuel said to Saul, "You have acted foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God which He commanded you; for now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. And now your kingdom will not endure. The LORD has sought for Himself a man according to His heart, and the LORD has commanded him ***to be*** leader over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you." And Samuel arose and went up from Gilgal ***to*** Gibeah of Benjamin. And Saul mustered the people who were found with him, about six hundred men.

13:16-23 And Saul and Jonathan his son and the people who were found with them ***were*** staying in Geba of Benjamin, and the Philistines encamped at Michmash. And the raiders came out from the camp of the Philistines ***in*** three companies: one company turned toward the way of Ophrah, to the land of Shual; and one company turned ***toward*** the way of Beth-horon; and one company turned ***toward*** the way of the border that looks down over the valley of Zeboim, toward the wilderness. And no craftsman was found in all the land of Israel, for the Philistines said, "Lest the Hebrews make sword or spear." And all Israel went down ***to*** the Philistines to sharpen each man his plowshare and his mattock and his axe and his plowshare. And the charge was approximately 1/4 ounce (a pim) for the plowshares and for the mattocks and for the three-pronged forks and for the axes, and to set the goads. And it was on the day of battle, and neither sword nor spear was found in the hand of any of the people who ***were*** with Saul and with Jonathan; and ***one*** was

found for Saul and for Jonathan his son. And the outpost of the Philistines went out to the pass of Michmash.

Chapter 13 Preview

Saul's reign began with a great victory and a joyful crowd at Gilgal. Now the real test comes. Jonathan, Saul's son, attacks a Philistine garrison, and the Philistines answer with a huge army, chariots and horsemen like the sand on the seashore. Israel's soldiers panic. They hide in caves and holes, and some flee across the Jordan. Saul waits at Gilgal for Samuel, as he was told to do. Seven days pass. Samuel has not come, and the army is melting away. So Saul offers the burnt offering himself.

Just as he finishes, Samuel arrives. "What have you done?" Saul makes excuses. Samuel tells him he has acted foolishly and has not kept the LORD's command, and that because of it his kingdom will not last. The LORD has sought for Himself "a man according to His heart." The chapter ends with a picture of how weak Israel is: the Philistines have made sure no Israelite can make a sword or spear, and only Saul and Jonathan have one. This chapter shows that impatience and fear can lead even a gifted leader to disobey God, and that God cares about obedience more than appearances.

Chapter 13 Study

13:1 *Saul **was** a year old when he became king, and two years he reigned over Israel.*

This verse is one of the hardest in the book, not because of what it teaches but because of how it has come down to us. The SLB gives the Hebrew as it stands: "Saul was a year old when he became king, and two years he reigned over Israel."

Here is the problem. This verse follows the normal pattern the Bible uses to begin a king's reign: so-and-so was this many years old when he became king, and he reigned this many years (2 Samuel 5:4; 1 Kings 14:21). But the numbers in our Hebrew copies do not fit. Saul was not one year old. He already had a grown son, Jonathan, who led a thousand soldiers (13:2). And Paul tells us that Saul reigned forty years (Acts 13:21), not two.

So what happened? Most Bible scholars believe that at a very early stage, as the text was copied by hand, one or both numbers were lost or damaged. Hebrew writers often used letters for numbers, and a letter can easily drop out. Some old Greek copies leave the verse out entirely. A few later Greek copies say Saul was thirty. That is why Bibles differ here. Some say Saul was thirty years old, some leave a blank, some say he reigned forty-two years, and some say "two years" means the time from his anointing to the events of this chapter.

How should we think about this? It is honest to say that a number has been lost in copying. That does not mean the Bible has failed. God inspired what the writers first wrote, and He has kept His Word for us with great care. The thousands of copies we have agree on nearly everything, and where they differ, as here, the difference is usually a small detail like a number, and no teaching

of the faith depends on it. We know from the rest of Scripture all we need: Saul was a grown man with an adult son, and he reigned about forty years, from about 1050 to about 1010 B.C.

13:2-4 *And Saul chose for himself three thousand from Israel; and two thousand were with Saul at Michmash and in the hill country of Bethel, and a thousand were with Jonathan at Gibeah of Benjamin. And the rest of the people he sent away, each man to his tents. And Jonathan struck the garrison of the Philistines which* ***was*** *at Geba, and the Philistines heard. And Saul blew the trumpet in all the land, saying, "Let the Hebrews hear." And all Israel heard, saying, "Saul has struck the garrison of the Philistines, and also Israel has made itself a stench to the Philistines." And the people were called together after Saul* ***to*** *Gilgal.*

Saul chose three thousand men as a standing army. Two thousand stayed with him "at Michmash and in the hill country of Bethel," and a thousand were with Jonathan "at Gibeah of Benjamin." This is the first time we meet Jonathan, and he will become one of the finest men in the book.

"Jonathan struck the garrison of the Philistines which was at Geba." A garrison was a military outpost. The Philistines had soldiers stationed inside Israel's land to keep control (10:5). Jonathan's attack was bold, and it was an act of war.

"And Saul blew the trumpet in all the land, saying, Let the Hebrews hear." Notice that the people heard "Saul has struck the garrison," though it was Jonathan who did it. Saul took the credit. It is a small detail, but it hints at something in Saul's heart.

"Israel has made itself a stench to the Philistines." Now the Philistines hated them and would strike back. The people were called together after Saul "to Gilgal," where Samuel had told Saul to wait for him (10:8).

13:5-7 *And the Philistines gathered to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen, and people like the sand which* ***is*** *on the shore of the sea for multitude; and they came up and encamped at Michmash, east of Beth-aven. And the men of Israel saw that* ***it was*** *distress for them, for the people were hard pressed; and the people hid themselves in caves and in thickets and in crags and in strongholds and in cisterns. And Hebrews crossed the Jordan* ***to*** *the land of Gad and Gilead. And Saul* ***was*** *still at Gilgal, and all the people trembled after him.*

The Philistines came in force: "thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen, and people like the sand which is on the shore of the sea for multitude." Thirty thousand chariots is a huge number for a hill country battle. Some Greek and Syriac copies read three thousand. Either way, Israel was badly outmatched. The Philistines camped at Michmash, where Saul's own troops had been.

"The men of Israel saw that it was distress for them." Fear spread through the army. "The people hid themselves in caves and in thickets and in crags and in strongholds and in cisterns." Cisterns were pits dug to collect rainwater. Men were hiding in holes in the ground.

"And Hebrews crossed the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead." Some ran away altogether. "And Saul was still at Gilgal, and all the people trembled after him." The men who stayed were shaking with fear.

13:8-9 *And he waited seven days, to the appointed time which Samuel **had set**, and Samuel did not come **to** Gilgal; and the people scattered from him. And Saul said, "Bring near to me the burnt offering and the peace offerings." And he offered up the burnt offering.*

"He waited seven days, to the appointed time which Samuel had set, and Samuel did not come to Gilgal; and the people scattered from him." Saul did wait, for most of the time. Every day more men slipped away. On the seventh day, with Samuel still not there, Saul made his choice.

"Bring near to me the burnt offering and the peace offerings. And he offered up the burnt offering." Offering sacrifices was the work of priests, and in this case it was the work God had given to Samuel. Samuel had said, "I am coming down to you to offer up burnt offerings" (10:8) and "I will make known to you what you shall do." Saul did not wait for either.

Why does this matter so much? It might look like Saul was being religious, wanting God's blessing before battle. But he was taking a role God had not given him, and he was refusing to wait for God's word. The king was trying to act as his own priest and prophet. In Israel, the king was under God's word, not over it.

13:10-12 *And it was, when he finished offering up the burnt offering, and look, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, to bless him. And Samuel said, "What have you done?" And Saul said, "Because I saw that the people were scattered from me, and you, you did not come at the appointed time of the days, and the Philistines **were** gathering **at** Michmash, and I said, 'Now the Philistines will come down against me **at** Gilgal, and the face of the LORD I have not entreated'; and I forced myself, and I offered up the burnt offering."*

"When he finished offering up the burnt offering, and look, Samuel came." Just at the end of the seventh day, Samuel arrived. If Saul had waited just a little longer, it would have been fine. How often do we give up on God just before He shows up?

"Saul went out to meet him, to bless him." Saul acted as if nothing was wrong.

"What have you done?" Samuel asked. Saul had three excuses. "I saw that the people were scattered from me." "You, you did not come at the appointed time of the days." And "the Philistines were gathering at Michmash." The army was leaving, Samuel was late, and the enemy was near. Each excuse was true. None of them was a reason to disobey.

Then Saul gave the religious reason: "the face of the LORD I have not entreated." In other words, I couldn't go to battle without asking God's favor. "And I forced myself, and I offered up the burnt offering." Saul made it sound like he did it against his will, out of duty. Notice also how he blamed Samuel and blamed the people. He never once said, I did wrong.

This is how disobedience usually sounds. We rarely say, I will now disobey God. We say, I had no choice, others let me down, the situation forced me, and besides, I was trying to do something good.

13:13-14 *And Samuel said to Saul, "You have acted foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God which He commanded you; for now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. And now your kingdom will not endure. The LORD has sought for Himself a man according to His heart, and the LORD has commanded him* ***to be*** *leader over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you."*

"You have acted foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God which He commanded you." In the Bible, a fool is not someone who lacks brains. It is someone who acts as if God's word does not matter. Saul was smart enough. He was foolish because he set God's command aside.

"For now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever." This is a sad sentence. God had something good in store for Saul. If he had obeyed, his family could have ruled for generations.

"And now your kingdom will not endure." Saul himself would still reign for years, but his family line would not hold the throne. "The LORD has sought for Himself a man according to His heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be leader over His people." This man was David, though he is not named yet. Paul quotes this in Acts 13:22, where God says, "I have found David the son of Jesse, a man according to My heart, who will do all My wishes." A man after God's heart is not a man without sin. David sinned badly. It is a man whose heart is set on God and who wants to do what God wants. When David sinned, he repented. When Saul sinned, he made excuses.

Some people feel this judgment was too harsh for one offering. But it was not one small slip. It was the king deciding that God's word through His prophet could be set aside when things got hard. Chapter 15 will show that this was the pattern of Saul's heart, not a one-time mistake. "Because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you." Obedience was the whole issue.

13:15-18 *And Samuel arose and went up from Gilgal* ***to*** *Gibeah of Benjamin. And Saul mustered the people who were found with him, about six hundred men. And Saul and Jonathan his son and the people who were found with them* ***were*** *staying in Geba of Benjamin, and the Philistines encamped at Michmash. And the raiders came out from the camp of the Philistines* ***in*** *three companies: one company turned toward the way of Ophrah, to the land of Shual; and one company turned* ***toward*** *the way of Beth-horon; and one company turned* ***toward*** *the way of the border that looks down over the valley of Zeboim, toward the wilderness.*

"Samuel arose and went up from Gilgal to Gibeah of Benjamin." Samuel left. Saul counted his army: "about six hundred men." He had started with three thousand, and before that he had led three hundred thirty thousand (11:8). Fear and disobedience had shrunk his army to a handful.

Saul and Jonathan stayed at Geba, across the valley from the Philistines at Michmash. The Philistines sent out raiding parties "in three companies," one north toward Ophrah, one west toward Beth-horon, and one east toward the wilderness. They were plundering the land, and Saul could do nothing to stop them.

13:19-22 *And no craftsman was found in all the land of Israel, for the Philistines said, "Lest the Hebrews make sword or spear." And all Israel went down **to** the Philistines to sharpen each man his plowshare and his mattock and his axe and his plowshare. And the charge was approximately 1/4 ounce (a pim) for the plowshares and for the mattocks and for the three-pronged forks and for the axes, and to set the goads. And it was on the day of battle, and neither sword nor spear was found in the hand of any of the people who **were** with Saul and with Jonathan; and **one** was found for Saul and for Jonathan his son.*

"And no craftsman was found in all the land of Israel." The word means a smith, a man who worked metal. "For the Philistines said, Lest the Hebrews make sword or spear." The Philistines had learned how to work iron and kept the skill to themselves. They would not let Israel have blacksmiths.

"All Israel went down to the Philistines to sharpen each man his plowshare and his mattock and his axe." Israelite farmers had to go to their enemies and pay to have their farm tools sharpened. The charge was a pim, which the SLB gives as about a quarter of an ounce of silver. A pim was a weight of about two-thirds of a shekel. Stone weights marked pim have been found by archaeologists, which helped scholars understand this rare word.

"On the day of battle, and neither sword nor spear was found in the hand of any of the people who were with Saul and with Jonathan." Only Saul and Jonathan had real weapons. The rest of the six hundred had farm tools, slings, and clubs.

This was not just bad luck. It was the result of years of Israel's sin and of God handing them over to the Philistines. But it also set up what God was about to do. In the next chapter, God will win a battle through Jonathan and one armor-bearer, and later through a shepherd boy with a sling. God does not need our weapons. He needs our trust.

13:23 *And the outpost of the Philistines went out to the pass of Michmash.*

"And the outpost of the Philistines went out to the pass of Michmash." The Philistines moved a guard post to the steep pass between Michmash and Geba. The two armies were facing each other across a deep gorge. The stage was set for Jonathan's bold climb in chapter 14.

Chapter 13 Summary

Saul's reign is introduced with the usual formula for a king's age and years, but the numbers in the Hebrew of 13:1 were lost in copying; Saul was a grown man and reigned about forty years. Saul kept three thousand men, and Jonathan attacked the Philistine garrison at Geba. The Philistines came with a vast army, and Israel's soldiers hid in caves and pits or fled across the Jordan. Saul waited seven days at Gilgal for Samuel, but as the people scattered, he offered the burnt offering himself. As he finished, Samuel came and asked what he had done. Saul blamed the scattering people, Samuel's delay and the Philistine threat. Samuel said Saul had acted foolishly and not kept the LORD's command, that otherwise God would have established his kingdom forever, but now it would not endure, because the LORD had sought a man after His own heart. Saul was left

with six hundred men, the Philistines sent raiders through the land, and because the Philistines allowed no smiths in Israel, only Saul and Jonathan had sword or spear.

People and Places

- Jonathan: Saul's son, a brave warrior who becomes David's closest friend.
- Michmash and Geba: towns on either side of a steep pass north of Jerusalem.
- Garrison: a military outpost of Philistine soldiers inside Israel's land.
- Pim: a small weight of about two-thirds of a shekel, the charge for sharpening tools.
- Smith (craftsman): a metalworker who could make weapons and tools.

Chapter 13 Study Questions

1. Why is 13:1 hard to understand, and what do we know about Saul's age and reign from the rest of Scripture? (13:1-2; Acts 13:21)

2. Who attacked the Philistine garrison, and who got the credit? (13:3-4)

3. How did Israel's army react to the Philistine forces? (13:6-7)

4. What had Samuel told Saul to do at Gilgal, and what did Saul do instead? (10:8; 13:8-9)

5. What excuses did Saul give for offering the sacrifice? (13:11-12)

6. What did Samuel say Saul's disobedience would cost him? (13:13-14)

7. What does it mean to be "a man according to His heart"? (13:14; Acts 13:22)

8. Why did Israel have no swords or spears? What does that show about their condition? (13:19-22)

9. Saul gave up waiting just before Samuel arrived. Is there something you are waiting on God for right now? What helps you keep waiting?

10. Saul blamed others and gave religious reasons for disobeying. What excuses are we most tempted to use when we know we have not obeyed God?

Chapter 14: Jonathan's Victory and Saul's Rash Oath

Scripture

14:1-15 And it was ***one*** day, and Jonathan the son of Saul said to the servant who carried his armor, "Come, and let us cross over to the outpost of the Philistines which ***is*** on the other side over there." And to his father he did not tell ***it***. And Saul ***was*** staying at the edge of Gibeah under the pomegranate tree which ***is*** in Migron, and the people who ***were*** with him ***were*** about six hundred men. And Ahijah the son of Ahitub, the brother of Ichabod, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eli, the priest of the LORD in Shiloh, ***was*** carrying an ephod. And the people did not know that Jonathan had gone. And between the passes by which Jonathan sought to cross over to the outpost of the Philistines ***there was*** a tooth of the crag on the one side and a tooth of the crag on the other side; and the name of the one ***was*** Bozez, and the name of the other Seneh. The one tooth ***was*** a pillar on the north in front of Michmash, and the other on the south in front of Geba. And Jonathan said to the servant who carried his armor, "Come, and let us cross over to the outpost of these uncircumcised; perhaps the LORD will act for us, for there is no restraint for the LORD to save by many or by few." And his armor-bearer said to him, "Do all that ***is*** in your heart; turn aside for yourself. Look, I ***am*** with you according to your heart." And Jonathan said, "Look, we ***are*** crossing over to the men, and we will reveal ourselves to them. If they say thus to us, 'Be still until we reach you,' then we will stand in our place, and we will not go up to them. And if they say thus, 'Come up to us,' then we will go up, for the LORD has given them into our hand; and this ***will be*** the sign for us." And the two of them revealed themselves to the outpost of the Philistines; and the Philistines said, "Look, Hebrews coming out from the holes where they have hidden themselves!" And the men of the outpost answered Jonathan and his armor-bearer, and they said, "Come up to us, and we will make known to you a thing!" And Jonathan said to his armor-bearer, "Come up after me, for the LORD has given them into the hand of Israel." And Jonathan went up on his hands and on his feet, and his armor-bearer after him; and they fell before Jonathan, and his armor-bearer ***was*** killing after him. And the first slaughter which Jonathan and his armor-bearer struck was about twenty men, within about half a furrow of an acre of field. And there was trembling in the camp, in the field, and among all the people; the outpost and the raiders, they also trembled; and the earth quaked, and it became a trembling of God.

14:16-23 And the watchmen of Saul at Gibeah of Benjamin looked, and look, the multitude melted away, and it went here and ***there***. And Saul said to the people who ***were*** with him, "Muster, please, and see who has gone from us." And they mustered, and look, Jonathan and his armor-bearer ***were*** not ***there***. And Saul said to Ahijah, "Bring near the ark of God," for the ark of God was on that day ***with*** the sons of Israel. And it was, while Saul spoke to the priest, and the tumult which ***was*** in the camp of the Philistines went on, going on and growing greater; and Saul said to the priest, "Withdraw your hand." And Saul and all the people who ***were*** with him were called together, and they came to the battle; and look, the sword of each man was against his neighbor, a very great panic. And the Hebrews ***who*** were for the Philistines as formerly, who had gone up with them into the camp all around, they also ***turned*** to be with Israel who ***were*** with Saul and Jonathan. And all the men of Israel who had hidden themselves in the hill country of Ephraim

heard that the Philistines had fled, and they also pursued closely after them in the battle. And the LORD saved Israel on that day; and the battle passed beyond Beth-aven.

14:24-35 And the men of Israel were hard pressed on that day, and Saul put the people under oath, saying, "Cursed ***is*** the man who eats food until the evening, and I will be avenged on my enemies." And none of the people tasted food. And all the land came into the forest, and there was honey on the face of the field. And the people came into the forest, and look, a flow of honey; and there was no one reaching his hand to his mouth, for the people feared the oath. And Jonathan had not heard when his father made the people swear, and he stretched out the end of the staff which ***was*** in his hand and dipped it in the honeycomb, and he brought his hand back to his mouth, and his eyes brightened. And a man from the people answered and said, "Your father surely made the people swear, saying, 'Cursed ***is*** the man who eats food today.'" And the people were weary. And Jonathan said, "My father has troubled the land. See, please, that my eyes have brightened, because I tasted a little of this honey. How much more if the people had surely eaten today from the plunder of their enemies which they found! For now the slaughter among the Philistines has not been great." And they struck the Philistines on that day from Michmash to Aijalon; and the people were exceedingly weary. And the people rushed on the plunder, and they took sheep and oxen and calves, and they slaughtered ***them*** on the ground; and the people ate ***them*** with the blood. And they told Saul, saying, "Look, the people ***are*** sinning against the LORD by eating with the blood." And he said, "You have acted treacherously; roll a great stone to me today." And Saul said, "Disperse among the people, and say to them, 'Bring near to me each man his ox and each man his sheep, and slaughter ***them*** here and eat; and do not sin against the LORD by eating with the blood.'" And all the people brought near each man his ox in his hand that night, and they slaughtered ***them*** there. And Saul built an altar to the LORD; it he began to build ***as*** an altar to the LORD.

14:36-52 And Saul said, "Let us go down after the Philistines ***by*** night and plunder among them until the light of the morning, and let us not leave a man among them." And they said, "Do all that ***is*** good in your eyes." And the priest said, "Let us draw near here to God." And Saul inquired of God, "Shall I go down after the Philistines? Will You give them into the hand of Israel?" And He did not answer him on that day. And Saul said, "Draw near here, all the chiefs of the people, and know and see in what this sin has happened today. For ***as*** the LORD lives, who saves Israel, even if it is in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die." And there was no one answering him from all the people. And he said to all Israel, "You, you will be on one side, and I and Jonathan my son will be on one side." And the people said to Saul, "Do what ***is*** good in your eyes." And Saul said to the LORD, the God of Israel, "Give perfect ***lot***." And Jonathan and Saul were taken, and the people went out. And Saul said, "Cast ***the lot*** between me and Jonathan my son." And Jonathan was taken. And Saul said to Jonathan, "Tell me what you have done." And Jonathan told him and said, "I surely tasted with the end of the staff which ***was*** in my hand a little honey. Here I ***am***; I will die." And Saul said, "Thus may God do, and thus may He add; for you shall surely die, Jonathan." And the people said to Saul, "Shall Jonathan die, who has worked this great salvation in Israel? Far be it! ***As*** the LORD lives, not one hair of his head shall fall to the ground, for with God he has worked this day." And the people ransomed Jonathan, and he did not die. And Saul went up from after the Philistines, and the Philistines went to their place. And Saul had taken the kingship over Israel, and he fought all around against all his enemies: against Moab, and against the sons of

Ammon, and against Edom, and against the kings of Zobah, and against the Philistines; and wherever he turned he condemned ***them***. And he did valiantly, and he struck Amalek, and he delivered Israel from the hand of those who plundered it. And the sons of Saul were Jonathan and Ishvi and Malchi-shua; and the names of his two daughters: the name of the firstborn ***was*** Merab, and the name of the younger Michal. And the name of the wife of Saul ***was*** Ahinoam, the daughter of Ahimaaz. And the name of the commander of his army ***was*** Abner, the son of Ner, the uncle of Saul. And Kish ***was*** the father of Saul, and Ner the father of Abner ***was*** the son of Abiel. And the war was severe against the Philistines all the days of Saul; and Saul would see every mighty man and every son of strength, and he would gather him to himself.

Chapter 14 Preview

While Saul sits under a pomegranate tree with six hundred men, his son Jonathan takes his armor-bearer and climbs up a steep cliff to the Philistine outpost. "Perhaps the LORD will act for us," he says, "for there is no restraint for the LORD to save by many or by few." The two of them strike down about twenty men, God sends an earthquake, and panic spreads through the whole Philistine camp. The Philistines start killing each other, and the LORD saves Israel that day.

But Saul has put the army under a foolish oath: no one may eat until evening. The men grow faint, Jonathan eats a little honey without knowing about the oath, and the starving army ends up sinning by eating meat with the blood. When God does not answer Saul, he casts lots, Jonathan is taken, and Saul is ready to put his own son to death until the people rescue him. The chapter closes with a summary of Saul's wars and family. This chapter sets a man of faith beside a man of rash religion, and it shows how a leader's foolish words can hurt the very people he leads.

Chapter 14 Study

14:1-3 *And it was **one** day, and Jonathan the son of Saul said to the servant who carried his armor, "Come, and let us cross over to the outpost of the Philistines which **is** on the other side over there." And to his father he did not tell **it**. And Saul **was** staying at the edge of Gibeah under the pomegranate tree which **is** in Migron, and the people who **were** with him **were** about six hundred men. And Ahijah the son of Ahitub, the brother of Ichabod, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eli, the priest of the LORD in Shiloh, **was** carrying an ephod. And the people did not know that Jonathan had gone.*

"Come, and let us cross over to the outpost of the Philistines." Jonathan did not wait for orders. "And to his father he did not tell it." We are not told why. Perhaps he knew Saul would say no.

Meanwhile Saul was "staying at the edge of Gibeah under the pomegranate tree." The army was small, the king was sitting still, and the Philistines were raiding the land.

With Saul was "Ahijah the son of Ahitub, the brother of Ichabod, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eli, the priest of the LORD in Shiloh." This man was from Eli's family, the house God had judged. Saul's priest came from a rejected line, which fits a king who was about to be rejected too. Ahijah was "carrying an ephod," the high priest's garment, which held the Urim and Thummim used to ask God's will (Exodus 28:30).

14:4-5 *And between the passes by which Jonathan sought to cross over to the outpost of the Philistines* ***there was*** *a tooth of the crag on the one side and a tooth of the crag on the other side; and the name of the one* ***was*** *Bozez, and the name of the other Seneh. The one tooth* ***was*** *a pillar on the north in front of Michmash, and the other on the south in front of Geba.*

The writer describes the terrain. Between Michmash and Geba was a deep gorge with "a tooth of the crag" on each side, two steep rocky cliffs. One was named Bozez and the other Seneh. One faced north toward Michmash and the other south toward Geba. To reach the Philistines, Jonathan would have to climb down one cliff and up the other, in plain view. No army would try it. That was the point.

14:6-7 *And Jonathan said to the servant who carried his armor, "Come, and let us cross over to the outpost of these uncircumcised; perhaps the LORD will act for us, for there is no restraint for the LORD to save by many or by few." And his armor-bearer said to him, "Do all that* ***is*** *in your heart; turn aside for yourself. Look, I* ***am*** *with you according to your heart."*

"Come, and let us cross over to the outpost of these uncircumcised." Circumcision was the sign of God's covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17:10-11). Calling the Philistines uncircumcised meant they were outside God's covenant. Jonathan was thinking in terms of God's promises, not of soldiers.

"Perhaps the LORD will act for us, for there is no restraint for the LORD to save by many or by few." This is the heart of Jonathan's faith. He did not claim to know God's plan. He said perhaps. But he knew God's power. Numbers do not limit the LORD. Gideon won with three hundred (Judges 7). God can save with an army or with two men. Jonathan's faith was humble about God's will and bold about God's ability. That is a good balance for us.

His armor-bearer answered, "Do all that is in your heart; turn aside for yourself. Look, I am with you according to your heart." Every bold servant of God needs friends like that.

14:8-10 *And Jonathan said, "Look, we* ***are*** *crossing over to the men, and we will reveal ourselves to them. If they say thus to us, 'Be still until we reach you,' then we will stand in our place, and we will not go up to them. And if they say thus, 'Come up to us,' then we will go up, for the LORD has given them into our hand; and this* ***will be*** *the sign for us."*

Jonathan proposed a sign. They would show themselves to the Philistines. If the Philistines said, wait there, we're coming down, they would stay put. But if they said, come up to us, "then we will go up, for the LORD has given them into our hand."

Is it right to ask God for a sign like this? Jonathan was not testing God out of doubt. He was asking God to guide him in a risky step, as Gideon did with the fleece (Judges 6:36-40) and as Abraham's servant did at the well (Genesis 24:12-14). We have God's complete Word, and that is our main guide. But it is not wrong to ask God to open or close a door when we are trying to serve Him.

14:11-12 *And the two of them revealed themselves to the outpost of the Philistines; and the Philistines said, "Look, Hebrews coming out from the holes where they have hidden themselves!" And the men of the outpost answered Jonathan and his armor-bearer, and they said, "Come up to us, and we will make known to you a thing!" And Jonathan said to his armor-bearer, "Come up after me, for the LORD has given them into the hand of Israel."*

"Look, Hebrews coming out from the holes where they have hidden themselves!" The Philistines mocked them. Many Israelites really had been hiding in holes (13:6). "Come up to us, and we will make known to you a thing!" They thought it was a joke. Two men climbing a cliff would be easy to kill.

But that was the sign. "Come up after me, for the LORD has given them into the hand of Israel." Notice Jonathan said "into the hand of Israel," not into my hand. He was fighting for God's people, not for his own name.

14:13-15 *And Jonathan went up on his hands and on his feet, and his armor-bearer after him; and they fell before Jonathan, and his armor-bearer **was** killing after him. And the first slaughter which Jonathan and his armor-bearer struck was about twenty men, within about half a furrow of an acre of field. And there was trembling in the camp, in the field, and among all the people; the outpost and the raiders, they also trembled; and the earth quaked, and it became a trembling of God.*

"Jonathan went up on his hands and on his feet, and his armor-bearer after him." It was a hard climb. When they reached the top, the Philistines "fell before Jonathan, and his armor-bearer was killing after him." About twenty men fell in a small area, "within about half a furrow of an acre of field."

Then God took over. "There was trembling in the camp, in the field, and among all the people." Even the raiders trembled. "And the earth quaked, and it became a trembling of God." The Hebrew can mean a very great panic, or a panic sent by God. Both are true. God shook the ground and shook their hearts. Two men started the fight. God finished it.

14:16-19 *And the watchmen of Saul at Gibeah of Benjamin looked, and look, the multitude melted away, and it went here and **there**. And Saul said to the people who **were** with him, "Muster, please, and see who has gone from us." And they mustered, and look, Jonathan and his armor-bearer **were** not **there**. And Saul said to Ahijah, "Bring near the ark of God," for the ark of God was on that day **with** the sons of Israel. And it was, while Saul spoke to the priest, and the tumult which **was** in the camp of the Philistines went on, going on and growing greater; and Saul said to the priest, "Withdraw your hand."*

Saul's lookouts at Gibeah saw the Philistine army "melted away, and it went here and there." Saul counted his men and found Jonathan and his armor-bearer missing.

"Bring near the ark of God." The Hebrew here says ark, though the ark was at Kiriath-jearim (7:2). The Greek reads ephod, which fits verse 3, since the ephod was how the priest asked God's will. Either way, Saul wanted to ask God what to do.

But as the noise in the Philistine camp grew, Saul said to the priest, "Withdraw your hand." In other words, stop, never mind. He did not wait for God's answer. This was the same impatience as in chapter 13. When things were moving, Saul decided he did not need to hear from God. Asking God what to do only when it is convenient is not really seeking Him at all.

14:20-23 *And Saul and all the people who **were** with him were called together, and they came to the battle; and look, the sword of each man was against his neighbor, a very great panic. And the Hebrews **who** were for the Philistines as formerly, who had gone up with them into the camp all around, they also **turned** to be with Israel who **were** with Saul and Jonathan. And all the men of Israel who had hidden themselves in the hill country of Ephraim heard that the Philistines had fled, and they also pursued closely after them in the battle. And the LORD saved Israel on that day; and the battle passed beyond Beth-aven.*

Saul and his men came to the battle, "and look, the sword of each man was against his neighbor, a very great panic." The Philistines were killing each other, as Gideon's enemies had (Judges 7:22).

"The Hebrews who were for the Philistines as formerly" changed sides. Some Israelites had been serving with the Philistine army. Now they turned and fought with Saul and Jonathan. The men who had hidden in the hill country of Ephraim came out and joined the chase too. It is amazing how brave people get once the battle is already won.

"And the LORD saved Israel on that day." That is the summary. Not Saul, not even Jonathan. The LORD.

14:24-26 *And the men of Israel were hard pressed on that day, and Saul put the people under oath, saying, "Cursed **is** the man who eats food until the evening, and I will be avenged on my enemies." And none of the people tasted food. And all the land came into the forest, and there was honey on the face of the field. And the people came into the forest, and look, a flow of honey; and there was no one reaching his hand to his mouth, for the people feared the oath.*

"The men of Israel were hard pressed on that day, and Saul put the people under oath, saying, Cursed is the man who eats food until the evening, and I will be avenged on my enemies."

Look at what Saul said: "I will be avenged on my enemies." Not the LORD's enemies. Mine. Saul was making it about himself. And his oath was foolish. A hungry army cannot fight well. Fasting can be a good way to seek God (7:6), but this was not a fast for seeking God. It was a command from a king who wanted every minute for revenge, and his men paid for it.

The army came into a forest where there was honey everywhere, "a flow of honey," but no one ate, "for the people feared the oath." Food was right there, and they could not touch it.

14:27-30 *And Jonathan had not heard when his father made the people swear, and he stretched out the end of the staff which **was** in his hand and dipped it in the honeycomb, and he brought his hand back to his mouth, and his eyes brightened. And a man from the people answered and said, "Your father surely made the people swear, saying, 'Cursed **is** the man who eats food today.'" And the people were weary. And Jonathan said, "My father has troubled the land. See, please, that my eyes have brightened, because I tasted a little of this honey. How much more if the people had surely eaten today from the plunder of their enemies which they found! For now the slaughter among the Philistines has not been great."*

"Jonathan had not heard when his father made the people swear." He dipped the end of his staff in the honeycomb, ate, "and his eyes brightened." His strength came back.

Someone told him about the oath. Jonathan's answer was blunt: "My father has troubled the land." The word troubled is the same word used of Achan, who brought trouble on Israel (Joshua 7:25). Jonathan said that if the people had eaten from the plunder, "the slaughter among the Philistines" would have been far greater. He was right. Saul's oath meant to bring victory, but it weakened the army and cut the victory short.

Was Jonathan wrong to speak about his father that way? He spoke the truth, though bluntly. Sometimes a son, or anyone under authority, sees clearly that a leader's decision is foolish. Saying so honestly is not rebellion.

14:31-35 *And they struck the Philistines on that day from Michmash to Aijalon; and the people were exceedingly weary. And the people rushed on the plunder, and they took sheep and oxen and calves, and they slaughtered **them** on the ground; and the people ate **them** with the blood. And they told Saul, saying, "Look, the people **are** sinning against the LORD by eating with the blood." And he said, "You have acted treacherously; roll a great stone to me today." And Saul said, "Disperse among the people, and say to them, 'Bring near to me each man his ox and each man his sheep, and slaughter **them** here and eat; and do not sin against the LORD by eating with the blood.'" And all the people brought near each man his ox in his hand that night, and they slaughtered **them** there. And Saul built an altar to the LORD; it he began to build **as** an altar to the LORD.*

The army chased the Philistines "from Michmash to Aijalon," a distance of about twenty miles, "and the people were exceedingly weary." By evening they were starving. They "rushed on the plunder," killed sheep and cattle on the ground, "and the people ate them with the blood."

God's law forbade eating meat with the blood in it. "The life of the flesh is in the blood," God said, and He had given the blood "on the altar to make atonement for your souls" (Leviticus 17:11). Blood was sacred because it stood for life, and it pointed ahead to the blood of Christ (Hebrews 9:22). Saul's foolish oath pushed the people into a real sin. One bad command led to another sin.

Saul tried to fix it. He had a great stone rolled to him so the animals could be slaughtered properly and the blood drained. "Do not sin against the LORD by eating with the blood." And "Saul built an

altar to the LORD; it he began to build as an altar to the LORD." This is the first altar we hear of Saul building. Perhaps the writer is quietly noting that it took a crisis for Saul to build one.

14:36-37 *And Saul said, "Let us go down after the Philistines **by** night and plunder among them until the light of the morning, and let us not leave a man among them." And they said, "Do all that **is** good in your eyes." And the priest said, "Let us draw near here to God." And Saul inquired of God, "Shall I go down after the Philistines? Will You give them into the hand of Israel?" And He did not answer him on that day.*

Saul wanted to keep fighting through the night: "let us not leave a man among them." The people said, "Do all that is good in your eyes." But the priest said, "Let us draw near here to God." This time Saul did ask. "Shall I go down after the Philistines? Will You give them into the hand of Israel?"

"And He did not answer him on that day." Silence. Saul had told the priest to stop asking before (14:19). Now that he wanted an answer, God gave none. This is a theme in Saul's life. At the end, he will ask and get no answer at all (28:6).

14:38-42 *And Saul said, "Draw near here, all the chiefs of the people, and know and see in what this sin has happened today. For **as** the LORD lives, who saves Israel, even if it is in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die." And there was no one answering him from all the people. And he said to all Israel, "You, you will be on one side, and I and Jonathan my son will be on one side." And the people said to Saul, "Do what **is** good in your eyes." And Saul said to the LORD, the God of Israel, "Give perfect **lot**." And Jonathan and Saul were taken, and the people went out. And Saul said, "Cast **the lot** between me and Jonathan my son." And Jonathan was taken.*

Saul decided someone's sin was blocking God's answer. "For as the LORD lives, who saves Israel, even if it is in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die." It was another rash oath. Saul did not know what the sin was, but he had already set the punishment. "And there was no one answering him from all the people." They knew Jonathan had eaten. No one would say it.

Saul set the people on one side and himself and Jonathan on the other, and they cast lots. "Give perfect lot," he prayed, asking God to show the truth. Saul and Jonathan were taken. Then between the two of them, "Jonathan was taken."

Was Jonathan guilty? He broke an oath he never heard, an oath that was foolish in the first place. The real sin that day was Saul's rash command, and the people's eating with the blood. The lot pointed at the eating that broke the oath, but God did not say Jonathan must die. That was Saul's word, not God's.

14:43-45 *And Saul said to Jonathan, "Tell me what you have done." And Jonathan told him and said, "I surely tasted with the end of the staff which **was** in my hand a little honey. Here I **am**; I will die." And Saul said, "Thus may God do, and thus may He add; for you shall surely die, Jonathan." And the people said to Saul, "Shall Jonathan die, who has worked this great salvation in Israel? Far be it! **As** the LORD lives, not one hair of his head shall fall to the ground, for with God he has worked this day." And the people ransomed Jonathan, and he did not die.*

"Tell me what you have done." Jonathan told him plainly: "I surely tasted with the end of the staff which was in my hand a little honey. Here I am; I will die." Jonathan did not argue or make excuses. Compare that with how his father answered Samuel in 13:11-12.

"Thus may God do, and thus may He add; for you shall surely die, Jonathan." Saul was ready to kill his own son to keep his word and save face. Pride can make a man cruel even to those he loves.

But the people stopped him. "Shall Jonathan die, who has worked this great salvation in Israel? Far be it!" They swore their own oath: "not one hair of his head shall fall to the ground, for with God he has worked this day." The people saw what Saul could not. God had been with Jonathan. "And the people ransomed Jonathan, and he did not die." To ransom means to buy someone free. We are not told how. It may mean they paid a price or offered a substitute, or simply that they rescued him by their stand.

The king was overruled by his own army. Saul's authority was already slipping.

14:46-48 *And Saul went up from after the Philistines, and the Philistines went to their place. And Saul had taken the kingship over Israel, and he fought all around against all his enemies: against Moab, and against the sons of Ammon, and against Edom, and against the kings of Zobah, and against the Philistines; and wherever he turned he condemned **them**. And he did valiantly, and he struck Amalek, and he delivered Israel from the hand of those who plundered it.*

"Saul went up from after the Philistines." Because of the oath and the night of confusion, the Philistines escaped to their own land. The victory was not as complete as it could have been.

Then the writer summarizes Saul's wars. He "fought all around against all his enemies: against Moab, and against the sons of Ammon, and against Edom, and against the kings of Zobah, and against the Philistines." Saul was a capable war leader. "He did valiantly, and he struck Amalek, and he delivered Israel from the hand of those who plundered it." We should give Saul his due. He did real good for Israel. His problem was not lack of ability. It was lack of obedience.

14:49-52 *And the sons of Saul were Jonathan and Ishvi and Malchi-shua; and the names of his two daughters: the name of the firstborn **was** Merab, and the name of the younger Michal. And the name of the wife of Saul **was** Ahinoam, the daughter of Ahimaaz. And the name of the commander of his army **was** Abner, the son of Ner, the uncle of Saul. And Kish **was** the father of Saul, and Ner the father of Abner **was** the son of Abiel. And the war was severe against the Philistines all the days of Saul; and Saul would see every mighty man and every son of strength, and he would gather him to himself.*

Saul's family is listed. His sons were Jonathan, Ishvi and Malchi-shua. His daughters were Merab and Michal, and both will matter in David's story. His wife was Ahinoam. His army commander was "Abner, the son of Ner, the uncle of Saul," who would play a big part after Saul's death (2 Samuel 2-3).

"And the war was severe against the Philistines all the days of Saul." The Philistines were never fully defeated in Saul's lifetime. "And Saul would see every mighty man and every son of strength, and he would gather him to himself." Samuel had warned that a king would take Israel's sons (8:11). Saul did. One of the men he would soon gather was a young shepherd from Bethlehem.

Chapter 14 Summary

Jonathan and his armor-bearer secretly crossed to the Philistine outpost, trusting that the LORD could save by many or by few. When the Philistines called them to come up, they climbed the cliff and struck down about twenty men, and God sent an earthquake and a great panic. Saul began to ask God through the priest but stopped, joined the battle, and found the Philistines killing each other, and the LORD saved Israel that day. Saul had cursed anyone who ate before evening, so the army grew faint. Jonathan, not knowing, ate honey and was strengthened, and said his father had troubled the land. The starving army ate meat with the blood, and Saul had them slaughter properly and built an altar. When God did not answer Saul about a night attack, he swore that the guilty one would die even if it were Jonathan, and the lot fell on Jonathan. Jonathan confessed, Saul vowed he would die, but the people ransomed him, saying he had worked with God that day. Saul fought enemies on every side, and the war with the Philistines was severe all his days.

People and Places

- Ahijah: a priest from Eli's line who served with Saul.
- Ephod: the high priest's garment, used with the Urim and Thummim to ask God's will.
- Bozez and Seneh: the two rocky cliffs at the pass of Michmash.
- Aijalon: a valley west of Michmash, where the chase ended.
- Abner: Saul's cousin and the commander of his army.
- Merab and Michal: Saul's daughters, who will appear in David's story.

Chapter 14 Study Questions

1. What did Jonathan say about the LORD's power before he crossed over? (14:6)

2. What sign did Jonathan ask for, and how did the Philistines answer? (14:8-12)

3. What did God do after Jonathan and his armor-bearer attacked? (14:13-15)

4. Why did Saul tell the priest to withdraw his hand? What does that show about him? (14:18-19)

5. What oath did Saul put on the army, and what did it lead to? (14:24, 31-32)

6. What did Jonathan say about his father's oath? (14:29-30)

7. How did the people save Jonathan, and what reason did they give? (14:45)

8. Jonathan said the LORD can save "by many or by few." Where do you need to remember that God is not limited by your small resources?

9. Saul's foolish words hurt the people he led. Have you ever made a rash promise or rule that hurt others? What did you learn?

10. Saul asked God only when it suited him, and later got no answer. How can you make seeking God a habit and not just an emergency step?

Chapter 15: Saul Rejected as King

Scripture

15:1-9 And Samuel said to Saul, "The LORD sent me to anoint you as king over His people, over Israel. And now, listen to the voice of the words of the LORD. Thus says the LORD of armies: 'I have paid attention to what Amalek did to Israel, what he set against him on the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go, and you shall strike Amalek, and you shall devote to destruction all that he has, and you shall not spare him; and you shall put to death from man to woman, from child to nursing infant, from ox to sheep, from camel to donkey.'" And Saul summoned the people, and he mustered them at Telaim: two hundred thousand foot soldiers, and ten thousand men of Judah. And Saul came to the city of Amalek, and he lay in wait in the wadi. And Saul said to the Kenites, "Go, depart, go down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them; and you, you did steadfast love with all the sons of Israel when they came up from Egypt." And the Kenites departed from among Amalek. And Saul struck Amalek from Havilah ***as*** you come ***to*** Shur, which ***is*** facing Egypt. And he seized Agag the king of Amalek alive, and all the people he devoted to destruction by the mouth of the sword. And Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep and the cattle and the second ***ones*** and the lambs and all that ***was*** good, and they were not willing to devote them to destruction; and all the property ***that was*** despised and worthless, it they devoted to destruction.

15:10-23 And the word of the LORD came to Samuel, saying, "I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from after Me, and My words he has not carried out." And Samuel burned ***with anger***, and he cried out to the LORD all the night. And Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning; and it was told to Samuel, saying, "Saul came to Carmel, and look, he ***was*** setting up for himself a monument, and he turned around and passed on and went down to Gilgal." And Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, "Blessed ***are*** you by the LORD! I have carried out the word of the LORD." And Samuel said, "And what ***is*** this voice of the sheep in my ears, and the voice of the cattle which I am hearing?" And Saul said, "From the Amalekites they brought them, because the people spared the best of the sheep and the cattle in order to sacrifice to the LORD your God; and the rest we devoted to destruction." And Samuel said to Saul, "Stop, and let me tell you what the LORD spoke to me this night." And he said to him, "Speak." And Samuel said, "Though you ***were*** small in your eyes, ***were*** you not the head of the tribes of Israel? And the LORD anointed you as king over Israel. And the LORD sent you on a journey, and He said, 'Go, and you shall devote to destruction the sinners, Amalek, and you shall fight against him until they have consumed them.' And why did you not listen to the voice of the LORD, and you rushed on the plunder, and you did the evil in the eyes of the LORD?" And Saul said to Samuel, "***But*** I did listen to the voice of the LORD, and I went on the journey on which the LORD sent me, and I brought Agag the king of Amalek, and Amalek I devoted to destruction. And the people took from the plunder sheep and cattle, the choicest of the devoted things, to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal." And Samuel said, "Does the LORD have delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in listening to the voice of the LORD? Look, to listen ***is*** better than sacrifice, to pay attention than the fat of rams. For rebellion ***is*** the sin of divination, and presumption ***is*** wickedness and teraphim. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, so He has rejected you from ***being*** king."

15:24-35 And Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned, for I have transgressed the mouth of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people, and I listened to their voice. And now, please forgive my sin, and return with me, and I will bow down to the LORD." And Samuel said to Saul, "I will not return with you, for you have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel." And Samuel turned around to go, and he took hold of the edge of his robe, and it tore. And Samuel said to him, "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today, and He will give it to your neighbor, who ***is*** better than you. And also the Eminence of Israel will not lie and will not regret, for He ***is*** not a man, that He should regret." And he said, "I have sinned; now please honor me before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, and I will bow down to the LORD your God." And Samuel returned after Saul, and Saul bowed down to the LORD. And Samuel said, "Bring near to me Agag the king of Amalek." And Agag came to him in fetters. And Agag said, "Surely the bitterness of death has departed." And Samuel said, "Just as your sword has made women childless, so your mother shall be childless among women." And Samuel hewed Agag to pieces before the LORD in Gilgal. And Samuel went to Ramah, and Saul went up to his house ***at*** Gibeah of Saul. And Samuel did not again see Saul until the day of his death, for Samuel mourned over Saul; and the LORD regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel.

Chapter 15 Preview

God gives Saul a clear command through Samuel: strike Amalek and devote everything to destruction, people and animals alike, as judgment for what Amalek did to Israel on the way out of Egypt. Saul wins the battle, but he spares King Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle. The LORD tells Samuel, "I regret that I have made Saul king," and Samuel cries out to God all night.

In the morning Samuel finds Saul setting up a monument to himself. Saul greets him cheerfully: "I have carried out the word of the LORD." Samuel asks about the bleating of sheep in his ears. Saul blames the people and says the animals are for sacrifice. Then Samuel speaks one of the great truths of the Bible: "to listen is better than sacrifice." Because Saul rejected the word of the LORD, the LORD has rejected him as king. Saul tears Samuel's robe, and Samuel says God has torn the kingdom from him. Samuel puts Agag to death, and the two men never meet again. This is one of the hardest chapters in the Bible, and one of the most important. I will go through it carefully.

Chapter 15 Study

15:1 *And Samuel said to Saul, "The LORD sent me to anoint you as king over His people, over Israel. And now, listen to the voice of the words of the LORD.*

"The LORD sent me to anoint you as king over His people, over Israel." Samuel reminded Saul where his crown came from. The LORD made him king, so the LORD had the right to command him. "And now, listen to the voice of the words of the LORD." The word listen is the key word of this chapter. In Hebrew it is shama, which means to hear and to obey. Saul had failed to listen once at Gilgal (13:13). Now he was given another chance.

15:2-3 *Thus says the LORD of armies: 'I have paid attention to what Amalek did to Israel, what he set against him on the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go, and you shall strike Amalek, and you shall devote to destruction all that he has, and you shall not spare him; and you shall put to death from man to woman, from child to nursing infant, from ox to sheep, from camel to donkey.'"*

"I have paid attention to what Amalek did to Israel, what he set against him on the way, when he came up from Egypt." The Amalekites were a nomadic people who lived in the desert south of Israel. They were descendants of Esau (Genesis 36:12). When Israel had just come out of Egypt, Amalek attacked them without cause at Rephidim (Exodus 17:8-16). Moses later tells us how: Amalek "attacked among you in the rear all the stragglers behind you, and you were faint and weary; and he did not fear God" (Deuteronomy 25:18). They went after the weakest, the old, the sick, the slow, the ones who could not keep up.

God had said then that He would "wipe out the remembrance of Amalek from under the heavens" (Exodus 17:14). Moses said, "war belongs to the LORD with Amalek from generation to generation" (Exodus 17:16), and he told Israel, once they had rest in the land, "you shall wipe out the remembrance of Amalek from under the heavens; you shall not forget" (Deuteronomy 25:19). Amalek did not change in the centuries between. They attacked Israel with the Midianites in Gideon's day (Judges 6:3) and joined other enemies against them (Judges 3:13). They raided Israel's towns in David's day too (chapter 30).

Now the command came: "you shall strike Amalek, and you shall devote to destruction all that he has, and you shall not spare him; and you shall put to death from man to woman, from child to nursing infant, from ox to sheep, from camel to donkey."

This is one of the hardest verses in all of Scripture. If it troubles you, it should. Children and babies are named. I will not soften what it says, and I will not try to explain it away. But I want us to read it in the light of the whole Bible, because that is the only way to read it rightly.

To devote to destruction is the Hebrew word herem. It means something set apart wholly to the LORD and given over to Him, so that no one may keep it or profit from it (Leviticus 27:28-29). It was used for God's judgment on the cities of Canaan (Deuteronomy 7:2; Joshua 6:17). It was not a war for land or for plunder. Nothing was to be kept. It was a judicial act, a sentence carried out by God's command.

First, this was God's judgment, not Saul's idea or Israel's revenge. The LORD is "the Judge of all the earth" (Genesis 18:25). He alone gives life, and He alone has the right to take it. Amalek had about four hundred years of warning, and through all of it they kept up the same cruelty. God waited far longer than any of us would have.

Second, God took no pleasure in it. He says He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but in the wicked turning from his way and living (Ezekiel 33:11). Notice that in verse 6 Saul warns the Kenites to leave before the battle, because they had shown kindness to Israel. God's judgment was never blind. Those who had sided with God's people were spared, the same way Rahab was spared at Jericho (Joshua 6:25).

Third, this was a one-time command, given directly by God through His prophet, for that people at that time. It was never a pattern for anyone after that, and it is not a pattern for us. No nation, no church and no person today can point to this chapter to justify harming anyone. God has given no such command to anyone since, and the New Testament gives none to the church. When Peter drew his sword, Jesus told him to put it away (Matthew 26:52). Our battle "is not against blood and flesh" (Ephesians 6:12), and we are told to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44). Anyone who uses this chapter to excuse violence against any people, including the Jewish people or any other, is twisting God's Word.

And last, what about the children? I do not know all of God's reasons, and Scripture does not give them. I do know that God is perfectly just and perfectly good, that He sees what we cannot see, and that He will do right. I believe we can trust the little ones of Amalek to the same God who gave His own Son for sinners. David said of his own baby son who died, "I am going to him" (2 Samuel 12:23).

This chapter also points us to the final judgment. One day Christ will return as Judge (Acts 17:30-31; Revelation 19:11). Every one of us deserves God's judgment. The only reason anyone will stand on that day is that Jesus took the judgment on Himself at the cross. The question this chapter puts to us is not only, how could God judge Amalek? It is also, how will I stand before a holy God? The answer is Jesus.

15:4-6 *And Saul summoned the people, and he mustered them at Telaim: two hundred thousand foot soldiers, and ten thousand men of Judah. And Saul came to the city of Amalek, and he lay in wait in the wadi. And Saul said to the Kenites, "Go, depart, go down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them; and you, you did steadfast love with all the sons of Israel when they came up from Egypt." And the Kenites departed from among Amalek.*

Saul gathered the army at Telaim: "two hundred thousand foot soldiers, and ten thousand men of Judah." These numbers are taken as written (see the note at 11:8).

Saul came to "the city of Amalek." The Amalekites were mostly nomads, so this may have been their main camp or settlement.

Before the attack, Saul warned the Kenites: "Go, depart, go down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them." The Kenites were the family of Moses' father-in-law (Judges 1:16). "You, you did steadfast love with all the sons of Israel when they came up from Egypt." Steadfast love is the Hebrew hesed, loyal, faithful kindness. Long ago the Kenites had been kind to Israel, and God remembered it. "And the Kenites departed from among Amalek." God's judgment was precise. He made a way out for those who had been on His people's side.

15:7-9 *And Saul struck Amalek from Havilah **as** you come **to** Shur, which **is** facing Egypt. And he seized Agag the king of Amalek alive, and all the people he devoted to destruction by the mouth of the sword. And Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep and the cattle and the second **ones** and the lambs and all that **was** good, and they were not willing to devote them to destruction; and all the property **that was** despised and worthless, it they devoted to destruction.*

"Saul struck Amalek from Havilah as you come to Shur, which is facing Egypt." This was a wide area across the southern desert. Saul won a large victory.

But here is the problem: "he seized Agag the king of Amalek alive." Then "Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep and the cattle and the second ones and the lambs and all that was good, and they were not willing to devote them to destruction." They kept the best and destroyed only "all the property that was despised and worthless."

In other words, Saul obeyed where obeying was easy and cost nothing, and he disobeyed where obeying cost him something. He kept a king as a trophy, the kind of thing ancient kings liked to parade, and kept the best animals as plunder. God had said the war was to be a judgment, not a raid. Saul turned it into a raid.

This is partial obedience. And partial obedience is disobedience. God does not grade on a curve. Saul did most of what God said, and he probably felt good about it. But he chose which parts of God's word to keep.

15:10-11 *And the word of the LORD came to Samuel, saying, "I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from after Me, and My words he has not carried out." And Samuel burned **with anger**, and he cried out to the LORD all the night.*

"The word of the LORD came to Samuel." God spoke to Samuel before Saul ever got home. "I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from after Me, and My words he has not carried out."

How can God regret? Later in this same chapter Samuel says God "will not lie and will not regret, for He is not a man, that He should regret" (15:29). Is the Bible contradicting itself? No. When Scripture says God regretted, it is describing His real sorrow and His change in how He deals with Saul, in words we can understand. God's feelings are real. He grieves over sin (Genesis 6:6; Ephesians 4:30). But God never changes His mind the way people do, as if He was surprised or made a mistake. He knew what Saul would do. Saul changed, so God's dealings with Saul changed. God's character and plan did not change at all.

"And Samuel burned with anger, and he cried out to the LORD all the night." Samuel was angry, perhaps at Saul, perhaps at the whole situation, perhaps even at the word God gave him. But he took it to God. He spent the whole night in prayer. Samuel loved Saul, and this hurt.

15:12-15 *And Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning; and it was told to Samuel, saying, "Saul came to Carmel, and look, he **was** setting up for himself a monument, and he turned around and passed on and went down to Gilgal." And Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, "Blessed **are** you by the LORD! I have carried out the word of the LORD." And Samuel said, "And what **is** this voice of the sheep in my ears, and the voice of the cattle which I am hearing?" And Saul said, "From the Amalekites they brought them, because the people spared the best of the sheep and the cattle in order to sacrifice to the LORD your God; and the rest we devoted to destruction."*

Samuel rose early to meet Saul and was told, "Saul came to Carmel, and look, he was setting up for himself a monument." This was a different Carmel, a town in the south of Judah, not Mount Carmel in the north. Saul was building a monument to his victory, to himself. The man who was once small in his own eyes (9:21) was now putting up a monument in his own honor.

When Samuel finally reached him at Gilgal, Saul greeted him warmly: "Blessed are you by the LORD! I have carried out the word of the LORD." Did he believe it? Maybe. People can fool themselves. Or maybe he was hoping Samuel would not ask questions.

"And what is this voice of the sheep in my ears, and the voice of the cattle which I am hearing?" I can almost hear the sheep bleating in the background. Sin has a way of making noise. You can claim you obeyed, but the evidence is right there.

Saul's answer had two parts, both excuses. First, he blamed others: "From the Amalekites they brought them, because the people spared the best." Notice the they. When Saul won, it was I. When something went wrong, it was they. Second, he gave a religious reason: "in order to sacrifice to the LORD your God." And notice "your God." Not my God, not our God. Your God. Then, "the rest we devoted to destruction." Now it was we again, for the good part.

15:16-19 *And Samuel said to Saul, "Stop, and let me tell you what the LORD spoke to me this night." And he said to him, "Speak." And Samuel said, "Though you **were** small in your eyes, **were** you not the head of the tribes of Israel? And the LORD anointed you as king over Israel. And the LORD sent you on a journey, and He said, 'Go, and you shall devote to destruction the sinners, Amalek, and you shall fight against him until they have consumed them.' And why did you not listen to the voice of the LORD, and you rushed on the plunder, and you did the evil in the eyes of the LORD?"*

"Stop, and let me tell you what the LORD spoke to me this night." Samuel cut him off. Saul said, "Speak." But he was not ready to listen.

"Though you were small in your eyes, were you not the head of the tribes of Israel?" Samuel reminded Saul of the humble man he once was. You were small in your own eyes, and God lifted you up. You are the head, you are responsible. You cannot hide behind the people.

"The LORD sent you on a journey," and He told you to "devote to destruction the sinners, Amalek." Notice that Samuel calls them "the sinners." This was judgment on a guilty people, not a war of conquest.

"And why did you not listen to the voice of the LORD, and you rushed on the plunder, and you did the evil in the eyes of the LORD?" The word rushed is the same word used of the hungry army

rushing on the plunder in 14:32. Saul's men had done the same thing again, and Saul led them in it.

15:20-21 *And Saul said to Samuel, "**But** I did listen to the voice of the LORD, and I went on the journey on which the LORD sent me, and I brought Agag the king of Amalek, and Amalek I devoted to destruction. And the people took from the plunder sheep and cattle, the choicest of the devoted things, to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal."*

Saul still did not admit it. "But I did listen to the voice of the LORD." He went on the mission, he brought back Agag, he destroyed Amalek. In Saul's mind, that was obedience. He did not see that bringing Agag back was the very problem.

"And the people took from the plunder sheep and cattle, the choicest of the devoted things, to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal." Again the people took. Again "your God." Again the religious excuse. But think about what he was saying. The devoted things already belonged to God. They were set apart for destruction. You cannot give God, as a gift, what already belongs to Him and what He has told you to destroy. Saul wanted to offer God His own things in a way God had not asked for.

15:22 *And Samuel said, "Does the LORD have delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in listening to the voice of the LORD? Look, to listen **is** better than sacrifice, to pay attention than the fat of rams.*

"Does the LORD have delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in listening to the voice of the LORD? Look, to listen is better than sacrifice, to pay attention than the fat of rams."

This is the key verse of the chapter, and one of the key verses of the whole Bible. Let me take it slowly.

First, look at what Samuel did not say. He did not say sacrifices were bad. God Himself had commanded the sacrifices in the law. They were how sinful people came near Him, and they pointed ahead to the sacrifice of Christ. Samuel offered sacrifices all his life. The question is not sacrifice or obedience. The question is, which does God delight in more? And the answer is plain: "to listen is better than sacrifice."

Second, look at what listen means. The Hebrew word is shama. It means to hear in a way that leads to doing. In Hebrew thinking, if you heard and did not do, you did not really hear. "To pay attention" says the same thing. To pay attention to God is to heed Him, to take Him seriously enough to act. This is Hebrew parallelism again. "To listen is better than sacrifice" and "to pay attention than the fat of rams" say the same thing two ways. The fat was the best part of the offering, burned on the altar as God's portion (Leviticus 3:16). Samuel says even the best part of the best offering is worth less to God than a heart that hears and obeys.

Third, why is this so? Because a sacrifice without obedience is an attempt to buy God off. It says, I will give You something religious, as long as You let me run my own life. Saul wanted to keep his plunder and look holy at the same time. God is not fooled. He does not want our things in place of ourselves. He wants us.

The prophets came back to this truth again and again. Hosea said, "For steadfast love I desire, and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings" (Hosea 6:6). Micah asked what the LORD requires, and answered, "to do justice, and to love steadfast love, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). Proverbs says, "To do righteousness and justice is chosen by the LORD more than sacrifice" (Proverbs 21:3). David, after his own great sin, said, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and crushed heart, God, You will not despise" (Psalm 51:17).

Jesus quoted Hosea's version of this truth twice. When the Pharisees complained that He ate with sinners, He said, "learn what it is," and quoted, "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice" (Matthew 9:13; also 12:7). The religious leaders of His day had the same problem as Saul. They kept the outward rituals and tithed their spices, and left aside "the weightier matters of the law: the justice and the mercy and the faith" (Matthew 23:23).

Fourth, what does this mean for us? We do not offer animal sacrifices. Christ's one sacrifice has done what they never could (Hebrews 10:4, 10). But we can still make Saul's mistake. We can go to church, give money, sing songs, serve on committees, read our Bibles, and still refuse to obey God in the one area He keeps putting His finger on. We can offer God the things that cost us little, and hold back the thing He actually asked for. Religious activity can become a way of hiding from God instead of coming to Him.

And let me be clear about one more thing. This verse does not teach that we are saved by obeying. No one is saved by obedience, in Saul's day or ours. We are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). But true faith listens. It hears God's word and does it. Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). Obedience is not how we earn God's love. It is how we show that we have received it.

So what is God asking of you that you have been trying to replace with something else? What sheep are bleating in the background of your life?

15:23 *For rebellion **is** the sin of divination, and presumption **is** wickedness and teraphim. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, so He has rejected you from **being** king."*

"For rebellion is the sin of divination, and presumption is wickedness and teraphim." The Hebrew is compact and the SLB gives it word for word. Divination was trying to learn the future through occult means, which God's law forbade (Deuteronomy 18:10-12). Teraphim were household idols (Genesis 31:19). Most read the verse as saying that rebellion is as bad as divination, and stubborn presumption as bad as idol worship. Saul would never have bowed to an idol or consulted a fortune-teller, or so he thought. But Samuel said that setting your own will above God's word is the same kind of sin. Rebellion puts something else in God's place, and so does idolatry. Stubbornness is idolatry of self. Sadly, at the end of his life, Saul really will go to a medium (chapter 28).

"Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, so He has rejected you from being king." Saul rejected God's word. God rejected Saul as king. The punishment matched the sin. In chapter 13, Samuel said Saul's family would not keep the throne. Now Saul himself was rejected as God's king, though he would keep the throne in name for years to come.

15:24-26 *And Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned, for I have transgressed the mouth of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people, and I listened to their voice. And now, please forgive my sin, and return with me, and I will bow down to the LORD." And Samuel said to Saul, "I will not return with you, for you have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel."*

"I have sinned, for I have transgressed the mouth of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people, and I listened to their voice." At last Saul said, I have sinned. But even here he made an excuse: I feared the people. And there is the root of it. Saul listened to the people's voice instead of the LORD's voice. He cared more about what his soldiers thought than what God thought. The fear of man is a trap (Proverbs 29:25).

"And now, please forgive my sin, and return with me, and I will bow down to the LORD." Saul wanted Samuel to come with him, so the people would see that everything was fine.

"I will not return with you, for you have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel." Samuel would not pretend.

Was Saul's confession real? Compare it with David's after his sin with Bathsheba. David said, "I have sinned against the LORD," and Nathan said, "The LORD also has taken away your sin" (2 Samuel 12:13). David's confession was about God. Saul's was about his position. His next words show it.

15:27-29 *And Samuel turned around to go, and he took hold of the edge of his robe, and it tore. And Samuel said to him, "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today, and He will give it to your neighbor, who **is** better than you. And also the Eminence of Israel will not lie and will not regret, for He **is** not a man, that He should regret."*

"Samuel turned around to go, and he took hold of the edge of his robe, and it tore." Saul grabbed Samuel's robe as he left, and it ripped.

Samuel turned that moment into a picture of God's word. "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today, and He will give it to your neighbor, who is better than you." The neighbor was David, though Samuel did not yet know his name. Years later, David would cut off the edge of Saul's robe in a cave (24:4-5), and Saul would say, "I know that you will certainly reign" (24:20). The torn robe became a sign that followed Saul all his life.

"And also the Eminence of Israel will not lie and will not regret, for He is not a man, that He should regret." The Eminence of Israel is a name for God, the Glory or Strength of Israel. This decision was final. Saul could not talk God out of it. As Balaam once said, "God is not a man, that He should lie" (Numbers 23:19).

15:30-31 *And he said, "I have sinned; now please honor me before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, and I will bow down to the LORD your God." And Samuel returned after Saul, and Saul bowed down to the LORD.*

"I have sinned; now please honor me before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, and I will bow down to the LORD your God." Here we see Saul's heart. He said, I have sinned, and in the same breath, honor me. His real concern was how this looked. And again, "the LORD your God."

"And Samuel returned after Saul, and Saul bowed down to the LORD." Why did Samuel go back? Perhaps to keep order in the nation, since Saul was still king, and a public split might have thrown Israel into chaos. Perhaps also because there was one more thing that had to be done.

15:32-33 *And Samuel said, "Bring near to me Agag the king of Amalek." And Agag came to him in fetters. And Agag said, "Surely the bitterness of death has departed." And Samuel said, "Just as your sword has made women childless, so your mother shall be childless among women." And Samuel hewed Agag to pieces before the LORD in Gilgal.*

"Bring near to me Agag the king of Amalek." Agag came "in fetters," in chains. The SLB has him say, "Surely the bitterness of death has departed." He seems to have thought the danger was past. Saul had spared him, and he expected to live.

"Just as your sword has made women childless, so your mother shall be childless among women." Samuel's words tell us who Agag was. He was not an innocent captive. He was a king who had killed many, leaving mothers without their sons. The sentence matched his crimes.

"And Samuel hewed Agag to pieces before the LORD in Gilgal." This is hard to read, and I will not dwell on the details. Samuel, an old prophet, carried out the sentence that the king had refused to carry out. He did it "before the LORD," which means it was an act of judgment in God's presence, not personal revenge. Samuel was not acting out of temper. He was doing what God had commanded and Saul had left undone.

What do we do with this? First, we see again that God's judgment, though slow, is sure. Agag had lived by the sword, and he died by it (Matthew 26:52). Second, we see the cost of Saul's disobedience. Because the king would not obey, the old prophet had to do it himself. Third, it was a sentence carried out by God's prophet, by God's direct command, in a unique moment in Israel's history. It gives no one today the right to take vengeance. "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord (Romans 12:19). Our part is to leave judgment to Him and to the rightful authorities He has set in place (Romans 13:1-4).

There is a sad footnote. Saul did not finish the job, and some Amalekites lived on. In chapter 30 they will raid David's town and carry off his family. In 2 Samuel 1 an Amalekite will claim to have killed Saul. And centuries later, in the book of Esther, a man named "Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite" (Esther 3:1) will try to wipe out the whole Jewish people. Many believe Haman was a descendant of Agag. Partial obedience has long consequences.

15:34-35 *And Samuel went to Ramah, and Saul went up to his house **at** Gibeah of Saul. And Samuel did not again see Saul until the day of his death, for Samuel mourned over Saul; and the LORD regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel.*

"Samuel went to Ramah, and Saul went up to his house at Gibeah of Saul." Gibeah of Saul was Saul's hometown. The two men went their separate ways.

"And Samuel did not again see Saul until the day of his death." The Hebrew means Samuel never went to see Saul again as long as Samuel lived. (Saul will come to where Samuel is in 19:24, but Samuel never again came to Saul as God's messenger.) "For Samuel mourned over Saul." Samuel did not gloat. He grieved. He had anointed this man, prayed for him, and loved him. Watching someone you love throw away God's best is one of the most painful things in life.

"And the LORD regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel." The chapter ends where it began, with God's sorrow. God was not surprised. But He was grieved. Sin always grieves the heart of God.

The next chapter will begin with God telling Samuel to stop mourning, fill his horn with oil, and go to Bethlehem. God had already chosen a man after His own heart. Saul's failure did not stop God's plan. It never does.

Chapter 15 Summary

Samuel told Saul that the LORD of armies had remembered what Amalek did to Israel on the way out of Egypt and commanded him to devote Amalek to destruction, sparing nothing. Saul gathered his army, warned the Kenites to leave because they had shown kindness to Israel, and struck Amalek, but he spared King Agag and the best of the animals and destroyed only what was worthless. The LORD told Samuel He regretted making Saul king, and Samuel cried out all night. Samuel found Saul, who claimed he had carried out the LORD's word, but the sheep and cattle could be heard. Saul blamed the people and said the animals were for sacrifice. Samuel answered that to listen is better than sacrifice and to pay attention better than the fat of rams, that rebellion is like divination and presumption like idolatry, and that because Saul rejected the word of the LORD, the LORD rejected him as king. Saul confessed that he feared the people, and when he grabbed Samuel's robe and tore it, Samuel said the LORD had torn the kingdom from him and given it to a better neighbor, and that the Eminence of Israel does not lie or change His mind. Saul asked Samuel to honor him before the elders, and Samuel went with him. Samuel then put Agag to death before the LORD at Gilgal. Samuel went home to Ramah, never again came to see Saul, and mourned for him, and the LORD regretted that He had made Saul king.

People and Places

- Amalek (Amalekites): a desert people descended from Esau who attacked Israel's stragglers after the exodus (Exodus 17:8-16; Deuteronomy 25:17-19).
- Agag: the king of Amalek, spared by Saul and put to death by Samuel.

- Kenites: the family of Moses' father-in-law, spared because they had shown kindness to Israel.
- Herem (devoted to destruction): something set apart wholly to the LORD, so that no one may keep it, usually by destruction (Leviticus 27:28-29).
- Carmel: a town in the hill country of southern Judah, not Mount Carmel.
- Teraphim: household idols.
- Eminence of Israel: a name for God, the Glory or Strength of Israel.

Chapter 15 Study Questions

1. What did the LORD command Saul to do, and why? (15:2-3; Deuteronomy 25:17-19)

2. Why did Saul warn the Kenites before the battle, and what does that show about God's judgment? (15:6)

3. What did Saul and the people spare, and what did they destroy? (15:9)

4. What excuses did Saul give when Samuel confronted him? (15:13-15, 20-21)

5. What did Samuel say is better than sacrifice? Explain it in your own words. (15:22)

6. What did Samuel compare rebellion and presumption to? (15:23)

7. What did Saul say was the reason he disobeyed, and what did he ask Samuel for even after confessing? (15:24, 30)

8. Why is this command about Amalek not a pattern for anyone today? (Matthew 26:52; Ephesians 6:12; Romans 12:19)

9. Saul obeyed in what was easy and disobeyed in what was costly. Is there an area where you are offering God "sacrifices" instead of obedience?

10. Saul feared the people more than God. Whose opinion are you most tempted to put above God's, and what would it look like to listen to His voice instead?

Chapter 16: David Anointed

Scripture

16:1-13 And the LORD said to Samuel, "How long ***are*** you mourning for Saul, and I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? Fill your horn ***with*** oil and go; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have seen among his sons a king for Myself." And Samuel said, "How can I go? And Saul will hear, and he will kill me." And the LORD said, "A heifer of the cattle you shall take in your hand, and you shall say, 'To sacrifice to the LORD I have come.' And you shall invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I, I will make known to you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for Me the ***one*** whom I say to you." And Samuel did what the LORD spoke, and he came ***to*** Bethlehem. And the elders of the city trembled to meet him, and ***one*** said, "***Is*** your coming ***in*** peace?" And he said, "***In*** peace. To sacrifice to the LORD I have come. Sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice." And he sanctified Jesse and his sons, and he invited them to the sacrifice. And it was, when they came, and he saw Eliab, and he said, "Surely His anointed ***is*** before the LORD." And the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance and at the height of his stature, for I have rejected him; for ***it is*** not what man sees, for man sees according to the eyes, and the LORD sees according to the heart." And Jesse called Abinadab, and he made him pass before Samuel. And he said, "Also this ***one*** the LORD has not chosen." And Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Also this ***one*** the LORD has not chosen." And Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen these." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Are the young men finished?" And he said, "The youngest still remains, and look, he is shepherding the flock." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him, for we will not turn around until he comes here." And he sent and brought him. And he ***was*** ruddy, with beautiful eyes and good appearance. And the LORD said, "Arise, anoint him, for this ***is*** he." And Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. And the Spirit of the LORD rushed on David from that day and onward. And Samuel arose and went to Ramah.

16:14-23 And the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD terrified him. And the servants of Saul said to him, "Look, please, an evil spirit of God is terrifying you. Please let our lord speak ***to*** your servants ***who are*** before you; let them seek a man who knows ***how to*** play on the lyre; and it will be, when an evil spirit of God is on you, that he will play with his hand, and ***it will be*** good for you." And Saul said to his servants, "Please see for me a man who does well at playing, and bring ***him*** to me." And one of the young men answered, and he said, "Look, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who knows ***how to*** play, and a mighty man of valor, and a man of war, and discerning in speech, and a man of ***fine*** form, and the LORD ***is*** with him." And Saul sent messengers to Jesse, and he said, "Send to me David your son, who ***is*** with the flock." And Jesse took a donkey ***with*** bread and a skin of wine and one kid of the goats, and he sent ***them*** by the hand of David his son to Saul. And David came to Saul and stood before him; and he loved him exceedingly, and he became his armor-bearer. And Saul sent to Jesse, saying, "Please let David stand before me, for he has found favor in my eyes." And it was, when the spirit of God was on Saul, and David took the lyre and played with his hand; and Saul was refreshed, and ***it was*** good for him, and the evil spirit departed from him.

Chapter 16 Preview

Samuel is still grieving over Saul when the LORD tells him to stop mourning, fill his horn with oil and go to Bethlehem, to the house of Jesse. God has already chosen a king for Himself among Jesse's sons. One by one the sons pass before Samuel. The oldest, Eliab, looks every bit a king, but the LORD says, "man sees according to the eyes, and the LORD sees according to the heart." The one God has chosen is the youngest, out in the field with the sheep. Samuel anoints David in front of his brothers, and the Spirit of the LORD rushes on him from that day on.

The second half of the chapter turns to Saul. The Spirit of the LORD leaves him, and an evil spirit from the LORD terrifies him. His servants look for a man who can play the lyre to calm him, and the man they find is David. So the young man God has chosen to be the next king is brought into the palace of the king God has rejected. This chapter opens the second half of 1 Samuel, and from here to the end of the book, the story is David's rise and Saul's fall.

Chapter 16 Study

16:1 *And the LORD said to Samuel, "How long **are** you mourning for Saul, and I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? Fill your horn **with** oil and go; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have seen among his sons a king for Myself."*

"How long are you mourning for Saul, and I have rejected him from reigning over Israel?" Samuel's grief was real and right (15:35). But there comes a time to stop looking back at what God has closed and start looking at what God is doing. God did not scold Samuel for caring. He gave him a new job.

"Fill your horn with oil and go." Kings in Israel were anointed with oil poured from a horn or a flask (10:1). Anointing set a person apart for God's service. The Hebrew word for anointed is mashiach, which gives us Messiah (see the Overview).

"I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have seen among his sons a king for Myself." Notice the difference. Saul was the king the people asked for (8:5). This would be "a king for Myself," the king God chose. Jesse was the grandson of Boaz and Ruth (Ruth 4:17, 21-22), from the tribe of Judah. Jacob had said long before that the scepter would not depart from Judah (Genesis 49:10). God's plan was moving right on schedule.

16:2-3 *And Samuel said, "How can I go? And Saul will hear, and he will kill me." And the LORD said, "A heifer of the cattle you shall take in your hand, and you shall say, 'To sacrifice to the LORD I have come.' And you shall invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I, I will make known to you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for Me the **one** whom I say to you."*

"How can I go? And Saul will hear, and he will kill me." Samuel knew Saul well. Anointing another king was treason in Saul's eyes. This tells us how far Saul had fallen since chapter 15. The prophet was afraid of the king.

God answered, "A heifer of the cattle you shall take in your hand." And Samuel was to say, "To sacrifice to the LORD I have come." A heifer is a young cow. Was God telling Samuel to lie? No.

Samuel really did go to offer a sacrifice, and he really did offer it. He simply did not tell everyone the whole of why he came. Telling the truth does not mean we owe every person every detail. Samuel was not to deceive anyone. He was to keep God's private business private until the right time.

"And I, I will make known to you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for Me the one whom I say to you." Samuel did not go knowing the name. He went trusting that God would show him. That is often how God leads us: one step at a time.

16:4-5 *And Samuel did what the LORD spoke, and he came **to** Bethlehem. And the elders of the city trembled to meet him, and **one** said, "**Is** your coming **in** peace?" And he said, "**In** peace. To sacrifice to the LORD I have come. Sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice." And he sanctified Jesse and his sons, and he invited them to the sacrifice.*

"And the elders of the city trembled to meet him." Why would the leaders of Bethlehem be afraid of an old prophet? Samuel was a judge as well as a prophet, and when he came to a town it might mean judgment. They had also heard what happened at Gilgal with Agag (15:33). "Is your coming in peace?"

"In peace. To sacrifice to the LORD I have come. Sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice." To sanctify themselves meant to make themselves ceremonially clean, washing and preparing to come before God (Exodus 19:10). Samuel himself "sanctified Jesse and his sons." This was a family invitation, and it gave Samuel the chance to look at each of Jesse's sons.

16:6-7 *And it was, when they came, and he saw Eliab, and he said, "Surely His anointed **is** before the LORD." And the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance and at the height of his stature, for I have rejected him; for **it is** not what man sees, for man sees according to the eyes, and the LORD sees according to the heart."*

"When they came, and he saw Eliab, and he said, Surely His anointed is before the LORD." Eliab was the oldest son (17:13). He was tall and good-looking, the kind of man people would follow. Samuel thought, this must be the one. Even a great prophet could judge by the outside.

"Do not look at his appearance and at the height of his stature, for I have rejected him." Do you hear the echo? Saul was chosen by the people partly because he was taller than anyone else (9:2; 10:23). Israel had already had a king who looked the part. God was not going to repeat the lesson.

"For it is not what man sees, for man sees according to the eyes, and the LORD sees according to the heart." This is the key verse of the book, and it is worth slowing down.

First, what does it say about us? We see what is on the outside. We cannot help it. We notice height, looks, clothes, voice, confidence and success. We are easily impressed, and we are easily fooled. Even Samuel was. That is not always sin. We are simply limited. But it means we should be slow to judge people, and slow to trust someone just because he looks strong or sounds good.

Second, what does it say about God? "The LORD sees according to the heart." In the Bible the heart is not only the feelings. It is the center of the person: the mind, the will, the desires, what a person

loves and trusts. God sees all of it. Solomon prayed, "You, You alone know the heart of all the sons of mankind" (1 Kings 8:39). Jeremiah wrote that the LORD searches the heart (Jeremiah 17:10). Nothing is hidden from Him (Hebrews 4:13).

Third, what was God looking for? We are told in 13:14 that the LORD sought "a man according to His heart." David was not chosen because he was sinless. He sinned badly. He was chosen because his heart was turned toward God. The Psalms show us that heart: a man who trusted God, loved God's Word, poured out his troubles to God, and ran back to God when he fell (Psalm 23; Psalm 51).

Fourth, this is good news and a warning. It is good news because God does not pass people by for being small, young, plain or overlooked. It is a warning because we cannot hide behind a good outside. A person can sit in church every week, say the right things and look like a fine Christian, while the heart is far from God. Jesus said of the religious leaders of His day, "with the lips honors Me, but their heart is far away from Me" (Matthew 15:8).

Jesus Himself fits this verse. Isaiah said of the coming Servant, "there was no form to Him and no splendor, that we should look at Him" (Isaiah 53:2). The King of kings was born in a stable in this same town of Bethlehem and grew up in Nazareth, and many people looked at Him and saw only a carpenter's son (Matthew 13:55). The world judged by the eyes. God looked at the heart.

So let me ask you: when God looks at your heart today, what does He see? You cannot fix your heart by working on your outside. But you can bring it to Him. David prayed, "Create for me a pure heart, God" (Psalm 51:10), and God answers that prayer.

16:8-10 *And Jesse called Abinadab, and he made him pass before Samuel. And he said, "Also this **one** the LORD has not chosen." And Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Also this **one** the LORD has not chosen." And Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen these."*

"And Jesse called Abinadab, and he made him pass before Samuel." Then Shammah. Each time Samuel said, "Also this one the LORD has not chosen." Notice that Samuel was now listening to God instead of his own eyes. He had learned the lesson of verse 7 quickly.

"And Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, The LORD has not chosen these." Seven sons stood there, a full and perfect number in Hebrew thinking. Jesse may have thought he had brought every son worth bringing. But God's choice was not among them. 1 Chronicles 2:13-15 lists seven sons of Jesse by name, with David as the seventh; one son here may have died young or may not be counted there. Scripture does not tell us.

16:11-12 *And Samuel said to Jesse, "Are the young men finished?" And he said, "The youngest still remains, and look, he is shepherding the flock." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him, for we will not turn around until he comes here." And he sent and brought him. And he **was** ruddy, with beautiful eyes and good appearance. And the LORD said, "Arise, anoint him, for this **is** he."*

"Are the young men finished?" Samuel must have been puzzled. God had said one of Jesse's sons, and none of these was the one.

"The youngest still remains, and look, he is shepherding the flock." The Hebrew word for youngest can also mean the smallest or least. Jesse did not even think to call David in. He was the boy who got the jobs nobody else wanted. Even his own father overlooked him. Have you ever felt overlooked? God sees you.

"Send and bring him, for we will not turn around until he comes here." No one sat down to the meal until David came.

"And he was ruddy, with beautiful eyes and good appearance." Ruddy means reddish, probably his skin or hair, a healthy young man. Scripture does say David was good-looking, so verse 7 does not mean God chose an ugly man. It means looks were not the reason. "And the LORD said, Arise, anoint him, for this is he."

David was a shepherd. That is no accident. God often calls His leaders shepherds. Later the LORD would say that He took David "from the pasture, from after the flock, to be ruler over My people" (2 Samuel 7:8). Psalm 78:70-72 says God chose David from the sheepfolds to shepherd Israel. And Jesus, the Son of David, said, "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11).

16:13 *And Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. And the Spirit of the LORD rushed on David from that day and onward. And Samuel arose and went to Ramah.*

"And Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers." David was anointed in front of his family, but not in front of the nation. It would be years before he took the throne, first over Judah and later over all Israel (2 Samuel 2:4; 5:3). He was God's chosen king long before he wore a crown. In the meantime he would go back to the sheep, serve Saul, run for his life, and learn to trust God in caves.

"And the Spirit of the LORD rushed on David from that day and onward." The same word, rushed, was used when the Spirit came on Samson (Judges 14:6) and on Saul (10:6, 10; 11:6). In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit came on certain people to empower them for the work God gave them, such as judges, prophets, craftsmen and kings. Here, for the first time, we are told that the Spirit stayed: "from that day and onward."

This is the first time David's name appears in the book. The name David may mean beloved. "And Samuel arose and went to Ramah." Samuel's work was done. This is the last time Samuel anoints anyone.

16:14 *And the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD terrified him.*

"And the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul." The order matters. The Spirit came on David in verse 13, and in the very next verse the Spirit left Saul. God's power for leadership passed from the rejected king to the chosen king.

Does this mean a believer today can lose the Holy Spirit? No. In the Old Testament, the Spirit came on certain people for certain tasks and could be withdrawn. That is why David later prayed, "do not take the Spirit of Your holiness from me" (Psalm 51:11). After Pentecost, things are different. Jesus promised that the Spirit would be with His followers "forever" (John 14:16). Every believer is

sealed by the Holy Spirit "for the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30; 1:13-14). A Christian can grieve the Spirit, but the Spirit does not leave him.

"And an evil spirit from the LORD terrified him." This is a hard phrase. How can an evil spirit come from the LORD? Bible teachers give two main answers. Many believe this was a real evil spirit, a demon, which God allowed to trouble Saul as a judgment. Others believe the word spirit here means a troubled state of mind, a deep and dark mood, that God sent or allowed as a result of Saul's rebellion. Both views agree on the main point.

What is the main point? God is in charge of everything, even evil spirits. Nothing can touch Saul unless God allows it, just as Satan could not touch Job without God's permission (Job 1:12). God is never the author of sin. He tempts no one (James 1:13). But He can use even evil to carry out His judgment. When Saul turned away from God, God gave him over to what he chose. We see the same pattern in Judges 9:23, where God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem, and in 1 Kings 22:19-23. Paul describes it too: when people refuse God, "God also gave them up" (Romans 1:24). Once Saul's heart was empty of the Spirit of God, darkness moved in.

That should sober us. To turn away from the LORD is not to become free. It is to be left open to something worse.

16:15-17 *And the servants of Saul said to him, "Look, please, an evil spirit of God is terrifying you. Please let our lord speak **to** your servants **who are** before you; let them seek a man who knows **how to** play on the lyre; and it will be, when an evil spirit of God is on you, that he will play with his hand, and **it will be** good for you." And Saul said to his servants, "Please see for me a man who does well at playing, and bring **him** to me."*

Saul's servants could see something was terribly wrong. "Look, please, an evil spirit of God is terrifying you." They had a plan. "Let them seek a man who knows how to play on the lyre." A lyre was a small stringed instrument, held in the arms and plucked, something like a small harp. Music has a real effect on the soul. The servants believed that when the dark spirit came, the music would make it "good for you."

"Please see for me a man who does well at playing, and bring him to me." Saul agreed. He would try anything. Sadly, Saul looked for music to ease his trouble, but he never looked to God to deal with it. He wanted relief, not repentance.

16:18 *And one of the young men answered, and he said, "Look, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who knows **how to** play, and a mighty man of valor, and a man of war, and discerning in speech, and a man of **fine** form, and the LORD **is** with him."*

"Look, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who knows how to play." One of the young men knew of David. Look at how he described him: a good musician, "a mighty man of valor, and a man of war, and discerning in speech, and a man of fine form, and the LORD is with him."

David was more than a shepherd boy. He had already shown courage (he will tell us about the lion and the bear in 17:34-36). He was wise with words. And the last item on the list is the most

important: "the LORD is with him." People could see it. Can people see that about you? Not that you are perfect, but that the LORD is with you?

16:19-21 *And Saul sent messengers to Jesse, and he said, "Send to me David your son, who **is** with the flock." And Jesse took a donkey **with** bread and a skin of wine and one kid of the goats, and he sent **them** by the hand of David his son to Saul. And David came to Saul and stood before him; and he loved him exceedingly, and he became his armor-bearer.*

"Send to me David your son, who is with the flock." Even the king knew David as the boy with the sheep. Jesse sent David with a gift: a donkey loaded with bread, "a skin of wine" (a goatskin bag used as a container), and a young goat. It was polite to bring a gift to a king (10:27).

"And David came to Saul and stood before him; and he loved him exceedingly, and he became his armor-bearer." To stand before the king meant to serve him. Saul loved David, at least at first. An armor-bearer carried the king's weapons and shield and stayed by his side in battle. It was a position of great trust.

Think about the irony. The king who was rejected brings into his own house the king who has been chosen, and he does not know it. God was training David for the throne by placing him right in the royal court, where he could see how a kingdom was run, and how a king could fail.

16:22-23 *And Saul sent to Jesse, saying, "Please let David stand before me, for he has found favor in my eyes." And it was, when the spirit of God was on Saul, and David took the lyre and played with his hand; and Saul was refreshed, and **it was** good for him, and the evil spirit departed from him.*

"Please let David stand before me, for he has found favor in my eyes." Saul asked Jesse to let David stay on. "And it was, when the spirit of God was on Saul, and David took the lyre and played with his hand; and Saul was refreshed, and it was good for him, and the evil spirit departed from him."

David's music brought relief. Many of David's songs are in the book of Psalms, and believers have found comfort in them for three thousand years. Music that honors God still has power to quiet a troubled heart. But notice that the relief was for a time. The evil spirit departed, and it came back (18:10). Music could soothe Saul, but it could not change him. Only a heart turned back to God could do that.

This verse also sets up the rest of the book. David came into Saul's life as a blessing. Saul will soon come to hate him for it.

Chapter 16 Summary

The LORD told Samuel to stop mourning for Saul and to go to Jesse in Bethlehem, because He had chosen a king for Himself among Jesse's sons. Samuel was afraid of Saul, so God told him to take a heifer and offer a sacrifice. At Bethlehem the elders trembled, but Samuel came in peace and invited Jesse and his sons to the sacrifice. When Samuel saw Eliab, he thought he must be the LORD's anointed, but the LORD said not to look at his appearance or height, because man sees according to the eyes and the LORD sees according to the heart. Seven sons passed by, and the LORD chose none of them. The youngest, David, was out with the sheep. When he came, the LORD

said, "Arise, anoint him," and Samuel anointed him among his brothers, and the Spirit of the LORD rushed on David from that day on. The Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD terrified him. His servants found David, a skilled lyre player, a brave and wise young man with whom the LORD was, and Saul brought him into his service as his armor-bearer. Whenever the evil spirit came on Saul, David played the lyre, and Saul was refreshed and the spirit departed.

People and Places

- Jesse: David's father, the grandson of Boaz and Ruth, from the tribe of Judah.
- Bethlehem: a small town in Judah about six miles south of Jerusalem, David's hometown and later the birthplace of Jesus (Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:6).
- Eliab, Abinadab and Shammah: Jesse's three oldest sons.
- David: Jesse's youngest son, a shepherd, anointed as the next king of Israel.
- Lyre: a small stringed instrument played by hand.
- Armor-bearer: a trusted servant who carried a warrior's weapons and stayed by his side in battle.

Chapter 16 Study Questions

1. Why did the LORD tell Samuel to stop mourning for Saul? (16:1)

2. Why was Samuel afraid to go to Bethlehem, and what did God tell him to do? (16:2-3)

3. Why did Samuel think Eliab was the LORD's choice? (16:6)

4. What did the LORD say about how man sees and how God sees? (16:7)

5. Where was David when Samuel came, and what does that tell us about how his family saw him? (16:11)

6. What happened to David after Samuel anointed him, and what happened to Saul? (16:13-14)

7. How did Saul's servant describe David? (16:18)

8. What effect did David's playing have on Saul, and why did it not last? (16:23; 18:10)

9. Have you ever judged someone by appearance and later found you were wrong? What does 16:7 teach you about how to see people?

10. If the LORD looks at your heart today, what would you want Him to change? Take a moment to pray the words of Psalm 51:10.

Chapter 17: David and Goliath

Scripture

17:1-11 And the Philistines gathered their camps for battle, and they were gathered ***at*** Socoh, which ***belongs*** to Judah, and they encamped between Socoh and Azekah, in Ephes-dammim. And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered, and they encamped in the valley of Elah, and they arranged battle to meet the Philistines. And the Philistines ***were*** standing on the mountain on this ***side***, and Israel ***was*** standing on the mountain on that ***side***, and the valley ***was*** between them. And the champion went out from the camps of the Philistines, his name ***was*** Goliath, from Gath; his height ***was*** approximately 9 feet 9 inches (six cubits and a span). And a helmet of bronze ***was*** on his head, and he ***was*** clothed ***with*** body armor of scales; and the weight of the body armor ***was*** approximately 125 pounds (five thousand shekels) of bronze. And leg armor of bronze ***was*** on his feet, and a javelin of bronze ***was*** between his shoulders. And the shaft of his spear ***was*** like a beam of weavers, and the blade of his spear ***was*** approximately 15 pounds (six hundred shekels) of iron; and the bearer of the shield ***was*** walking before him. And he stood and called out to the battle lines of Israel, and he said to them, "Why do you come out to arrange battle? ***Am*** I not the Philistine, and you servants of Saul? Choose for yourselves a man, and let him come down to me. If he is able to fight with me and strikes me, then we will become servants to you; and if I, I prevail against him and strike him, then you will become servants to us, and you will serve us." And the Philistine said, "I, I defy the battle lines of Israel this day. Give me a man, and let us fight together." And Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, and they were dismayed and were exceedingly afraid.

17:12-30 And David ***was*** the son of this Ephrathite man from Bethlehem ***of*** Judah, and his name ***was*** Jesse, and he had eight sons; and the man in the days of Saul was old, advanced among men. And the three oldest sons of Jesse had gone; they had gone after Saul to the battle. And the names of his three sons who had gone into the battle ***were*** Eliab the firstborn, and his second Abinadab, and the third Shammah. And David, he ***was*** the youngest, and the three oldest had gone after Saul. And David was going and returning from Saul to shepherd the flock of his father ***at*** Bethlehem. And the Philistine drew near, early and late, and he took his stand forty days. And Jesse said to David his son, "Please take for your brothers approximately 3/5 bushel (an ephah) of this roasted grain and these ten ***loaves of*** bread, and bring ***them*** quickly to the camp to your brothers. And these ten slices of cheese you shall bring to the commander of the thousand; and you shall pay attention to your brothers for ***their*** welfare, and their pledge you shall take. And Saul and they and all the men of Israel ***are*** in the valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines." And David rose early in the morning, and he left the flock with a keeper, and he lifted ***it*** up and went, just as Jesse had commanded him. And he came to the encampment, and the army ***was*** going out to the battle line, and they shouted the war cry for the battle. And Israel and the Philistines arranged battle line to meet battle line. And David left the baggage from upon himself in the hand of the keeper of the baggage, and he ran to the battle line, and he came and asked his brothers about ***their*** welfare. And he ***was*** speaking with them, and look, the champion ***was*** coming up, Goliath the Philistine ***was*** his name, from Gath, from the battle lines of the Philistines; and he spoke according to these words, and David heard. And all the men of Israel, when they saw the

man, then they fled from before him, and they were exceedingly afraid. And the men of Israel said, "Have you seen this man who is coming up? For to defy Israel he is coming up. And it will be, the man who strikes him, the king will make him rich ***with*** great riches, and his daughter he will give to him, and the house of his father he will make free in Israel." And David said to the men who were standing with him, saying, "What will be done for the man who strikes this Philistine and removes reproach from upon Israel? For who ***is*** this uncircumcised Philistine, that he has defied the battle lines of the living God?" And the people said to him according to this word, saying, "Thus it will be done for the man who strikes him." And Eliab his oldest brother heard when he spoke to the men, and the anger of Eliab burned against David, and he said, "Why ***is*** this ***that*** you have come down? And with whom have you left that little flock in the wilderness? I, I know your arrogance and the evil of your heart, for to see the battle you have come down." And David said, "What have I done now? Was it not a word?" And he turned from beside him toward another, and he said according to this word; and the people brought him back word according to the former word.

17:31-40 And the words which David spoke were heard, and they told ***them*** before Saul, and he took him. And David said to Saul, "Let the heart of no man fall on account of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." And Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him, for you ***are*** a youth, and he ***is*** a man of war from his youth." And David said to Saul, "Your servant was shepherding for his father in the flock, and the lion would come, and the bear, and carry off a sheep from the herd, and I would go out after it and strike it and deliver ***it*** from its mouth; and it rose up against me, and I took hold of its beard, and I struck it and killed it. Both the lion and the bear your servant has struck; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, for he has defied the battle lines of the living God." And David said, "The LORD who delivered me from the hand of the lion and from the hand of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." And Saul said to David, "Go, and the LORD will be with you." And Saul clothed David ***with*** his garments, and he put a helmet of bronze on his head, and he clothed him ***with*** body armor. And David girded his sword over his garments, and he undertook to walk, for he had not tested ***them***. And David said to Saul, "I am not able to walk in these, for I have not tested ***them***." And David removed them from upon himself. And he took his staff in his hand, and he chose for himself five smooth stones from the wadi, and he put them in the shepherds' bag which ***was*** his, and in the pouch, and his sling ***was*** in his hand; and he drew near to the Philistine.

17:41-58 And the Philistine came, going and drawing near to David, and the man, the bearer of the shield, ***was*** before him. And the Philistine looked and saw David, and he despised him, for he was a youth, and ruddy, with beautiful appearance. And the Philistine said to David, "***Am*** I a dog, that you are coming to me with staffs?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. And the Philistine said to David, "Come to me, and let me give your flesh to the flying things of the heavens and to the living things of the field." And David said to the Philistine, "You are coming to me with sword and with spear and with javelin, and I am coming to you in the name of the LORD of armies, the God of the battle lines of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will hand you over into my hand, and I will strike you and remove your head from upon you, and I will give the corpses of the camp of the Philistines this day to the flying things of the heavens and to the living things of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God for Israel, and that all this

assembly may know that not by sword and by spear does the LORD save; for the battle ***belongs*** to the LORD, and He will give you into our hand." And it was, when the Philistine arose and came and drew near to meet David, that David hurried and ran to the battle line to meet the Philistine. And David sent his hand into the bag, and he took from there a stone and slung ***it***, and he struck the Philistine on his forehead; and the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell on his face to the earth. And David was stronger than the Philistine with the sling and with the stone, and he struck the Philistine and killed him; and ***there was*** no sword in the hand of David. And David ran and stood over the Philistine, and he took his sword and drew it out of its sheath and killed him, and he cut off his head with it. And the Philistines saw that their mighty ***man*** had died, and they fled. And the men of Israel and Judah arose and shouted the war cry, and they pursued the Philistines until you come ***to*** a valley and to the gates of Ekron. And the slain of the Philistines fell on the way of Shaaraim, and to Gath and to Ekron. And the sons of Israel returned from hotly pursuing after the Philistines, and they plundered their camps. And David took the head of the Philistine and brought it ***to*** Jerusalem, and his weapons he put in his tent. And when Saul saw David going out to meet the Philistine, he said to Abner the commander of the army, "Whose son ***is*** this youth, Abner?" And Abner said, "***As*** your soul lives, O king, I do not know." And the king said, "You, ask whose son this young man ***is***." And when David returned from striking the Philistine, and Abner took him and brought him before Saul, and the head of the Philistine ***was*** in his hand. And Saul said to him, "Whose son ***are*** you, youth?" And David said, "The son of your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite."

Chapter 17 Preview

This is one of the best-known stories in the world. People who have never opened a Bible still talk about a David and Goliath fight. The Philistines and Israel face each other across the valley of Elah. Every morning and evening for forty days, a giant named Goliath from Gath steps out and dares Israel to send one man to fight him. Saul, the tall king, and his whole army are terrified. Then a young shepherd named David arrives with food for his brothers, hears the giant defy "the battle lines of the living God," and asks why no one is answering.

David refuses Saul's armor and goes out with his staff, his sling and five smooth stones. He tells Goliath that he comes "in the name of the LORD of armies," so that all the earth may know there is a God for Israel. One stone brings the giant down, and Israel wins the day. The story is not mainly about a brave boy beating the odds. It is about a God who saves "not by sword and by spear," and a young man who believed it.

Chapter 17 Study

17:1-3 *And the Philistines gathered their camps for battle, and they were gathered **at** Socoh, which **belongs** to Judah, and they encamped between Socoh and Azekah, in Ephes-dammim. And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered, and they encamped in the valley of Elah, and they arranged battle to meet the Philistines. And the Philistines **were** standing on the mountain on this **side**, and Israel **was** standing on the mountain on that **side**, and the valley **was** between them.*

"And the Philistines gathered their camps for battle." The Philistines were Israel's great enemy in this period, a sea people who lived on the coastal plain to the west in five main cities. They had iron weapons and trained soldiers (13:19-22).

They camped "between Socoh and Azekah, in Ephes-dammim." These places are in the low hills of Judah, west of Bethlehem. The Philistines were pushing inland, up the valleys toward the heart of Judah. "And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered, and they encamped in the valley of Elah." The valley of Elah is a broad valley about fifteen miles west of Bethlehem. Visitors can still see it today, with a dry streambed running through the middle.

"The Philistines were standing on the mountain on this side, and Israel was standing on the mountain on that side, and the valley was between them." Two armies on two hills. Whoever went down into the valley first would have to fight uphill. So they waited.

17:4-7 *And the champion went out from the camps of the Philistines, his name **was** Goliath, from Gath; his height **was** approximately 9 feet 9 inches (six cubits and a span). And a helmet of bronze **was** on his head, and he **was** clothed **with** body armor of scales; and the weight of the body armor **was** approximately 125 pounds (five thousand shekels) of bronze. And leg armor of bronze **was** on his feet, and a javelin of bronze **was** between his shoulders. And the shaft of his spear **was** like a beam of weavers, and the blade of his spear **was** approximately 15 pounds (six hundred shekels) of iron; and the bearer of the shield **was** walking before him.*

"And the champion went out from the camps of the Philistines, his name was Goliath, from Gath." The word champion means the man between, the one who stands out between two armies to fight alone. In the ancient world, battles were sometimes settled by single combat. Each side sent out its best man, and the winner decided the battle. Gath was one of the five Philistine cities, and it was known for very large men, the descendants of the Anakim (Joshua 11:22). The Anakim were the giants who had frightened Israel's spies in Moses' day (Numbers 13:28, 33).

The Hebrew text gives his height as "six cubits and a span." A cubit was the length from the elbow to the fingertip, about 18 inches, and a span was about half a cubit, about 9 inches. That makes Goliath about nine feet nine inches tall. Some old copies, including most copies of the ancient Greek translation and one of the Dead Sea Scrolls, read four cubits and a span, about six feet nine inches. Either way, he was a giant of a man, a trained warrior from his youth (17:33), and he towered over everyone in Israel, including Saul.

Then comes his armor: "a helmet of bronze was on his head," a coat of "body armor of scales," made of overlapping bronze plates like the scales of a fish, weighing "five thousand shekels." A

shekel was about two-fifths of an ounce, so the coat weighed about 125 pounds. "Leg armor of bronze" protected his shins, and "a javelin of bronze was between his shoulders," slung on his back. "The shaft of his spear was like a beam of weavers," as thick as the wooden beam on a loom, and the iron point weighed "six hundred shekels," about 15 pounds. A shield-bearer walked in front of him carrying a large shield.

Why does the writer spend so long on the armor? So we will feel what Israel felt. Every piece of this man said, you cannot beat me. And measured by eyes, that was true. Remember 16:7. Man sees according to the eyes. Israel was about to learn again how the LORD sees.

17:8-11 *And he stood and called out to the battle lines of Israel, and he said to them, "Why do you come out to arrange battle?* ***Am*** *I not the Philistine, and you servants of Saul? Choose for yourselves a man, and let him come down to me. If he is able to fight with me and strikes me, then we will become servants to you; and if I, I prevail against him and strike him, then you will become servants to us, and you will serve us." And the Philistine said, "I, I defy the battle lines of Israel this day. Give me a man, and let us fight together." And Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, and they were dismayed and were exceedingly afraid.*

"Why do you come out to arrange battle? Am I not the Philistine, and you servants of Saul?" Goliath mocked them. You call yourselves an army? You are just Saul's slaves. "Choose for yourselves a man, and let him come down to me."

"If he is able to fight with me and strikes me, then we will become servants to you; and if I, I prevail against him and strike him, then you will become servants to us." The whole war would ride on one fight. "I, I defy the battle lines of Israel this day." To defy is to taunt, to heap shame on someone. Goliath was not only insulting soldiers. As David will see, he was insulting the God of Israel.

"And Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, and they were dismayed and were exceedingly afraid." This is the saddest line in the chapter. Saul was the one man in Israel who should have gone out. He was the king. He was "taller than all the people from his shoulder and upward" (10:23). The people had asked for a king to go out before them and fight their battles (8:20). Here was the battle, and the king was hiding in his tent. When the Spirit of the LORD had left Saul (16:14), his courage left with it.

17:12-15 *And David* ***was*** *the son of this Ephrathite man from Bethlehem* ***of*** *Judah, and his name* ***was*** *Jesse, and he had eight sons; and the man in the days of Saul was old, advanced among men. And the three oldest sons of Jesse had gone; they had gone after Saul to the battle. And the names of his three sons who had gone into the battle* ***were*** *Eliab the firstborn, and his second Abinadab, and the third Shammah. And David, he* ***was*** *the youngest, and the three oldest had gone after Saul. And David was going and returning from Saul to shepherd the flock of his father* ***at*** *Bethlehem.*

"And David was the son of this Ephrathite man from Bethlehem of Judah, and his name was Jesse." The story turns to David as if we were meeting him for the first time. Ephrathite means a man of Ephrathah, an old name for Bethlehem (Ruth 4:11; Micah 5:2). Jesse was old by now, and "he had eight sons."

The three oldest, "Eliab the firstborn, and his second Abinadab, and the third Shammah," had gone to war with Saul. These were the same three who passed before Samuel in 16:6-9. "And David, he was the youngest."

"And David was going and returning from Saul to shepherd the flock of his father at Bethlehem." This explains how David could be Saul's musician and armor-bearer (16:21-23) and still be home with the sheep. He went back and forth. When the army went to war, David went home. The anointed king was still doing his chores.

17:16-19 *And the Philistine drew near, early and late, and he took his stand forty days. And Jesse said to David his son, "Please take for your brothers approximately 3/5 bushel (an ephah) of this roasted grain and these ten* ***loaves of*** *bread, and bring* ***them*** *quickly to the camp to your brothers. And these ten slices of cheese you shall bring to the commander of the thousand; and you shall pay attention to your brothers for* ***their*** *welfare, and their pledge you shall take. And Saul and they and all the men of Israel* ***are*** *in the valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines."*

"And the Philistine drew near, early and late, and he took his stand forty days." Morning and evening, for forty days, Goliath came out and shouted. Forty days in Scripture is often a time of testing (Exodus 24:18; Matthew 4:2). For forty days Israel's fear grew.

Jesse sent David with supplies: "an ephah of this roasted grain" (about three-fifths of a bushel), ten loaves of bread for his brothers, and "ten slices of cheese" for their commander. Soldiers in those days often depended on their families for food. "And you shall pay attention to your brothers for their welfare, and their pledge you shall take." The pledge was some token from the brothers to show they were alive and well. Jesse was a worried father.

David did not go to the valley looking for a fight. He went because his father sent him on an errand. Some of the greatest things God does in our lives begin on an ordinary day, while we are simply doing what we were asked to do.

17:20-24 *And David rose early in the morning, and he left the flock with a keeper, and he lifted* ***it*** *up and went, just as Jesse had commanded him. And he came to the encampment, and the army* ***was*** *going out to the battle line, and they shouted the war cry for the battle. And Israel and the Philistines arranged battle line to meet battle line. And David left the baggage from upon himself in the hand of the keeper of the baggage, and he ran to the battle line, and he came and asked his brothers about* ***their*** *welfare. And he* ***was*** *speaking with them, and look, the champion* ***was*** *coming up, Goliath the Philistine* ***was*** *his name, from Gath, from the battle lines of the Philistines; and he spoke according to these words, and David heard. And all the men of Israel, when they saw the man, then they fled from before him, and they were exceedingly afraid.*

"And David rose early in the morning, and he left the flock with a keeper." Notice that David did not leave the sheep without care. He was faithful in the small things before he was trusted with big things (Luke 16:10).

He arrived just as the army was "going out to the battle line, and they shouted the war cry." It was all noise. The armies lined up every day, shouted, and then went back. David left his load with "the keeper of the baggage" and ran to find his brothers.

"And look, the champion was coming up, Goliath the Philistine was his name." While David was talking with them, the giant came out and gave his speech again, "and David heard." Then he saw something else: "all the men of Israel, when they saw the man, then they fled from before him, and they were exceedingly afraid." The whole army of God was running from one man.

17:25-27 *And the men of Israel said, "Have you seen this man who is coming up? For to defy Israel he is coming up. And it will be, the man who strikes him, the king will make him rich **with** great riches, and his daughter he will give to him, and the house of his father he will make free in Israel." And David said to the men who were standing with him, saying, "What will be done for the man who strikes this Philistine and removes reproach from upon Israel? For who **is** this uncircumcised Philistine, that he has defied the battle lines of the living God?" And the people said to him according to this word, saying, "Thus it will be done for the man who strikes him."*

The soldiers were talking about the reward. "The man who strikes him, the king will make him rich with great riches, and his daughter he will give to him, and the house of his father he will make free in Israel." Free probably means free from taxes and from service to the king. Saul offered money, a royal marriage and privileges, but he did not go himself.

David asked about the reward too, but listen to his second question: "For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he has defied the battle lines of the living God?" Circumcision was the sign of God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 17:10-11). To call Goliath uncircumcised was to say he stood outside God's covenant. He had no promise from God and no claim on God's help. Israel did.

And notice the words "the living God." The Philistines worshiped Dagon, an idol that had already fallen on its face before the ark of the LORD (5:3-4). Israel's God was alive. Everyone else in the camp saw a giant. David saw a man insulting the living God. That changed everything. Fear looks at the size of the problem. Faith looks at the size of God.

17:28-30 *And Eliab his oldest brother heard when he spoke to the men, and the anger of Eliab burned against David, and he said, "Why **is** this **that** you have come down? And with whom have you left that little flock in the wilderness? I, I know your arrogance and the evil of your heart, for to see the battle you have come down." And David said, "What have I done now? Was it not a word?" And he turned from beside him toward another, and he said according to this word; and the people brought him back word according to the former word.*

"And the anger of Eliab burned against David." Eliab, the oldest brother, the one Samuel thought would be king (16:6), heard David talking. "With whom have you left that little flock in the wilderness? I, I know your arrogance and the evil of your heart, for to see the battle you have come down."

That was unfair. Eliab accused David of pride and of an evil heart, when David had come because their father sent him and he had left the sheep with a keeper. Why was Eliab so angry? Scripture does not say. He may have been jealous since the day David was anointed in front of him. Maybe he was ashamed that his little brother was asking the question he and every other soldier should have asked. It is a strange thing, but the people who criticize us most when we try to stand for God are sometimes the people closest to us.

"What have I done now? Was it not a word?" David did not fight his brother. He gave a short answer, in effect, I only asked a question, and turned away to someone else. He would not let a family argument pull him away from the real battle. That is wisdom. Not every attack needs an answer.

17:31-33 *And the words which David spoke were heard, and they told **them** before Saul, and he took him. And David said to Saul, "Let the heart of no man fall on account of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." And Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him, for you **are** a youth, and he **is** a man of war from his youth."*

"And the words which David spoke were heard, and they told them before Saul." Word got to the king that someone was talking differently from everyone else. Saul sent for him.

"Let the heart of no man fall on account of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." David spoke courage into a king who had lost his own.

Saul's answer was reasonable, by human measure: "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him, for you are a youth, and he is a man of war from his youth." A youth here means a young man, perhaps in his late teens. Goliath had been a soldier since he was David's age. Saul was looking at the eyes again. On paper, David had no chance.

17:34-37 *And David said to Saul, "Your servant was shepherding for his father in the flock, and the lion would come, and the bear, and carry off a sheep from the herd, and I would go out after it and strike it and deliver **it** from its mouth; and it rose up against me, and I took hold of its beard, and I struck it and killed it. Both the lion and the bear your servant has struck; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, for he has defied the battle lines of the living God." And David said, "The LORD who delivered me from the hand of the lion and from the hand of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." And Saul said to David, "Go, and the LORD will be with you."*

David told Saul his story. "Your servant was shepherding for his father in the flock, and the lion would come, and the bear, and carry off a sheep from the herd." Lions and bears lived in the land of Israel in those days. A shepherd was expected to protect his flock, even at risk to himself (Amos 3:12). "And I would go out after it and strike it and deliver it from its mouth; and it rose up against me, and I took hold of its beard, and I struck it and killed it."

David had not learned courage on the battlefield. He learned it alone in the hills, where no one was watching. The private victories prepared him for the public one. God often trains us in hidden places for the work He will give us later.

"And this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, for he has defied the battle lines of the living God." To David, Goliath was one more wild animal threatening God's flock.

Then comes the heart of David's faith: "The LORD who delivered me from the hand of the lion and from the hand of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." David's courage rested on God's past faithfulness. He did not say, I am strong enough. He said, God did it before, and He will do it again. That is how faith grows. When we remember what God has already done for us, we can trust Him with what is in front of us.

"Go, and the LORD will be with you." Saul said the right words. But he still sent a boy to do a king's job.

17:38-40 *And Saul clothed David **with** his garments, and he put a helmet of bronze on his head, and he clothed him **with** body armor. And David girded his sword over his garments, and he undertook to walk, for he had not tested **them**. And David said to Saul, "I am not able to walk in these, for I have not tested **them**." And David removed them from upon himself. And he took his staff in his hand, and he chose for himself five smooth stones from the wadi, and he put them in the shepherds' bag which **was** his, and in the pouch, and his sling **was** in his hand; and he drew near to the Philistine.*

"Saul clothed David with his garments, and he put a helmet of bronze on his head, and he clothed him with body armor." Saul meant well. He gave David the best he had. But think about it: Saul was the tallest man in Israel, and his armor would not fit a young man. "David girded his sword over his garments, and he undertook to walk, for he had not tested them." David tried to walk around in it and could not.

"I am not able to walk in these, for I have not tested them." David took it all off. This was not foolishness. He knew he could not fight Saul's way. He would fight with what God had already trained him to use.

"And he took his staff in his hand, and he chose for himself five smooth stones from the wadi, and he put them in the shepherds' bag." A wadi is a streambed that is dry most of the year, like the one that still runs through the valley of Elah. The sling was not a toy. It was a strip of leather with a pouch in the middle. A skilled slinger whirled it and released one end, and the stone flew with great speed and force. Armies used slingers, and the men of Benjamin were known for slinging a stone at a hair and not missing (Judges 20:16). A smooth stone, about the size of a hen's egg or a little larger, flew straight and hit hard.

Why five stones? Scripture does not tell us. Some have pointed out that Goliath had relatives who were also giants (2 Samuel 21:22). Others think David was simply ready in case he missed. Either way, it was good sense. Trusting God never means being careless.

17:41-44 *And the Philistine came, going and drawing near to David, and the man, the bearer of the shield,* ***was*** *before him. And the Philistine looked and saw David, and he despised him, for he was a youth, and ruddy, with beautiful appearance. And the Philistine said to David, "****Am*** *I a dog, that you are coming to me with staffs?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. And the Philistine said to David, "Come to me, and let me give your flesh to the flying things of the heavens and to the living things of the field."*

"And the Philistine came, going and drawing near to David." The shield-bearer walked ahead. "And the Philistine looked and saw David, and he despised him, for he was a youth, and ruddy, with beautiful appearance." Goliath judged by the eyes too. He saw a good-looking boy, not a warrior. He was insulted that Israel would send this.

"Am I a dog, that you are coming to me with staffs?" Goliath saw the shepherd's staff and took it as an insult. "And the Philistine cursed David by his gods." He called on his idols to curse David. Now the contest was out in the open. It was not only a man against a man. It was the gods of the Philistines against the LORD.

"Come to me, and let me give your flesh to the flying things of the heavens and to the living things of the field." The flying things are the birds, and the living things are the wild animals. It was a threat to leave David's body unburied, which in that world was a great shame.

17:45-47 *And David said to the Philistine, "You are coming to me with sword and with spear and with javelin, and I am coming to you in the name of the LORD of armies, the God of the battle lines of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will hand you over into my hand, and I will strike you and remove your head from upon you, and I will give the corpses of the camp of the Philistines this day to the flying things of the heavens and to the living things of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God for Israel, and that all this assembly may know that not by sword and by spear does the LORD save; for the battle* ***belongs*** *to the LORD, and He will give you into our hand."*

David's answer is the center of the chapter.

"You are coming to me with sword and with spear and with javelin, and I am coming to you in the name of the LORD of armies, the God of the battle lines of Israel, whom you have defied." To come in someone's name is to come by his authority and to represent him. David was not coming in his own name, but in the name of "the LORD of armies," the God who commands all the armies of heaven and earth. Goliath had the better weapons. David had the better God.

"This day the LORD will hand you over into my hand." David did not say, I hope. He said, the LORD will. He was so sure that he answered Goliath's threat with the same words: it would be the Philistine army that went to the birds and wild animals.

Why would God do this? David gave two reasons. First, "that all the earth may know that there is a God for Israel." God was going to show the nations who He is. Second, "that all this assembly may know that not by sword and by spear does the LORD save." This was a lesson for Israel too. They

had been trusting in weapons and size, and so had their king. God wanted them to know that He saves His people Himself.

"For the battle belongs to the LORD, and He will give you into our hand." Years later, a prophet would tell King Jehoshaphat and Judah the same thing: "the battle is not yours, but God's" (2 Chronicles 20:15). Psalm 20:7 says some trust in chariots and some in horses, but "we, we will make mention of the name of the LORD our God."

What does this mean for us? We usually tell this story as, you can beat your giants. There is some truth in that. God does help His people face things that are far too big for them. But look at what David said the battle was about. It was not about David's reputation. It was about God's name. David fought because the living God was being mocked, and he trusted God to defend His own name. When we face a giant, the question is not only, how can I win? It is, how will God be honored in this?

There is something even deeper here. Israel could not fight for itself. One man went out in their place, as their representative, and his victory became their victory. The New Testament does not draw this line from David and Goliath, so I offer it only as a picture. But it is a picture of the gospel. We could not defeat sin, death and the devil. Jesus, the Son of David, went out alone in our place. Through His death He made powerless the one who held the power of death, that is, the devil, and set free those who lived in fear (Hebrews 2:14-15). His victory becomes ours when we trust Him. "We more than conquer through the One who loved us" (Romans 8:37).

17:48-51 *And it was, when the Philistine arose and came and drew near to meet David, that David hurried and ran to the battle line to meet the Philistine. And David sent his hand into the bag, and he took from there a stone and slung* ***it****, and he struck the Philistine on his forehead; and the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell on his face to the earth. And David was stronger than the Philistine with the sling and with the stone, and he struck the Philistine and killed him; and* ***there was*** *no sword in the hand of David. And David ran and stood over the Philistine, and he took his sword and drew it out of its sheath and killed him, and he cut off his head with it. And the Philistines saw that their mighty* ***man*** *had died, and they fled.*

"When the Philistine arose and came and drew near to meet David, that David hurried and ran to the battle line to meet the Philistine." Israel had been running from Goliath for forty days. David ran toward him.

"And David sent his hand into the bag, and he took from there a stone and slung it, and he struck the Philistine on his forehead; and the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell on his face to the earth." The one place not covered by Goliath's armor was his face, and that is where the stone went. Goliath fell on his face, the same way Dagon, his god, had fallen on its face before the ark (5:3).

"And David was stronger than the Philistine with the sling and with the stone." The writer wants us to see it: "there was no sword in the hand of David." Just as David had said, the LORD does not save by sword and spear.

"And David ran and stood over the Philistine, and he took his sword and drew it out of its sheath and killed him, and he cut off his head with it." Goliath's own sword finished him. The weapon he trusted was turned against him. "And the Philistines saw that their mighty man had died, and they fled." They had made a deal, the loser's army would serve the winner (17:9), but they did not keep it. They ran.

You may notice that 2 Samuel 21:19 says Elhanan the Bethlehemite struck down "Goliath the Gittite," while 1 Chronicles 20:5 says Elhanan struck down "Lahmi the brother of Goliath the Gittite"; many explain the verse in 2 Samuel as a small copying slip in the names, and others think a second giant from Gath bore the same name.

17:52-54 *And the men of Israel and Judah arose and shouted the war cry, and they pursued the Philistines until you come **to** a valley and to the gates of Ekron. And the slain of the Philistines fell on the way of Shaaraim, and to Gath and to Ekron. And the sons of Israel returned from hotly pursuing after the Philistines, and they plundered their camps. And David took the head of the Philistine and brought it **to** Jerusalem, and his weapons he put in his tent.*

"The men of Israel and Judah arose and shouted the war cry, and they pursued the Philistines." The same army that ran from Goliath now chased the Philistines all the way back to Gath and Ekron, two of their own cities. Faith in one young man stirred courage in thousands. That is often how God works. One person's trust in God can wake up a whole church.

"And David took the head of the Philistine and brought it to Jerusalem, and his weapons he put in his tent." Jerusalem was not yet an Israelite city. The Jebusites still held its fortress, and David would capture it years later (2 Samuel 5:6-9). Most explain this verse as the writer telling us, ahead of time, where the head ended up: David brought it to Jerusalem later, once it was his city. Others think it was taken to the part of the area already held by Israel. Goliath's sword was later kept at the tabernacle at Nob, and David will receive it back in 21:9.

17:55-58 *And when Saul saw David going out to meet the Philistine, he said to Abner the commander of the army, "Whose son **is** this youth, Abner?" And Abner said, "**As** your soul lives, O king, I do not know." And the king said, "You, ask whose son this young man **is**." And when David returned from striking the Philistine, and Abner took him and brought him before Saul, and the head of the Philistine **was** in his hand. And Saul said to him, "Whose son **are** you, youth?" And David said, "The son of your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite."*

"Whose son is this youth, Abner?" Abner was Saul's cousin and the commander of his army (14:50). He said, "As your soul lives, O king, I do not know." After the battle, Abner brought David to Saul with Goliath's head still in his hand. "Whose son are you, youth?" "The son of your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite."

This raises a question. In chapter 16, David was already Saul's musician and armor-bearer, and Saul had even sent a message to Jesse (16:19-22). How could Saul and Abner not know who he was? Bible teachers give a few answers. Saul may have known David, but not his family. He had promised to free the winner's family (17:25), and he would want to know exactly who that father was, now that David might marry his daughter. Saul may also have been asking what kind of man

this was, where a boy like this came from. Others note that Saul's mind was troubled by the evil spirit (16:14) and that a court musician who came and went might not be well known to the army commander. And chapter 16 may tell what happened over time, not in exact order.

Good Bible teachers hold each of these answers, and the text does not settle it. What we do know is that Saul's question was about whose son David was, and David answered it plainly: "The son of your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite." In the next chapter, Saul will take David into his house for good.

Chapter 17 Summary

The Philistines camped in the valley of Elah, facing Israel across the valley. Their champion, Goliath of Gath, a giant in bronze armor with a spear like a weaver's beam, came out morning and evening for forty days and dared Israel to send a man to fight him, and Saul and all Israel were terrified. Jesse sent his youngest son David with food for his three oldest brothers in the army. David heard Goliath's challenge, saw the army run, and asked who this uncircumcised Philistine was to defy the battle lines of the living God. His brother Eliab accused him of pride, but David turned away and kept asking. Saul sent for him and said he was too young, but David told how the LORD had delivered him from the lion and the bear and would deliver him from this Philistine. David could not walk in Saul's armor, so he went out with his staff, five smooth stones and his sling. Goliath despised him and cursed him by his gods, but David said he came in the name of the LORD of armies, so that all the earth would know there is a God for Israel and that the LORD does not save by sword and spear, for the battle belongs to the LORD. David's stone struck Goliath in the forehead and he fell, and David killed him with his own sword. The Philistines fled, and Israel pursued them to Gath and Ekron. Saul asked Abner whose son David was, and David told him, "The son of your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite."

People and Places

- Valley of Elah: a broad valley in the low hills of Judah, about fifteen miles west of Bethlehem.
- Socoh and Azekah: towns of Judah on either side of the valley of Elah.
- Goliath: the Philistine champion from Gath.
- Gath: one of the five main Philistine cities, near the valley of Elah.
- Champion: a warrior who fought alone between two armies to settle a battle.
- Cubit: about 18 inches, the length from elbow to fingertip; a span is about half a cubit.
- Uncircumcised: outside God's covenant with Abraham, which had circumcision as its sign (Genesis 17:10-11).
- Abner: Saul's cousin and the commander of his army.
- Ekron: another Philistine city, north of Gath.

Chapter 17 Study Questions

1. Describe Goliath and his armor. Why do you think the writer gives so much detail? (17:4-7)

2. How did Saul and the army of Israel react to Goliath's challenge, and why is that surprising for Saul? (17:11, 24; 8:20; 10:23)

3. Why was David in the camp that day? (17:17-20)

4. What did David call Goliath, and what did he call Israel's army? What do those names show about how David saw the battle? (17:26)

5. How did Eliab treat David, and how did David answer? (17:28-30)

6. Where had David learned to trust God before he faced Goliath? (17:34-37)

7. Why did David refuse Saul's armor? (17:38-40)

8. What two reasons did David give for why the LORD would win this battle? (17:45-47)

9. David remembered the lion and the bear. What has God already done in your life that can give you courage for what you are facing now?

10. David fought because God's name was being mocked. When you face a hard situation, how would it change things to ask how God can be honored in it, and not only how you can get through it?

Chapter 18: Saul's Jealousy of David

Scripture

18:1-16 And it was, when he had finished speaking to Saul, and the soul of Jonathan was bound with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. And Saul took him on that day, and he did not permit him to return ***to*** the house of his father. And Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe which ***was*** on him, and he gave it to David, and his garments, and even to his sword and to his bow and to his belt. And David went out; in every ***place*** where Saul sent him, he was successful. And Saul appointed him over the men of war, and it was good in the eyes of all the people and also in the eyes of the servants of Saul. And it was, when they came, when David returned from striking the Philistine, that the women came out from all the cities of Israel to sing, and the dances, to meet Saul the king, with tambourines, with joy, and with three-stringed instruments. And the women who were celebrating sang, and they said, "Saul has struck his thousands, and David his ten thousands." And Saul burned ***with anger*** exceedingly, and this matter was evil in his eyes; and he said, "They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed the thousands; and yet for him ***there is*** only the kingdom." And Saul was eyeing David from that day and onward. And it was, on the next day, that an evil spirit of God rushed on Saul, and he prophesied in the midst of the house; and David ***was*** playing with his hand, as day by day; and the spear ***was*** in the hand of Saul. And Saul hurled the spear, and he said, "I will strike into David and into the wall." And David turned from before him two times. And Saul was afraid of David, for the LORD was with him, and from Saul He had departed. And Saul removed him from beside him and appointed him for himself commander of a thousand; and he went out and came in before the people. And David was successful in all his ways, and the LORD ***was*** with him. And Saul saw that he was exceedingly successful, and he was in dread of him. And all Israel and Judah loved David, for he was going out and coming in before them.

18:17-30 And Saul said to David, "Look, my older daughter Merab, her I will give to you as a wife; only be for me a son of valor, and fight the battles of the LORD." And Saul said, "Let my hand not be on him, and let the hand of the Philistines be on him." And David said to Saul, "Who ***am*** I, and who ***are*** my relatives, the clan of my father in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the king?" And it was, at the time of giving Merab the daughter of Saul to David, that she was given to Adriel the Meholathite as a wife. And Michal the daughter of Saul loved David, and they told Saul, and the matter was right in his eyes. And Saul said, "I will give her to him, that she may be a snare to him, and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him." And Saul said to David, "By a second ***time*** you will become my son-in-law today." And Saul commanded his servants, "Speak to David in secret, saying, 'Look, the king delights in you, and all his servants love you; and now, become son-in-law to the king.'" And the servants of Saul spoke these words in the ears of David. And David said, "***Is*** it a light ***thing*** in your eyes to become son-in-law to the king, and I ***am*** a poor man and lightly esteemed?" And the servants of Saul told him, saying, "According to these words David spoke." And Saul said, "Thus you shall say to David: 'The king has no delight in a bride-price, but in a hundred foreskins of Philistines, to be avenged on the enemies of the king.'" And Saul planned to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines. And his servants told David these

words, and the matter was right in the eyes of David to become son-in-law to the king. And the days were not completed. And David arose and went, he and his men, and he struck among the Philistines two hundred men; and David brought their foreskins, and they gave them in full ***number*** to the king, to become son-in-law to the king. And Saul gave him Michal his daughter as a wife. And Saul saw and knew that the LORD ***was*** with David, and Michal the daughter of Saul loved him. And Saul was yet more afraid of David, and Saul was an enemy to David all the days. And the commanders of the Philistines went out, and it was, as often as they went out, David was more successful than all the servants of Saul, and his name was exceedingly esteemed.

Chapter 18 Preview

After Goliath, two men in Saul's house respond to David in two very different ways. Jonathan, Saul's son and the heir to the throne, loves David "as his own soul." He makes a covenant with him and gives him his own robe, his armor and his weapons. Saul takes David into his service for good and puts him over the army, and David succeeds at everything he does.

Then the women of Israel come out singing, "Saul has struck his thousands, and David his ten thousands," and something turns in Saul. From that day on he eyes David with suspicion. Twice he throws a spear at him. He sends him into battle hoping the Philistines will kill him, and he offers his daughters in marriage as a trap. But every plan backfires. The more Saul schemes, the more it becomes plain that "the LORD was with David." This chapter shows us the power of jealousy, and the beauty of a friend who is glad for your success.

Chapter 18 Study

18:1-2 *And it was, when he had finished speaking to Saul, and the soul of Jonathan was bound with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. And Saul took him on that day, and he did not permit him to return **to** the house of his father.*

"The soul of Jonathan was bound with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." Jonathan had watched the whole thing. He was a brave man himself, the one who climbed up to the Philistine outpost with only his armor-bearer and said, "there is no restraint for the LORD to save by many or by few" (14:6). In David he found a man with the same faith. Their friendship was built on a shared trust in God.

The phrase "bound with the soul" is used in Genesis 44:30 of Jacob's love for his son Benjamin. It describes a deep, loyal love, the kind that ties two lives together. This was not a romantic love. It was the deep friendship of two men who shared the same faith and courage, and it was sealed with a covenant.

"And Saul took him on that day, and he did not permit him to return to the house of his father." David no longer went back and forth to Bethlehem (17:15). He now lived at Saul's court.

18:3-4 *And Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe which **was** on him, and he gave it to David, and his garments, and even to his sword and to his bow and to his belt.*

"And Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul." A covenant is a solemn agreement, a binding promise made before God. This covenant will come up again and again (20:8, 16-17, 42; 23:18), and David will keep it long after Jonathan's death when he cares for Jonathan's son Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 9:1, 7).

"And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe which was on him, and he gave it to David, and his garments, and even to his sword and to his bow and to his belt." Remember, swords were rare in Israel (13:22). Jonathan was giving David what he had that was most precious. And the robe was more than clothing. Jonathan was the king's son, the next in line. By giving David his robe and weapons, Jonathan was in a sense handing over his own place. Later he will say it plainly: "you, you will reign over Israel, and I, I will be second to you" (23:17).

Think about that. Jonathan had every human reason to be jealous of David. Instead he gave him his robe. That is what real love looks like. It is glad when God lifts someone else up, even above us.

18:5 *And David went out; in every **place** where Saul sent him, he was successful. And Saul appointed him over the men of war, and it was good in the eyes of all the people and also in the eyes of the servants of Saul.*

"In every place where Saul sent him, he was successful." The Hebrew word for successful also carries the idea of acting wisely. David succeeded because he was wise, and he was wise because the LORD was with him (18:14). "And Saul appointed him over the men of war." The shepherd boy was now a commander. "And it was good in the eyes of all the people and also in the eyes of the servants of Saul." Everyone liked David, even the king's own officials. For now.

18:6-7 *And it was, when they came, when David returned from striking the Philistine, that the women came out from all the cities of Israel to sing, and the dances, to meet Saul the king, with tambourines, with joy, and with three-stringed instruments. And the women who were celebrating sang, and they said, "Saul has struck his thousands, and David his ten thousands."*

"When David returned from striking the Philistine," the women "came out from all the cities of Israel to sing." It was the custom for women to greet the army returning from victory with songs and dances (Exodus 15:20; Judges 11:34). They came with "tambourines, with joy, and with three-stringed instruments."

Their song was simple: "Saul has struck his thousands, and David his ten thousands." In Hebrew poetry, thousands and ten thousands are often used together to mean a great many (Psalm 91:7). The women may not have meant to insult Saul at all. It was a song of joy. But Saul heard it as a comparison, and he came out second.

18:8-9 *And Saul burned **with anger** exceedingly, and this matter was evil in his eyes; and he said, "They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed the thousands; and yet for him **there is** only the kingdom." And Saul was eyeing David from that day and onward.*

"And Saul burned with anger exceedingly, and this matter was evil in his eyes." Saul did the math. "They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed the thousands; and yet for him there is only the kingdom." Saul remembered what Samuel had said, that the LORD had torn the kingdom from him and given it to a neighbor better than he (15:28). Now he thought he knew who that neighbor was.

"And Saul was eyeing David from that day and onward." Saul started watching David with a jealous eye. That is how jealousy begins. It starts with a look and a thought. If we do not deal with it, it grows. Proverbs says, "who will stand before jealousy?" (Proverbs 27:4), and that "jealousy is rottenness of bones" (Proverbs 14:30). James says that "where jealousy and selfish ambition are, there is disorder and every evil thing" (James 3:16). That is the story of the rest of Saul's life.

Jealousy is a quiet sin. It does not look as ugly as murder. But in Saul it led to attempted murder within a day. Is there someone whose success bothers you? Bring it to God now, before it takes root.

18:10-11 *And it was, on the next day, that an evil spirit of God rushed on Saul, and he prophesied in the midst of the house; and David **was** playing with his hand, as day by day; and the spear **was** in the hand of Saul. And Saul hurled the spear, and he said, "I will strike into David and into the wall." And David turned from before him two times.*

"On the next day, that an evil spirit of God rushed on Saul." On the evil spirit from God, see the comments at 16:14. "And he prophesied in the midst of the house." The word prophesied here means he was raving, speaking wildly as one under the power of a spirit, not that he was giving God's message. This was a dark, out-of-control state.

"And David was playing with his hand, as day by day; and the spear was in the hand of Saul." Do you see the contrast? David had a lyre in his hand. Saul had a spear in his. David was trying to help him. Saul was thinking of murder.

"And Saul hurled the spear, and he said, I will strike into David and into the wall." He meant to pin David to the wall. "And David turned from before him two times." David dodged, and it happened twice. God protected him, and David did not strike back.

18:12-16 *And Saul was afraid of David, for the LORD was with him, and from Saul He had departed. And Saul removed him from beside him and appointed him for himself commander of a thousand; and he went out and came in before the people. And David was successful in all his ways, and the LORD **was** with him. And Saul saw that he was exceedingly successful, and he was in dread of him. And all Israel and Judah loved David, for he was going out and coming in before them.*

"And Saul was afraid of David, for the LORD was with him, and from Saul He had departed." Here is the real reason for Saul's fear. It was not David's skill or popularity. It was that Saul could see

God's hand on David, and he knew it had left him. A man who will not repent of his own sin often comes to hate the person in whom he sees God at work.

"And Saul removed him from beside him and appointed him for himself commander of a thousand." Saul wanted David out of his sight. Perhaps he also hoped David would be killed in battle. But it backfired. "He went out and came in before the people," which means he led them in war and in daily life, and they saw him do it.

"And David was successful in all his ways, and the LORD was with him." The same words again. "And Saul saw that he was exceedingly successful, and he was in dread of him." "And all Israel and Judah loved David." Everything Saul did to push David down only lifted him up. When God is lifting someone up, no one can hold him down.

18:17-19 *And Saul said to David, "Look, my older daughter Merab, her I will give to you as a wife; only be for me a son of valor, and fight the battles of the LORD." And Saul said, "Let my hand not be on him, and let the hand of the Philistines be on him." And David said to Saul, "Who **am** I, and who **are** my relatives, the clan of my father in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the king?" And it was, at the time of giving Merab the daughter of Saul to David, that she was given to Adriel the Meholathite as a wife.*

"Look, my older daughter Merab, her I will give to you as a wife; only be for me a son of valor, and fight the battles of the LORD." On the surface this was a fine offer, and it was part of what was promised to the man who killed Goliath (17:25). But listen to what Saul was thinking: "Let my hand not be on him, and let the hand of the Philistines be on him." He wanted the Philistines to do his dirty work. And notice his words, "the battles of the LORD." Saul used religious language to cover a murderous plan.

David answered humbly: "Who am I, and who are my relatives, the clan of my father in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the king?" Saul had once said almost the same thing to Samuel (9:21). David did not reach for the throne. He would wait for God to give it.

"At the time of giving Merab the daughter of Saul to David, that she was given to Adriel the Meholathite as a wife." Saul broke his promise. We are not told why. It was another insult to David, and another sign that Saul's word could not be trusted.

18:20-21 *And Michal the daughter of Saul loved David, and they told Saul, and the matter was right in his eyes. And Saul said, "I will give her to him, that she may be a snare to him, and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him." And Saul said to David, "By a second **time** you will become my son-in-law today."*

"And Michal the daughter of Saul loved David." Scripture rarely tells us in so many words that a woman loved a man, but it does here. "And they told Saul, and the matter was right in his eyes." Saul was glad, but not for Michal's sake. "I will give her to him, that she may be a snare to him, and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him." A snare is a trap. Saul was willing to use his own daughter's love as bait.

"By a second time you will become my son-in-law today." Saul gave David a second chance at marrying into the family.

18:22-24 *And Saul commanded his servants, "Speak to David in secret, saying, 'Look, the king delights in you, and all his servants love you; and now, become son-in-law to the king.'" And the servants of Saul spoke these words in the ears of David. And David said, "**Is** it a light **thing** in your eyes to become son-in-law to the king, and I **am** a poor man and lightly esteemed?" And the servants of Saul told him, saying, "According to these words David spoke."*

Saul had his servants speak to David privately, as if they were just passing on friendly news: "Look, the king delights in you, and all his servants love you; and now, become son-in-law to the king."

David's answer was honest. "Is it a light thing in your eyes to become son-in-law to the king, and I am a poor man and lightly esteemed?" In those days a man gave a bride-price, a gift to the bride's father, when he married. A king's daughter would cost more than a shepherd's son could ever pay. David was not playing games. He was poor, and he knew it.

18:25-27 *And Saul said, "Thus you shall say to David: 'The king has no delight in a bride-price, but in a hundred foreskins of Philistines, to be avenged on the enemies of the king.'" And Saul planned to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines. And his servants told David these words, and the matter was right in the eyes of David to become son-in-law to the king. And the days were not completed. And David arose and went, he and his men, and he struck among the Philistines two hundred men; and David brought their foreskins, and they gave them in full **number** to the king, to become son-in-law to the king. And Saul gave him Michal his daughter as a wife.*

"The king has no delight in a bride-price, but in a hundred foreskins of Philistines, to be avenged on the enemies of the king." This was a grim demand. The Philistines were uncircumcised (17:26), and Saul wanted proof that David had killed a hundred of them. It sounds strange and harsh to us, and it was. But the writer tells us exactly why Saul asked it: "Saul planned to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines." He hoped David would die trying.

"And the matter was right in the eyes of David." David accepted. "And the days were not completed," meaning that before the time Saul had set ran out, David went with his men and "struck among the Philistines two hundred men." He brought twice what Saul asked. "And Saul gave him Michal his daughter as a wife."

Once again, Saul's plan to destroy David made David greater. The writer does not dwell on the details, and neither will I. The point is that God protected David through every trap Saul set.

18:28-30 *And Saul saw and knew that the LORD **was** with David, and Michal the daughter of Saul loved him. And Saul was yet more afraid of David, and Saul was an enemy to David all the days. And the commanders of the Philistines went out, and it was, as often as they went out, David was more successful than all the servants of Saul, and his name was exceedingly esteemed.*

"And Saul saw and knew that the LORD was with David, and Michal the daughter of Saul loved him." Saul could no longer deny it. His own son loved David. Now his own daughter loved him. And God was with him.

"And Saul was yet more afraid of David, and Saul was an enemy to David all the days." This is the tragedy of Saul. He saw clearly that God was with David, and instead of humbling himself before God, he set himself against God's chosen man. He chose to be David's enemy for the rest of his life. When we fight what God is doing, we are not really fighting a person. We are fighting God.

"And the commanders of the Philistines went out, and it was, as often as they went out, David was more successful than all the servants of Saul, and his name was exceedingly esteemed." The chapter ends where it began: David succeeding and his name growing.

This chapter shows two ways to respond when God blesses someone else. Jonathan gave David his robe. Saul threw a spear. Jonathan's love made him one of the most honored men in Scripture. Saul's jealousy made him miserable and led to his ruin. Jesus said, "Greater love than this no one has, that one lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Jonathan gave up his claim to the throne for his friend. Jesus gave up His life for us.

Chapter 18 Summary

After David killed Goliath, Jonathan's soul was bound to David's, and he loved him as his own soul. Jonathan made a covenant with David and gave him his robe, his armor and his weapons, and Saul kept David at court and set him over the men of war. When the army came home, the women sang, "Saul has struck his thousands, and David his ten thousands," and Saul was furious and from that day eyed David with suspicion. The next day, while David played the lyre, Saul threw his spear at him twice, but David escaped. Saul was afraid of David because the LORD was with him and had left Saul. Saul made David commander of a thousand, and David was successful in everything and loved by all Israel and Judah. Saul offered his daughter Merab, hoping the Philistines would kill David, but gave her to another man. When Saul learned that his daughter Michal loved David, he offered her as a snare, asking for a hundred Philistine foreskins as the bride-price. David brought two hundred, and Saul gave him Michal. Saul saw that the LORD was with David and that Michal loved him, and he became David's enemy for the rest of his life, while David's name grew greater.

People and Places

- Jonathan: Saul's oldest son and heir, David's closest friend.
- Merab: Saul's older daughter, promised to David but given to Adriel.
- Adriel the Meholathite: the man who married Merab, from Abel-meholah.

- Michal: Saul's younger daughter, who loved David and became his wife.
- Covenant: a solemn, binding promise made before God.
- Bride-price: a gift a man gave to the bride's father when he married.

Chapter 18 Study Questions

1. How is Jonathan's love for David described, and what did Jonathan give him? (18:1-4)

2. Why do you think Jonathan's gift of his robe and weapons mattered so much? (18:4; 23:17)

3. What did the women sing, and how did Saul react? (18:6-9)

4. What happened when David played the lyre for Saul the next day? (18:10-11)

5. Why was Saul afraid of David? (18:12, 15, 28-29)

6. What was Saul really hoping for when he offered his daughters to David? (18:17, 21, 25)

7. How did David answer the offers of marriage, and what does it show about him? (18:18, 23)

8. How did each of Saul's plans against David turn out? (18:13-16, 27-30)

9. Jonathan was glad for David's success; Saul was jealous of it. Whose success is hardest for you to celebrate, and why?

10. Who has been a Jonathan to you? How can you be that kind of friend to someone else this week?

Chapter 19: Saul Tries to Kill David

Scripture

19:1-10 And Saul spoke to Jonathan his son and to all his servants, to kill David; and Jonathan the son of Saul delighted in David exceedingly. And Jonathan told David, saying, "Saul my father is seeking to kill you; and now, please be on guard in the morning, and stay in the secret place and hide yourself. And I, I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where you ***are***, and I, I will speak about you to my father; and I will see what ***happens***, and I will tell you." And Jonathan spoke good about David to Saul his father, and he said to him, "Let the king not sin against his servant, against David, for he has not sinned against you, and for his deeds ***have been*** exceedingly good for you. And he put his life in his palm and struck the Philistine, and the LORD made a great salvation for all Israel; you saw and rejoiced. And why will you sin against innocent blood by killing David without cause?" And Saul listened to the voice of Jonathan, and Saul swore, "***As*** the LORD lives, he shall not be put to death." And Jonathan called David, and Jonathan told him all these words; and Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he was before him as yesterday ***and*** the day before. And ***there*** was war again; and David went out and fought against the Philistines, and he struck them with a great blow, and they fled from before him. And an evil spirit of the LORD was on Saul, and he ***was*** sitting in his house, and his spear ***was*** in his hand, and David ***was*** playing with ***his*** hand. And Saul sought to strike with the spear into David and into the wall; and he slipped away from before Saul, and he struck the spear into the wall. And David fled and escaped that night.

19:11-24 And Saul sent messengers to the house of David to watch him and to kill him in the morning. And Michal his wife told David, saying, "If you are not delivering your life this night, tomorrow you ***will be*** put to death." And Michal let David down through the window, and he went and fled and escaped. And Michal took the teraphim and put ***it*** on the bed, and the quilt of goats' ***hair*** she put ***at*** its head, and she covered ***it*** with the garment. And Saul sent messengers to take David, and she said, "He ***is*** sick." And Saul sent the messengers to see David, saying, "Bring him up on the bed to me, to kill him." And the messengers came, and look, the teraphim ***was*** on the bed, and the quilt of goats' ***hair at*** its head. And Saul said to Michal, "Why have you deceived me thus, and let my enemy go, and he has escaped?" And Michal said to Saul, "He said to me, 'Let me go; why should I kill you?'" And David fled and escaped, and he came to Samuel at Ramah, and he told him all that Saul had done to him. And he and Samuel went, and they dwelt in Naioth. And it was told to Saul, saying, "Look, David ***is*** in Naioth in Ramah." And Saul sent messengers to take David; and he saw the company of the prophets prophesying, and Samuel standing, set over them; and the Spirit of God was on the messengers of Saul, and they also prophesied. And they told Saul, and he sent other messengers, and they also prophesied. And Saul again sent messengers, a third ***group***, and they also prophesied. And he also went to Ramah, and he came to the great cistern which ***is*** in Secu; and he asked and said, "Where ***are*** Samuel and David?" And ***one*** said, "Look, in Naioth in Ramah." And he went there, to Naioth in Ramah; and the Spirit of God was on him also, and he went on, going and prophesying, until he came to Naioth in Ramah. And he also stripped off his clothes, and he also prophesied before Samuel, and he fell down naked all that day and all the night. Therefore they say, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

Chapter 19 Preview

Saul's jealousy is out in the open now. He tells Jonathan and all his servants to kill David. Jonathan pleads for his friend, and for a short time Saul listens and swears David will not die. But war comes again, David wins again, and Saul throws his spear again. David runs for his life.

That night Saul sends men to David's house to kill him in the morning, and David's wife Michal lets him down through a window and puts an idol in his bed to fool the messengers. David flees to Samuel at Ramah. Three times Saul sends men to capture him, and each time the Spirit of God comes on them and they prophesy instead. Finally Saul goes himself, and the Spirit comes on him too, and he lies on the ground before Samuel all day and night. God protects David in ways no one could have planned, through a friend, a wife, an old prophet, and His own Spirit.

Chapter 19 Study

19:1-3 *And Saul spoke to Jonathan his son and to all his servants, to kill David; and Jonathan the son of Saul delighted in David exceedingly. And Jonathan told David, saying, "Saul my father is seeking to kill you; and now, please be on guard in the morning, and stay in the secret place and hide yourself. And I, I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where you* ***are****, and I, I will speak about you to my father; and I will see what* ***happens****, and I will tell you."*

"And Saul spoke to Jonathan his son and to all his servants, to kill David." Saul had tried to trap David quietly (18:17, 21, 25). Now he gave an open order. He even told his own son, the one person most likely to refuse.

"And Jonathan the son of Saul delighted in David exceedingly." Jonathan was caught between his father and his friend. He did the right thing. He warned David: "Saul my father is seeking to kill you; and now, please be on guard in the morning, and stay in the secret place and hide yourself." Then he made a plan. He would talk to Saul in the field near David's hiding place, "and I will see what happens, and I will tell you."

Jonathan honored his father, but he would not obey him in this. When a parent or a ruler commands us to do what God forbids, we must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29).

19:4-5 *And Jonathan spoke good about David to Saul his father, and he said to him, "Let the king not sin against his servant, against David, for he has not sinned against you, and for his deeds* ***have been*** *exceedingly good for you. And he put his life in his palm and struck the Philistine, and the LORD made a great salvation for all Israel; you saw and rejoiced. And why will you sin against innocent blood by killing David without cause?"*

"And Jonathan spoke good about David to Saul his father." Look at how wisely he spoke. "Let the king not sin against his servant, against David, for he has not sinned against you." He named it for what it was: sin. Then he reminded Saul of the facts: David's deeds had been "exceedingly good for you."

"He put his life in his palm and struck the Philistine." To put your life in your palm means to risk your life, to hold it out where it could easily be taken. "And the LORD made a great salvation for all

Israel; you saw and rejoiced." Jonathan gave the credit to the LORD, and he reminded Saul that Saul himself had been glad that day.

"And why will you sin against innocent blood by killing David without cause?" To shed innocent blood was a grave sin under God's law (Deuteronomy 19:10; 27:25). Jonathan spoke the truth to his father with courage and respect. That is how a peacemaker speaks.

19:6-7 *And Saul listened to the voice of Jonathan, and Saul swore, "**As** the LORD lives, he shall not be put to death." And Jonathan called David, and Jonathan told him all these words; and Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he was before him as yesterday **and** the day before.*

"And Saul listened to the voice of Jonathan, and Saul swore, As the LORD lives, he shall not be put to death." For a moment Saul's heart softened. He took an oath in the LORD's name. Jonathan brought David back to court, "and he was before him as yesterday and the day before."

It is good when a hard heart softens. But Saul's oath did not last. A promise made under the pressure of the moment, without real repentance, rarely holds. Saul had made rash oaths before (14:24, 39, 44), and he broke this one within days.

19:8-10 *And **there** was war again; and David went out and fought against the Philistines, and he struck them with a great blow, and they fled from before him. And an evil spirit of the LORD was on Saul, and he **was** sitting in his house, and his spear **was** in his hand, and David **was** playing with **his** hand. And Saul sought to strike with the spear into David and into the wall; and he slipped away from before Saul, and he struck the spear into the wall. And David fled and escaped that night.*

"And there was war again; and David went out and fought against the Philistines, and he struck them with a great blow." David did what he always did. He served faithfully and won. And once more, his success set off Saul's jealousy.

"And an evil spirit of the LORD was on Saul, and he was sitting in his house, and his spear was in his hand, and David was playing with his hand." It is almost the same scene as 18:10-11. On the evil spirit, see the comments at 16:14.

"And Saul sought to strike with the spear into David and into the wall; and he slipped away from before Saul, and he struck the spear into the wall." This time the spear stuck in the wall, so Saul threw it hard. "And David fled and escaped that night." This was the end of David's time at Saul's court. From here until Saul dies, David is a man on the run. He would live in caves and deserts for years. But notice that David never once threw the spear back.

19:11-12 *And Saul sent messengers to the house of David to watch him and to kill him in the morning. And Michal his wife told David, saying, "If you are not delivering your life this night, tomorrow you **will be** put to death." And Michal let David down through the window, and he went and fled and escaped.*

"And Saul sent messengers to the house of David to watch him and to kill him in the morning." The heading of Psalm 59 ties that psalm to this very night, when Saul sent men to watch David's

house to kill him. In that psalm David cries out, "Deliver me from my enemies, my God," and later sings that God has been "a high refuge for me" (Psalm 59:16). If you want to know what David was feeling, read Psalm 59.

"And Michal his wife told David, saying, If you are not delivering your life this night, tomorrow you will be put to death." Michal loved David (18:20, 28), and she saw the danger clearly. "And Michal let David down through the window, and he went and fled and escaped." The house may have been built against the city wall, like Rahab's house in Jericho (Joshua 2:15). Paul was let down in a basket through a window in the wall at Damascus to escape those who wanted to kill him (2 Corinthians 11:32-33).

19:13-17 *And Michal took the teraphim and put **it** on the bed, and the quilt of goats' **hair** she put **at** its head, and she covered **it** with the garment. And Saul sent messengers to take David, and she said, "He **is** sick." And Saul sent the messengers to see David, saying, "Bring him up on the bed to me, to kill him." And the messengers came, and look, the teraphim **was** on the bed, and the quilt of goats' **hair at** its head. And Saul said to Michal, "Why have you deceived me thus, and let my enemy go, and he has escaped?" And Michal said to Saul, "He said to me, 'Let me go; why should I kill you?'"*

"And Michal took the teraphim and put it on the bed, and the quilt of goats' hair she put at its head, and she covered it with the garment." Teraphim were household idols (15:23). Rachel had stolen her father's teraphim long before (Genesis 31:19). This one must have been about the size of a man, or Michal made it look that way with the goat-hair quilt for hair and a cloak over it. Why did David's house have an idol in it at all? Scripture does not say. It may have been Michal's. It shows that even in Israel, even in the king's family, old pagan habits lingered.

"And Saul sent messengers to take David, and she said, He is sick." Michal lied to buy David time. Saul was so set on killing David that he said, "Bring him up on the bed to me, to kill him." Sick or not, he wanted him dead. When the messengers pulled back the cloak, they found the idol.

"Why have you deceived me thus, and let my enemy go?" Saul now called David "my enemy." Michal lied again to protect herself. She claimed David had threatened to kill her if she did not let him go. David had said no such thing.

The Bible records Michal's lies. It does not praise them. God protected David, but He did not need Michal's lies to do it. We will see Michal again, and her story does not end happily (25:44; 2 Samuel 6:16, 23).

19:18-19 *And David fled and escaped, and he came to Samuel at Ramah, and he told him all that Saul had done to him. And he and Samuel went, and they dwelt in Naioth. And it was told to Saul, saying, "Look, David **is** in Naioth in Ramah."*

"And David fled and escaped, and he came to Samuel at Ramah, and he told him all that Saul had done to him." Where do you go when your life falls apart? David went to the man of God. He went to the old prophet who had anointed him. He did not go to raise an army. He went to talk it through with someone who knew God.

"And he and Samuel went, and they dwelt in Naioth." Naioth was a place in or near Ramah. The word may mean dwellings, and many think it was where the company of prophets lived together, a kind of school of the prophets under Samuel. "And it was told to Saul." Saul had spies everywhere.

19:20-21 *And Saul sent messengers to take David; and he saw the company of the prophets prophesying, and Samuel standing, set over them; and the Spirit of God was on the messengers of Saul, and they also prophesied. And they told Saul, and he sent other messengers, and they also prophesied. And Saul again sent messengers, a third* ***group****, and they also prophesied.*

"And Saul sent messengers to take David; and he saw the company of the prophets prophesying, and Samuel standing, set over them." The messengers came to arrest David, and they walked right into a meeting of prophets worshiping God, with Samuel leading them. "And the Spirit of God was on the messengers of Saul, and they also prophesied."

To prophesy here means to speak or sing praise under the power of the Spirit, in the way the company of prophets did (10:5-6). The men came to capture David, and God's Spirit captured them instead.

Saul sent a second group, then a third. The same thing happened each time. God did not need a sword to protect David. He simply took over the hands and mouths of the men sent to seize him.

19:22-24 *And he also went to Ramah, and he came to the great cistern which* ***is*** *in Secu; and he asked and said, "Where* ***are*** *Samuel and David?" And* ***one*** *said, "Look, in Naioth in Ramah." And he went there, to Naioth in Ramah; and the Spirit of God was on him also, and he went on, going and prophesying, until he came to Naioth in Ramah. And he also stripped off his clothes, and he also prophesied before Samuel, and he fell down naked all that day and all the night. Therefore they say, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"*

"And he also went to Ramah." Saul would not learn. He came "to the great cistern which is in Secu," a well-known water pit, and asked, "Where are Samuel and David?" Then he went on to Naioth.

"And the Spirit of God was on him also, and he went on, going and prophesying." The king who came to kill was overcome before he arrived. "And he also stripped off his clothes, and he also prophesied before Samuel, and he fell down naked all that day and all the night." Naked here most likely means he took off his outer royal robe and lay in his undergarments, the way the word is sometimes used of a man without his outer cloak (Isaiah 20:2). The point is that the proud king lay helpless on the ground before Samuel, stripped of the robes that marked him as king, while David got away.

"Therefore they say, Is Saul also among the prophets?" This saying first came up when Saul was a humble young man and the Spirit came on him for good (10:11-12). Now it came up again, but in shame. The first time, the Spirit came to give Saul a new heart (10:9). This time, the Spirit came to stop him in his tracks.

What does this teach us? God can protect His people in ways we would never think of. And being overcome by God's Spirit for a moment is not the same as being changed by Him. Saul had a powerful spiritual experience that day. It did not change his heart. In the very next chapter he is still trying to kill David. An experience, however powerful, is no substitute for repentance and faith.

Chapter 19 Summary

Saul ordered Jonathan and his servants to kill David. Jonathan warned David to hide, then reminded Saul that David had not sinned against him and had risked his life against the Philistine, and Saul swore by the LORD that David would not be put to death. But when war came again and David defeated the Philistines, an evil spirit came on Saul, and he threw his spear at David, who escaped into the night. Saul sent men to watch David's house and kill him in the morning. Michal warned David, let him down through a window, and put the teraphim in his bed with goat hair at its head, and she lied to the messengers and to Saul. David fled to Samuel at Ramah, and they stayed at Naioth. Saul sent three groups of messengers to seize David, and each time the Spirit of God came on them and they prophesied. Then Saul went himself, and the Spirit of God came on him, and he stripped off his clothes and lay before Samuel all day and night, so that people said, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

People and Places

- Michal: Saul's daughter and David's wife.
- Teraphim: household idols.
- Ramah: Samuel's hometown, a few miles north of Jerusalem.
- Naioth: a place in Ramah, probably where the company of prophets lived with Samuel.
- Secu: a place near Ramah with a great cistern.
- Company of the prophets: a group of prophets who worshiped together under Samuel's leadership.

Chapter 19 Study Questions

1. What did Saul order, and how did Jonathan respond? (19:1-3)

2. What arguments did Jonathan use to speak up for David? (19:4-5)

3. What did Saul swear, and how long did it last? (19:6, 9-10)

4. How did Michal help David escape, and what did she say to Saul? (19:11-17)

5. Where did David go when he fled, and why do you think he went there? (19:18)

6. What happened to the three groups of messengers Saul sent? (19:20-21)

7. What happened when Saul went to Naioth himself? (19:23-24)

8. Why did a powerful spiritual experience not change Saul's heart? (19:24; 20:30-33)

9. Jonathan spoke up for his friend at real risk to himself. When is it hardest for you to speak up for someone who is being treated wrongly?

10. When your life falls apart, where do you go first? Who is a godly person you can go to, the way David went to Samuel?

Chapter 20: The Covenant of David and Jonathan

Scripture

20:1-17 And David fled from Naioth in Ramah, and he came and said before Jonathan, "What have I done? What ***is*** my iniquity, and what ***is*** my sin before your father, that he is seeking my life?" And he said to him, "Far be it! You shall not die. Look, my father does not do anything great or anything small without uncovering my ear; and why should my father hide this thing from me? It ***is*** not ***so***." And David swore again, and he said, "Your father certainly knows that I have found favor in your eyes, and he has said, 'Let Jonathan not know this, lest he be grieved.' And yet, ***as*** the LORD lives and ***as*** your soul lives, surely about a step ***is*** between me and death." And Jonathan said to David, "Whatever your soul says, I will do for you." And David said to Jonathan, "Look, tomorrow ***is*** the new moon, and I, I should surely sit with the king to eat; and you shall let me go, and I will hide myself in the field until the third evening. If your father misses me at all, then you shall say, 'David earnestly asked leave of me to run ***to*** Bethlehem his city, for the yearly sacrifice ***is*** there for all the clan.' If he says thus, 'Good,' ***there is*** peace for your servant; but if he certainly burns ***with anger***, know that the evil has been determined by him. And you shall do steadfast love toward your servant, for into a covenant of the LORD you have brought your servant with you. And if there is iniquity in me, put me to death yourself; and to your father, why should you bring me?" And Jonathan said, "Far be it from you! For if I certainly know that the evil has been determined by my father to come on you, would I not tell it to you?" And David said to Jonathan, "Who will tell me, or what ***if*** your father answers you harshly?" And Jonathan said to David, "Come, and let us go out ***to*** the field." And the two of them went out ***to*** the field. And Jonathan said to David, "The LORD, the God of Israel! When I sound out my father about this time tomorrow, ***or*** the third ***day***, and look, ***there is*** good toward David, will I not then send to you and uncover your ear? Thus may the LORD do to Jonathan, and thus may He add! If it pleases my father ***to bring*** the evil on you, then I will uncover your ear and send you away, and you shall go in peace. And may the LORD be with you, just as He has been with my father. And ***will you*** not, while I am still alive, and ***will you*** not do with me the steadfast love of the LORD, that I may not die? And you shall not cut off your steadfast love from my house forever, not even when the LORD cuts off the enemies of David, each one from the face of the ground." And Jonathan made ***a covenant*** with the house of David, and the LORD shall require ***it*** from the hand of the enemies of David. And Jonathan again made David swear by his love for him, for with the love of his own soul he loved him.

20:18-34 And Jonathan said to him, "Tomorrow ***is*** the new moon, and you will be missed, for your seat will be empty. And ***on*** the third ***day*** you shall go down quickly, and you shall come to the place where you hid yourself on the day of the deed, and you shall stay beside the stone Ezel. And I, I will shoot three arrows to its side, as though sending ***them*** for myself to a target. And look, I will send the lad, ***saying***, 'Go, find the arrows.' If I say clearly to the lad, 'Look, the arrows ***are*** on this side of you, take it,' then come, for ***there is*** peace for you and ***there is*** nothing ***wrong***, ***as*** the LORD lives. And if I say thus to the young man, 'Look, the arrows ***are*** beyond you,' go, for the LORD has sent you away. And the matter which we have spoken, I and you, look, the LORD ***is*** between me and you forever." And David hid himself in the field. And it was the new moon, and the king sat down at the food to eat. And the king sat on his seat as time by time, on the seat by the

wall; and Jonathan arose, and Abner sat at the side of Saul, and the place of David was empty. And Saul did not speak anything on that day, for he said, "It ***is*** a chance ***event***; he ***is*** not clean; surely ***he is*** not clean." And it was, on the day after the new moon, the second ***day***, and the place of David was empty. And Saul said to Jonathan his son, "Why has the son of Jesse not come, both yesterday and today, to the food?" And Jonathan answered Saul, "David earnestly asked leave of me ***to go*** to Bethlehem. And he said, 'Please let me go, for a sacrifice of the clan ***is*** ours in the city, and my brother, he has commanded me; and now, if I have found favor in your eyes, please let me get away and see my brothers.' Therefore he has not come to the table of the king." And the anger of Saul burned against Jonathan, and he said to him, "Son of a perverse ***woman*** of rebelliousness! Do I not know that you are choosing the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of the nakedness of your mother? For all the days that the son of Jesse lives on the earth, you and your kingdom will not be established. And now, send and take him to me, for he ***is*** a son of death." And Jonathan answered Saul his father, and he said to him, "Why should he be put to death? What has he done?" And Saul hurled the spear at him to strike him; and Jonathan knew that it had been determined by his father to kill David. And Jonathan arose from the table in burning anger, and he did not eat food on the second day of the new moon, for he was grieved for David, because his father had put him to shame.

20:35-42 And it was in the morning, and Jonathan went out ***to*** the field at the appointed time ***with*** David, and a small lad ***was*** with him. And he said to his lad, "Run, please find the arrows which I am shooting." The lad ran, and he shot the arrow to make ***it*** pass beyond him. And the lad came to the place of the arrow which Jonathan had shot, and Jonathan called out after the lad, and he said, "***Is*** not the arrow beyond you?" And Jonathan called out after the lad, "Quickly! Hurry! Do not stand ***still***!" And the lad of Jonathan gathered the arrows, and he came to his master. And the lad did not know anything; only Jonathan and David knew the matter. And Jonathan gave his weapons to the lad who ***was*** his, and he said to him, "Go, bring ***them*** to the city." The lad went, and David arose from beside the south, and he fell on his face to the earth and bowed down three times. And they kissed, each his friend, and they wept, each with his friend, until David made ***his weeping*** great. And Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, since we have sworn, the two of us, in the name of the LORD, saying, 'The LORD will be between me and you, and between my seed and your seed, forever.'" And he arose and went; and Jonathan went ***into*** the city.

Chapter 20 Preview

David slips away from Naioth and goes to find Jonathan. "What have I done?" he asks. Jonathan cannot believe his father really means to kill David. So the two friends make a plan. At the feast of the new moon David will stay away, and Jonathan will watch how his father reacts. If Saul is angry, Jonathan will send a signal with arrows in the field. Before they part, Jonathan asks David to promise something: to keep showing kindness to Jonathan's family forever, even after the LORD has cut off all David's enemies. The two men renew their covenant before the LORD.

At the feast Saul's anger explodes. He curses Jonathan, tells him that as long as David lives Jonathan will never be king, and throws his spear at his own son. The next morning Jonathan shoots the arrows beyond the boy, the signal that David must flee. When the boy is gone, the two

friends meet, weep together, and say goodbye. This is one of the most moving chapters in the Bible. It shows us what faithful friendship looks like, and what it can cost.

Chapter 20 Study

20:1-2 *And David fled from Naioth in Ramah, and he came and said before Jonathan, "What have I done? What **is** my iniquity, and what **is** my sin before your father, that he is seeking my life?" And he said to him, "Far be it! You shall not die. Look, my father does not do anything great or anything small without uncovering my ear; and why should my father hide this thing from me? It **is** not **so**."*

"What have I done? What is my iniquity, and what is my sin before your father, that he is seeking my life?" David had served Saul faithfully, fought his battles, played for him when he was troubled and married his daughter. And still Saul wanted him dead. David did not understand it. Sometimes we suffer when we have done nothing wrong, and the hardest part is not knowing why.

Jonathan answered, "Far be it! You shall not die." Jonathan believed his father confided in him: "my father does not do anything great or anything small without uncovering my ear." To uncover the ear means to tell someone something privately. Jonathan had seen his father swear that David would not die (19:6). He did not want to believe the worst. That is a good quality in a son, but here he was wrong.

20:3-4 *And David swore again, and he said, "Your father certainly knows that I have found favor in your eyes, and he has said, 'Let Jonathan not know this, lest he be grieved.' And yet, **as** the LORD lives and **as** your soul lives, surely about a step **is** between me and death." And Jonathan said to David, "Whatever your soul says, I will do for you."*

"Your father certainly knows that I have found favor in your eyes." David explained why Saul would hide it from Jonathan: Saul knew Jonathan loved David and would warn him. "And yet, as the LORD lives and as your soul lives, surely about a step is between me and death." That is a vivid way to put it. David felt he was one step from the grave.

"Whatever your soul says, I will do for you." Jonathan did not argue anymore. He trusted his friend. That is what a real friend does. He takes your fear seriously, even when he does not fully understand it.

20:5-8 *And David said to Jonathan, "Look, tomorrow **is** the new moon, and I, I should surely sit with the king to eat; and you shall let me go, and I will hide myself in the field until the third evening. If your father misses me at all, then you shall say, 'David earnestly asked leave of me to run **to** Bethlehem his city, for the yearly sacrifice **is** there for all the clan.' If he says thus, 'Good,' **there is** peace for your servant; but if he certainly burns **with anger**, know that the evil has been determined by him. And you shall do steadfast love toward your servant, for into a covenant of the LORD you have brought your servant with you. And if there is iniquity in me, put me to death yourself; and to your father, why should you bring me?"*

"Look, tomorrow is the new moon." The new moon began each month on Israel's calendar, and it was marked with special sacrifices and a feast (Numbers 10:10; 28:11). The king's household would eat together, and David was expected to be there.

David's plan was simple. He would hide in the field for three days. If Saul asked about him, Jonathan would say that David had asked leave to go to Bethlehem for "the yearly sacrifice," a family sacrifice for "all the clan." If Saul said, "Good," David was safe. "But if he certainly burns with anger, know that the evil has been determined by him."

Was David's excuse true? Scripture does not tell us whether David actually went to Bethlehem. Families did hold such sacrifices, and it may have been true. But it is also possible that David was asking Jonathan to cover for him with a story. The Bible records what David said without praising it. David was a man after God's heart, but he was not a perfect man, and in the next chapters we will see him lie outright when he is afraid.

"And you shall do steadfast love toward your servant, for into a covenant of the LORD you have brought your servant with you." Steadfast love is the Hebrew word hesed, loyal, faithful love that keeps its promises. It is one of the great words of the Old Testament, and it is used again and again for God's covenant love for His people. David reminded Jonathan of their covenant (18:3). He called it "a covenant of the LORD," because it was made before God. "And if there is iniquity in me, put me to death yourself." David was saying, if I have truly done wrong, I would rather die by your hand than be handed over to your father.

20:9-11 *And Jonathan said, "Far be it from you! For if I certainly know that the evil has been determined by my father to come on you, would I not tell it to you?" And David said to Jonathan, "Who will tell me, or what **if** your father answers you harshly?" And Jonathan said to David, "Come, and let us go out **to** the field." And the two of them went out **to** the field.*

"Far be it from you! For if I certainly know that the evil has been determined by my father to come on you, would I not tell it to you?" Jonathan promised to tell him. But David had a practical question: "Who will tell me, or what if your father answers you harshly?" How would David find out without being seen?

"Come, and let us go out to the field." Jonathan took him outside where they could not be overheard. Friends who face danger together need a safe place to talk.

20:12-17 *And Jonathan said to David, "The LORD, the God of Israel! When I sound out my father about this time tomorrow,* ***or*** *the third* ***day****, and look,* ***there is*** *good toward David, will I not then send to you and uncover your ear? Thus may the LORD do to Jonathan, and thus may He add! If it pleases my father* ***to bring*** *the evil on you, then I will uncover your ear and send you away, and you shall go in peace. And may the LORD be with you, just as He has been with my father. And* ***will you*** *not, while I am still alive, and* ***will you*** *not do with me the steadfast love of the LORD, that I may not die? And you shall not cut off your steadfast love from my house forever, not even when the LORD cuts off the enemies of David, each one from the face of the ground." And Jonathan made* ***a covenant*** *with the house of David, and the LORD shall require* ***it*** *from the hand of the enemies of David. And Jonathan again made David swear by his love for him, for with the love of his own soul he loved him.*

Jonathan made a solemn oath. "The LORD, the God of Israel!" He would sound out his father and let David know either way. "Thus may the LORD do to Jonathan, and thus may He add!" This was a common form of oath: may God punish me, and more, if I do not keep my word.

"And may the LORD be with you, just as He has been with my father." Jonathan understood. The LORD had once been with Saul. Now He was with David. Jonathan knew David would be king, and he was at peace with it.

Then Jonathan asked for something in return. "Will you not, while I am still alive, and will you not do with me the steadfast love of the LORD, that I may not die?" In that world, when a new king took the throne from another family, he often killed all the old king's sons and grandsons, so that no one could claim the throne (1 Kings 15:29). Jonathan was asking David to show him the steadfast love of the LORD, God's own kind of faithful kindness.

"And you shall not cut off your steadfast love from my house forever, not even when the LORD cuts off the enemies of David." Jonathan was asking David to protect his children and grandchildren, even after Jonathan was gone.

"And Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David." The covenant now reached beyond the two men to their families. "And Jonathan again made David swear by his love for him, for with the love of his own soul he loved him."

Did David keep this promise? Yes. Years later, when David was king, he asked, "Is there still anyone who is left of the house of Saul, that I may do steadfast love with him for the sake of Jonathan?" (2 Samuel 9:1). He found Jonathan's son Mephibosheth, who was lame in both feet, gave him back his grandfather's land, and had him eat at the king's table like one of his own sons (2 Samuel 9:7, 11).

This is a beautiful picture of God's own steadfast love. Mephibosheth had done nothing to earn a place at the king's table. He was welcomed because of a covenant made with someone else. That is how we come to God. We are welcomed at His table, not because of anything we have done, but because of the covenant God has made in Christ.

20:18-23 *And Jonathan said to him, "Tomorrow **is** the new moon, and you will be missed, for your seat will be empty. And **on** the third **day** you shall go down quickly, and you shall come to the place where you hid yourself on the day of the deed, and you shall stay beside the stone Ezel. And I, I will shoot three arrows to its side, as though sending **them** for myself to a target. And look, I will send the lad, **saying**, 'Go, find the arrows.' If I say clearly to the lad, 'Look, the arrows **are** on this side of you, take it,' then come, for **there is** peace for you and **there is** nothing **wrong**, **as** the LORD lives. And if I say thus to the young man, 'Look, the arrows **are** beyond you,' go, for the LORD has sent you away. And the matter which we have spoken, I and you, look, the LORD **is** between me and you forever."*

"Tomorrow is the new moon, and you will be missed, for your seat will be empty." Jonathan laid out the signal. On the third day David was to hide by "the stone Ezel," a landmark in the field. Jonathan would come out as if for target practice and shoot three arrows. Then he would send a boy to find them.

If Jonathan called out that the arrows were on this side of the boy, David was safe. But if he called out, "Look, the arrows are beyond you," then David was to go, "for the LORD has sent you away." The words were plain enough for the boy to hear without suspecting anything, and they would tell David everything.

Notice what Jonathan said: "the LORD has sent you away." Even if David had to run, it would be under God's hand. Jonathan saw God in both outcomes.

"And the matter which we have spoken, I and you, look, the LORD is between me and you forever." God was the witness of their covenant. A friendship with God at the center of it is the strongest kind there is.

20:24-26 *And David hid himself in the field. And it was the new moon, and the king sat down at the food to eat. And the king sat on his seat as time by time, on the seat by the wall; and Jonathan arose, and Abner sat at the side of Saul, and the place of David was empty. And Saul did not speak anything on that day, for he said, "It **is** a chance **event**; he **is** not clean; surely **he is** not clean."*

"And David hid himself in the field. And it was the new moon, and the king sat down at the food to eat." The scene is full of tension. Saul sat in his usual seat "by the wall," a safe seat with his back protected. Abner sat beside him. Jonathan "arose," which may mean he stood to serve or changed seats. "And the place of David was empty."

On the first day Saul said nothing. He told himself, "It is a chance event; he is not clean; surely he is not clean." Under the law, a man who was ceremonially unclean, for example from touching a dead body or from certain bodily discharges, could not eat a sacred meal until he was clean again, usually at evening (Leviticus 7:20-21; 15:16). Saul assumed something like that had happened.

20:27-29 *And it was, on the day after the new moon, the second **day**, and the place of David was empty. And Saul said to Jonathan his son, "Why has the son of Jesse not come, both yesterday and today, to the food?" And Jonathan answered Saul, "David earnestly asked leave of me **to go** to Bethlehem. And he said, 'Please let me go, for a sacrifice of the clan **is** ours in the city, and my brother, he has commanded me; and now, if I have found favor in your eyes, please let me get away and see my brothers.' Therefore he has not come to the table of the king."*

"On the day after the new moon, the second day, and the place of David was empty." Now Saul spoke. "Why has the son of Jesse not come, both yesterday and today, to the food?" Notice he did not call him David, or my son-in-law. He called him "the son of Jesse," a way of putting him down, as if to say, that nobody from Bethlehem.

Jonathan gave the answer they had agreed on. "David earnestly asked leave of me to go to Bethlehem." He said there was a family sacrifice and that David's brother had told him to come. "Therefore he has not come to the table of the king."

20:30-31 *And the anger of Saul burned against Jonathan, and he said to him, "Son of a perverse **woman** of rebelliousness! Do I not know that you are choosing the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of the nakedness of your mother? For all the days that the son of Jesse lives on the earth, you and your kingdom will not be established. And now, send and take him to me, for he **is** a son of death."*

"And the anger of Saul burned against Jonathan." Saul's rage turned on his own son. "Son of a perverse woman of rebelliousness!" This was a vulgar insult, the kind of thing a man says to wound. Saul attacked Jonathan, and even Jonathan's mother, in front of everyone. He accused Jonathan of "choosing the son of Jesse to your own shame."

Then Saul said what was really in his heart. "For all the days that the son of Jesse lives on the earth, you and your kingdom will not be established." Saul was not only jealous. He was afraid for his dynasty. He knew, as Jonathan did, that David was the man God had chosen. But Saul would not accept it.

"And now, send and take him to me, for he is a son of death." A son of death is a man marked to die. Saul gave the order plainly. There was no more pretending.

20:32-34 *And Jonathan answered Saul his father, and he said to him, "Why should he be put to death? What has he done?" And Saul hurled the spear at him to strike him; and Jonathan knew that it had been determined by his father to kill David. And Jonathan arose from the table in burning anger, and he did not eat food on the second day of the new moon, for he was grieved for David, because his father had put him to shame.*

"Why should he be put to death? What has he done?" Jonathan asked the same question David had asked in verse 1. It is the right question. David had done nothing to deserve death.

"And Saul hurled the spear at him to strike him." Saul tried to kill his own son. Jealousy that is not dealt with will in the end attack anyone who stands in its way, even those we love most.

"And Jonathan knew that it had been determined by his father to kill David." Now there was no doubt. "And Jonathan arose from the table in burning anger, and he did not eat food on the second day of the new moon, for he was grieved for David, because his father had put him to shame." Jonathan was angry, and his anger was right. But notice what it was about: he was grieved for David. He was not mainly angry over the insult to himself, or his lost throne. He grieved for his friend.

20:35-40 *And it was in the morning, and Jonathan went out **to** the field at the appointed time **with** David, and a small lad **was** with him. And he said to his lad, "Run, please find the arrows which I am shooting." The lad ran, and he shot the arrow to make **it** pass beyond him. And the lad came to the place of the arrow which Jonathan had shot, and Jonathan called out after the lad, and he said, "**Is** not the arrow beyond you?" And Jonathan called out after the lad, "Quickly! Hurry! Do not stand **still**!" And the lad of Jonathan gathered the arrows, and he came to his master. And the lad did not know anything; only Jonathan and David knew the matter. And Jonathan gave his weapons to the lad who **was** his, and he said to him, "Go, bring **them** to the city."*

"In the morning, and Jonathan went out to the field at the appointed time with David, and a small lad was with him." Jonathan did everything as he had said. "Run, please find the arrows which I am shooting." He shot an arrow beyond the boy and called out, "Is not the arrow beyond you?" That was the signal. David had to go.

"Quickly! Hurry! Do not stand still!" These words were spoken to the boy, but they were meant for David too. There was no time to waste.

"And the lad did not know anything; only Jonathan and David knew the matter." Jonathan gave his weapons to the boy and sent him back to the city. Now the two friends were alone.

20:41-42 *The lad went, and David arose from beside the south, and he fell on his face to the earth and bowed down three times. And they kissed, each his friend, and they wept, each with his friend, until David made **his weeping** great. And Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, since we have sworn, the two of us, in the name of the LORD, saying, 'The LORD will be between me and you, and between my seed and your seed, forever.'" And he arose and went; and Jonathan went **into** the city.*

"David arose from beside the south, and he fell on his face to the earth and bowed down three times." David bowed to Jonathan as the king's son. He honored him even now.

"And they kissed, each his friend, and they wept, each with his friend, until David made his weeping great." In that culture men greeted and parted with a kiss on the cheek, as many in the Middle East still do (Genesis 33:4; Acts 20:37). These two men wept openly. They knew they might never see each other again. In fact, they would meet only once more (23:16-18). There is no shame in a man weeping over a friend. Jesus wept at the tomb of His friend Lazarus (John 11:35).

"Go in peace, since we have sworn, the two of us, in the name of the LORD." Jonathan's last words to David here reminded him of their covenant: the LORD would be between them, and between their descendants, forever.

"And he arose and went; and Jonathan went into the city." David went into years of exile. Jonathan went back to his father's house. Each went where God had placed him. Jonathan stayed loyal to his father as a son, and loyal to David as a friend, and he never betrayed either one. He died fighting beside his father (31:2). David's lament for him is one of the most tender in the Bible: "your love to me was wonderful, more than the love of women" (2 Samuel 1:26), meaning that Jonathan's loyal, self-giving love was rarer and deeper than anything he had known.

What can we learn from this friendship? It was built on God. It was loyal when loyalty cost something. It put the other person first. Jonathan gave up the throne. David kept his promise long after Jonathan was gone. Proverbs says "there is one who loves who clings more than a brother" (Proverbs 18:24). That is the kind of friend Jonathan was. And that is the kind of Friend Jesus is to us. He calls us His friends, and He laid down His life for us (John 15:13-15).

Chapter 20 Summary

David fled from Naioth and asked Jonathan what he had done to make Saul seek his life. Jonathan could not believe his father would hide such a plan from him, but he promised to do whatever David asked. They agreed that David would miss the new moon feast and that Jonathan would learn whether Saul meant harm. Jonathan swore to tell David either way, asked David to show the steadfast love of the LORD to him and his house forever, and made a covenant with the house of David. He set a signal with arrows in the field. On the first day of the feast Saul said nothing, thinking David was unclean, but on the second day he asked about the son of Jesse. When Jonathan gave David's excuse, Saul cursed him, said Jonathan's kingdom would never be established while David lived, called David a son of death, and threw his spear at Jonathan. Jonathan left the table grieving for David. The next morning he shot the arrow beyond the boy as the signal, sent the boy back to the city, and David came out and bowed before him. The two friends kissed and wept, and Jonathan sent David away in peace, reminding him of their covenant before the LORD.

People and Places

- New moon: the first day of each month, marked with sacrifices and a feast (Numbers 10:10; 28:11).
- Steadfast love (hesed): loyal, faithful love that keeps its covenant promises.
- The stone Ezel: a landmark in the field where David hid.
- Mephibosheth: Jonathan's son, whom David later cared for (2 Samuel 9).

Chapter 20 Study Questions

1. What did David ask Jonathan when he came to him, and why did Jonathan not believe it at first? (20:1-2)

2. What plan did David and Jonathan make for the new moon feast? (20:5-7, 18-22)

3. What did Jonathan ask David to promise him, and why? (20:14-17)

4. How did David later keep this promise? (2 Samuel 9:1, 7)

5. What did Saul think on the first day David was missing? (20:26)

6. What did Saul say to Jonathan on the second day, and what did he do? (20:30-33)

7. Why was Jonathan angry, according to 20:34?

8. How did David and Jonathan say goodbye? (20:41-42)

9. Jonathan's friendship with David had God at the center. What would it look like for your closest friendships to have God at the center?

10. Jonathan gave up a throne out of love for his friend and loyalty to God's plan. What might God be asking you to give up for someone else's good?

Chapter 21: David at Nob and Gath

Scripture

21:1-15 And David came to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest; and Ahimelech trembled to meet David, and he said to him, "Why ***are*** you alone, and no man ***is*** with you?" And David said to Ahimelech the priest, "The king commanded me a matter, and he said to me, 'Let no man know anything of the matter on which I am sending you and which I have commanded you.' And the young men I have directed to such and such a place. And now, what is under your hand? Give five ***loaves of*** bread into my hand, or whatever is found." And the priest answered David, and he said, "There is no common bread under my hand, but there is holy bread, if only the young men have kept themselves from a woman." And David answered the priest, and he said to him, "Surely a woman has been withheld from us as yesterday ***and*** the day before, when I went out; and the vessels of the young men were holy, and it ***is*** a common journey; and how much more today will it be holy in the vessel." And the priest gave him holy ***bread***, for there was no bread there except the bread of the presence which was removed from before the LORD, to put hot bread ***in its place*** on the day it was taken away. And there ***was*** a man of the servants of Saul on that day, detained before the LORD, and his name ***was*** Doeg the Edomite, the mighty ***one*** of the shepherds who ***belonged*** to Saul. And David said to Ahimelech, "And is there not here under your hand a spear or a sword? For neither my sword nor my weapons have I taken in my hand, because the matter of the king was urgent." And the priest said, "The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you struck in the valley of Elah, look, it ***is*** wrapped in the cloak behind the ephod. If you will take it for yourself, take ***it***, for there is no other except it here." And David said, "There is none like it; give it to me." And David arose and fled on that day from before Saul, and he came to Achish the king of Gath. And the servants of Achish said to him, "***Is*** this not David the king of the land? ***Is it*** not of this ***one that*** they sing in the dances, saying, 'Saul has struck his thousands, and David his ten thousands'?" And David put these words in his heart, and he was exceedingly afraid of Achish the king of Gath. And he changed his discernment in their eyes, and he acted like a madman in their hand, and he made marks on the doors of the gate, and he let his spittle run down on his beard. And Achish said to his servants, "Look, you see a man acting like a madman. Why do you bring him to me? Am I lacking madmen, that you have brought this ***one*** to act like a madman before me? Shall this ***one*** come into my house?"

Chapter 21 Preview

David is on the run with nothing: no food, no weapon, no friends at his side. He goes first to Nob, the town of the priests, where the tabernacle now stands. He tells the priest Ahimelech a story about a secret mission for the king and asks for bread. The only bread there is the holy bread of the presence, set out before the LORD each Sabbath, and Ahimelech gives it to him. Jesus Himself will point back to this moment a thousand years later. David also takes the sword of Goliath. But one of Saul's men, Doeg the Edomite, is there that day and sees it all.

Then David does something surprising. He flees to Gath, Goliath's own city, and asks for shelter from the Philistine king Achish. When the king's servants recognize him as the David of the song, David is terrified, and he pretends to be insane, scratching on the doors and letting spit run down

his beard. Achish sends him away. This is a chapter about fear. We see the giant-killer afraid, telling lies and acting the fool. And yet God is still protecting him, and David's psalms from these days show us how he found his way back to trust.

Chapter 21 Study

21:1 *And David came to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest; and Ahimelech trembled to meet David, and he said to him, "Why **are** you alone, and no man **is** with you?"*

"And David came to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest." After Shiloh was destroyed (Jeremiah 7:12), the tabernacle and the priests moved to Nob, a town just north of Jerusalem. That is why 22:19 calls it "Nob, the city of the priests." Ahimelech was the great-grandson of Eli. He was the son of Ahitub (22:9), and Ahitub was Ichabod's brother (14:3). He was probably the same man called Ahijah in 14:3, since the two names mean much the same thing.

"And Ahimelech trembled to meet David." Why would a priest be afraid of David? David was the king's son-in-law and a famous commander. If he came alone and unexpected, something was wrong. "Why are you alone, and no man is with you?"

21:2-3 *And David said to Ahimelech the priest, "The king commanded me a matter, and he said to me, 'Let no man know anything of the matter on which I am sending you and which I have commanded you.' And the young men I have directed to such and such a place. And now, what is under your hand? Give five **loaves of** bread into my hand, or whatever is found."*

"The king commanded me a matter." David said the king had told him, "Let no man know anything of the matter on which I am sending you." This was a lie. Saul had not sent David anywhere. Saul was trying to kill him. David also said he had arranged to meet "the young men" at some place. There may have been a few men with him (Mark 2:25 speaks of "those with him"), but there was no mission from the king.

Why did David lie? He was afraid, and perhaps he thought he was protecting Ahimelech by keeping him from knowing the truth. But the lie did not protect anyone. In the next chapter it will cost Ahimelech his life, and David will admit it: "I, I have caused the death of every soul of the house of your father" (22:22). The Bible does not hide the sins of its heroes. David was a man after God's heart, and he still lied when he was afraid. We should not copy his lie. We should learn from what it cost.

"And now, what is under your hand? Give five loaves of bread into my hand, or whatever is found." David had left in such a hurry that he had no food.

21:4-6 *And the priest answered David, and he said, "There is no common bread under my hand, but there is holy bread, if only the young men have kept themselves from a woman." And David answered the priest, and he said to him, "Surely a woman has been withheld from us as yesterday* ***and*** *the day before, when I went out; and the vessels of the young men were holy, and it* ***is*** *a common journey; and how much more today will it be holy in the vessel." And the priest gave him holy* ***bread****, for there was no bread there except the bread of the presence which was removed from before the LORD, to put hot bread* ***in its place*** *on the day it was taken away.*

"There is no common bread under my hand, but there is holy bread." Common bread was ordinary bread anyone could eat. The holy bread was the bread of the presence. Every Sabbath, twelve fresh loaves were set out on a table in the holy place of the tabernacle, one for each tribe of Israel, before the face of the LORD (Leviticus 24:5-8). When the new loaves were put out, the old ones were eaten by the priests in a holy place (Leviticus 24:9). It was a sign that God's people lived in His presence and that He fed them.

Ahimelech had one condition: "if only the young men have kept themselves from a woman." In the law, a man who had relations with his wife was ceremonially unclean until evening (Leviticus 15:18), and soldiers on a holy mission kept themselves apart (Deuteronomy 23:9-11; 2 Samuel 11:11). David said they had: "the vessels of the young men were holy," meaning their bodies or their gear were ceremonially clean.

"And the priest gave him holy bread, for there was no bread there except the bread of the presence which was removed from before the LORD." This was the old bread, just taken off the table and replaced with "hot bread," fresh loaves, that day. So it was a Sabbath.

Was it right for David to eat it? Jesus answers that question. When the Pharisees criticized His disciples for picking grain on the Sabbath, He said, "Did you never read what David did when he had need and was hungry, he and those with him?" (Mark 2:25). He went on to say that David "ate the loaves of the presentation, which it is not lawful to eat except for the priests, and he gave also to those who were with him" (Mark 2:26). Then He said, "The Sabbath was made for the sake of man, not man for the sake of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27).

What did Jesus mean? He did not say the law did not matter. He said that God gave the law for the good of His people, and that meeting a real human need, in this case hunger, was not breaking the heart of the law. The rule about the holy bread was a ceremonial rule. The command to love and to preserve life is weightier. In Matthew's account Jesus adds that if they had understood that God desires mercy and not sacrifice, they "would not have condemned the guiltless" (Matthew 12:7). It is the same truth Samuel told Saul: God wants a heart of mercy and obedience more than ritual (15:22). Jesus also said that "the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:28). If a priest could give David the holy bread, how much more could the Lord of the Sabbath decide what was right on His own day?

Notice something else. Jesus did not praise David's lie. He pointed to David's need and the priest's mercy.

Mark 2:26 says this happened "in the days of Abiathar the high priest," but 1 Samuel says Ahimelech was the priest. Abiathar was Ahimelech's son, and he was there at Nob (22:20). Bible teachers explain this in a few ways. Many point out that the Greek words can mean in the passage about Abiathar, the way Jesus spoke of the section of Scripture "at the bush" in Mark 12:26. Others note that Abiathar soon became the high priest and was the better-known name, so Jesus spoke of that time by his name, the way we often name a period by its best-known leader. Others note that the names of these two priests seem to be used for each other elsewhere (2 Samuel 8:17; 1 Chronicles 24:6). Any of these answers is reasonable, and none of them means Jesus made a mistake.

21:7 *And there **was** a man of the servants of Saul on that day, detained before the LORD, and his name **was** Doeg the Edomite, the mighty **one** of the shepherds who **belonged** to Saul.*

"And there was a man of the servants of Saul on that day, detained before the LORD, and his name was Doeg the Edomite." Detained before the LORD probably means Doeg was kept at the tabernacle that day for some religious reason, perhaps a vow, a purification or a Sabbath rule. He was an Edomite, a descendant of Esau, and "the mighty one of the shepherds who belonged to Saul," the chief over Saul's herdsmen.

The writer drops this verse into the middle of the story like a warning bell. Someone was watching. David saw him too (22:22). We will find out in the next chapter what Doeg did with what he saw.

21:8-9 *And David said to Ahimelech, "And is there not here under your hand a spear or a sword? For neither my sword nor my weapons have I taken in my hand, because the matter of the king was urgent." And the priest said, "The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you struck in the valley of Elah, look, it **is** wrapped in the cloak behind the ephod. If you will take it for yourself, take **it**, for there is no other except it here." And David said, "There is none like it; give it to me."*

"And is there not here under your hand a spear or a sword?" David was unarmed. He claimed it was because "the matter of the king was urgent," which was part of the same lie.

"The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you struck in the valley of Elah, look, it is wrapped in the cloak behind the ephod." After David's victory, David first kept Goliath's weapons in his tent (17:54). At some point the sword was given to the LORD and kept at the tabernacle. The ephod was a special garment worn by the high priest, with the Urim and Thummim connected to it, used to seek God's will (Exodus 28:6, 30). The sword was kept behind it, as a memorial of what God had done.

"There is none like it; give it to me." Do you see what this meant to David? Every time he looked at that sword, he would remember the day God gave him victory over the giant. But notice too that the boy who had once said the LORD does not save by sword and spear (17:47) now felt he needed one. Fear had crept in.

21:10-12 *And David arose and fled on that day from before Saul, and he came to Achish the king of Gath. And the servants of Achish said to him, "**Is** this not David the king of the land? **Is it** not of this **one that** they sing in the dances, saying, 'Saul has struck his thousands, and David his ten thousands'?" And David put these words in his heart, and he was exceedingly afraid of Achish the king of Gath.*

"And David arose and fled on that day from before Saul, and he came to Achish the king of Gath." This is one of the strangest moves David ever made. Gath was Goliath's hometown. David walked into the Philistine city carrying the sword of the man he killed. Why would he do that? He must have thought Saul would never look for him there, and perhaps he hoped that as Saul's enemy he would be welcome. Fear does not always think clearly.

"Is this not David the king of the land?" The Philistines may have called him king because he was a famous leader, or because word had spread that he would be king. They knew the song too: "Saul has struck his thousands, and David his ten thousands" (18:7). To them, David was the man who had killed thousands of their own people.

"And David put these words in his heart, and he was exceedingly afraid of Achish the king of Gath." David realized he had walked into a trap.

21:13-15 *And he changed his discernment in their eyes, and he acted like a madman in their hand, and he made marks on the doors of the gate, and he let his spittle run down on his beard. And Achish said to his servants, "Look, you see a man acting like a madman. Why do you bring him to me? Am I lacking madmen, that you have brought this **one** to act like a madman before me? Shall this **one** come into my house?"*

"And he changed his discernment in their eyes, and he acted like a madman in their hand." David pretended to be insane. "He made marks on the doors of the gate, and he let his spittle run down on his beard." In that culture a man's beard was a sign of his dignity. To drool into it was the deepest kind of shame. Some think people in that day were also afraid to harm a man who seemed mad.

It worked. "Look, you see a man acting like a madman. Why do you bring him to me? Am I lacking madmen, that you have brought this one to act like a madman before me?" Achish did not want him in his house, and he let David go.

This is a low point for David. He had faced Goliath with calm faith. Now he was drooling on his beard to save his life. What happened? He had taken his eyes off the LORD, and fear filled the space.

But here is the good news. God did not leave him. Two psalms come from this time. Psalm 56 has the heading "when the Philistines seized him in Gath," and in it David says, "In the day I fear, I will trust in You" (Psalm 56:3). Psalm 34 has the heading "when he changed his sense before Abimelech" (Abimelech was probably a royal title for the Philistine king, as Pharaoh was for Egypt's kings, here used of Achish). In Psalm 34 David says, "I sought the LORD, and He answered

me, and from all my fears He rescued me" (Psalm 34:4), and "The LORD is near to the broken of heart" (Psalm 34:18).

David did not stay in his fear. He brought it to God. That is the lesson for us. Even strong believers have days when fear wins and we do foolish things. The answer is not to pretend it did not happen. It is to go back to the LORD, confess, and trust Him again. "Taste and see that the LORD is good" was written by a man who had just been drooling into his beard in Gath (Psalm 34:8).

Chapter 21 Summary

David fled to Nob, where Ahimelech the priest trembled to see him alone. David lied, saying the king had sent him on a secret mission, and asked for bread. The only bread there was the holy bread of the presence, just replaced with fresh loaves, and Ahimelech gave it to David on condition that his men were ceremonially clean. Jesus later pointed to this event to show that meeting real human need fits the heart of God's law (Mark 2:25-27). Doeg the Edomite, Saul's chief herdsman, was at the tabernacle that day. David asked for a weapon, and Ahimelech gave him Goliath's sword, which had been kept behind the ephod. David then fled to Achish king of Gath, but when the king's servants recognized him as the David of the song, he was very afraid and pretended to be insane, scratching on the gate doors and drooling into his beard. Achish sent him away.

People and Places

- Nob: the town of the priests, just north of Jerusalem, where the tabernacle stood in Saul's day.
- Ahimelech: the priest at Nob, son of Ahitub and great-grandson of Eli.
- Bread of the presence: twelve loaves set out before the LORD every Sabbath, then eaten by the priests (Leviticus 24:5-9).
- Doeg the Edomite: Saul's chief herdsman, an Edomite descended from Esau.
- Ephod: a sacred garment of the high priest, used in seeking God's will.
- Achish: the Philistine king of Gath.

Fear and bad choices took me to rock bottom more than once. I did things I deeply regret, and those choices hurt people I love. I am not proud of those seasons. God did not leave me there, and that is the only reason I can write about it now.

Chapter 21 Study Questions

1. Why do you think Ahimelech was afraid when David came alone? (21:1)

2. What did David tell Ahimelech, and was it true? (21:2; 22:22)

3. What was the bread of the presence, and who was normally allowed to eat it? (21:4-6; Leviticus 24:5-9)

4. How did Jesus use this story, and what was His point? (Mark 2:25-28; Matthew 12:3-7)

5. Who was watching at Nob that day, and why does the writer mention him? (21:7; 22:9)

6. What weapon did David receive, and what might it have reminded him of? (21:8-9)

7. Why did David pretend to be insane in Gath? (21:10-13)

8. What do Psalms 34 and 56 tell us about how David dealt with his fear? (Psalm 34:4; 56:3)

9. David told a lie when he was afraid, and it hurt others. When has fear pushed you to do something you later regretted?

10. What would it look like for you to say with David, "In the day I fear, I will trust in You" (Psalm 56:3)? What fear do you need to bring to God today?

Chapter 22: The Cave of Adullam and the Priests of Nob

Scripture

22:1-10 And David went from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam; and his brothers and all the house of his father heard, and they went down to him there. And every man in distress and every man who had a creditor and every man bitter of soul gathered to him, and he became commander over them; and there were with him about four hundred men. And David went from there ***to*** Mizpeh of Moab, and he said to the king of Moab, "Please let my father and my mother go out ***to be*** with you until I know what God will do for me." And he led them before the king of Moab, and they dwelt with him all the days David was in the stronghold. And Gad the prophet said to David, "Do not remain in the stronghold; go, and you shall come for yourself ***into*** the land of Judah." And David went and came ***into*** the forest of Hereth. And Saul heard that David and the men who ***were*** with him were known; and Saul ***was*** sitting in Gibeah under the tamarisk at the high place, and his spear ***was*** in his hand, and all his servants ***were*** stationed by him. And Saul said to his servants who were stationed by him, "Listen, please, Benjaminites! Will the son of Jesse also give to all of you fields and vineyards? Will he appoint all of you commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds, that all of you have conspired against me, and there is no one uncovering my ear when my son makes ***a covenant*** with the son of Jesse, and there is none of you pained for me or uncovering my ear that my son has stirred up my servant against me as one lying in wait, as ***at*** this day?" And Doeg the Edomite answered, and he ***was*** stationed over the servants of Saul, and he said, "I saw the son of Jesse coming to Nob, to Ahimelech the son of Ahitub. And he inquired of the LORD for him, and he gave him provisions, and the sword of Goliath the Philistine he gave to him."

22:11-23 And the king sent to summon Ahimelech the son of Ahitub the priest, and all the house of his father, the priests who ***were*** in Nob; and all of them came to the king. And Saul said, "Listen, please, son of Ahitub." And he said, "Here I ***am***, my lord." And Saul said to him, "Why have you conspired against me, you and the son of Jesse, in your giving him bread and a sword, and inquiring of God for him, to rise up against me as one lying in wait, as ***at*** this day?" And Ahimelech answered the king, and he said, "And who among all your servants ***is*** like David, faithful, and son-in-law of the king, and turning aside to your bodyguard, and honored in your house? Did I begin today to inquire of God for him? Far be it from me! Let the king not put anything against his servant, against all the house of my father, for your servant did not know anything of all this, small or great." And the king said, "You shall surely die, Ahimelech, you and all the house of your father." And the king said to the runners who were stationed by him, "Turn around and put to death the priests of the LORD, because their hand also ***is*** with David, and because they knew that he was fleeing and did not uncover my ear." And the servants of the king were not willing to stretch out their hand to fall on the priests of the LORD. And the king said to Doeg, "You, turn around and fall on the priests." And Doeg the Edomite turned around, and he, he fell on the priests, and he killed on that day eighty-five men carrying a linen ephod. And Nob, the city of the priests, he struck by the mouth of the sword, from man to woman, from child to nursing infant, and ox and donkey and sheep, by the mouth of the sword. And one son of Ahimelech the son of Ahitub escaped, and his name ***was*** Abiathar, and he fled after David. And Abiathar told David

that Saul had killed the priests of the LORD. And David said to Abiathar, "I knew on that day, because Doeg the Edomite ***was*** there, that he would surely tell Saul. I, I have caused ***the death of*** every soul of the house of your father. Stay with me; do not be afraid; for he who seeks my life seeks your life; for you ***are*** in safekeeping with me."

Chapter 22 Preview

David escapes from Gath to the cave of Adullam, and people begin to come to him: first his own family, then about four hundred men who are in distress, in debt, or bitter of soul. David becomes their leader. He takes his parents to safety in Moab, and the prophet Gad tells him to go back into the land of Judah.

Meanwhile, Saul sits under a tree at Gibeah with his spear in his hand, accusing his own men of plotting against him. Doeg the Edomite speaks up and tells what he saw at Nob. Saul summons Ahimelech and all the priests. Ahimelech answers honestly that he knew nothing of any plot. Saul orders them killed. His own guards refuse to lift a hand against the priests of the LORD, but Doeg does it, and then he destroys the whole town of Nob. One priest, Abiathar, escapes to David. This is one of the darkest chapters in the book. It shows how far a man can fall when he hardens his heart against God, and it shows David taking responsibility for what his lie helped cause.

Chapter 22 Study

22:1-2 *And David went from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam; and his brothers and all the house of his father heard, and they went down to him there. And every man in distress and every man who had a creditor and every man bitter of soul gathered to him, and he became commander over them; and there were with him about four hundred men.*

"And David went from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam." Adullam was a town in the low hills of Judah, about halfway between Gath and Bethlehem. The hills there are full of caves. Psalm 142 has the heading "when he was in the cave," and in it David says there was no one who looked out for him, and he cried to the LORD as his refuge. Psalm 57 also comes from a time "when he fled from before Saul in the cave."

"And his brothers and all the house of his father heard, and they went down to him there." David's family was no longer safe either. When Saul turned on David, he would turn on them too. And notice that the brothers who once looked down on him (17:28) now came to him.

"And every man in distress and every man who had a creditor and every man bitter of soul gathered to him." A creditor is someone you owe money to. These were men in trouble, men in debt, and men who were bitter and angry about how life had treated them. It was not an impressive army. "And he became commander over them; and there were with him about four hundred men."

Do you see what God was doing? He was giving David a people to shepherd, and they were the kind nobody else wanted. Over the years David turned these men into his mighty men, some of the greatest warriors in Israel's history (2 Samuel 23:8-39). God often builds His work from

broken people. Paul reminds the church that not many of us were wise or powerful or noble when God called us (1 Corinthians 1:26-27). Jesus, the Son of David, gathered tax collectors, fishermen and sinners around Him and made them His people.

22:3-4 *And David went from there **to** Mizpeh of Moab, and he said to the king of Moab, "Please let my father and my mother go out **to be** with you until I know what God will do for me." And he led them before the king of Moab, and they dwelt with him all the days David was in the stronghold.*

"And David went from there to Mizpeh of Moab." Mizpeh means watchtower, and this was a place in Moab, east of the Dead Sea. "Please let my father and my mother go out to be with you until I know what God will do for me."

Why Moab? David's great-grandmother Ruth was a Moabite (Ruth 4:13, 17). The king of Moab may have welcomed David's family for that reason, and because he was also Saul's enemy (14:47). David took care of his aging parents even while he was running for his life. Honoring your father and mother does not stop when life gets hard.

Notice David's words: "until I know what God will do for me." David did not know the plan. But he knew God had one.

"And they dwelt with him all the days David was in the stronghold." The stronghold may have been the cave of Adullam, or a fortress in Moab.

22:5 *And Gad the prophet said to David, "Do not remain in the stronghold; go, and you shall come for yourself **into** the land of Judah." And David went and came **into** the forest of Hereth.*

"And Gad the prophet said to David, Do not remain in the stronghold; go, and you shall come for yourself into the land of Judah." This is the first time we meet Gad. He will stay with David for the rest of his life and help write the record of his reign (2 Samuel 24:11; 1 Chronicles 29:29).

Why would God send David back into Judah, where Saul could find him? Because David was to be king of Israel, not a refugee in Moab. His place was among his own people, even if it was dangerous. God does not always lead us to the safest place. He leads us to the right place.

"And David went and came into the forest of Hereth." Hereth was a wooded area in Judah. David obeyed.

22:6-8 *And Saul heard that David and the men who **were** with him were known; and Saul **was** sitting in Gibeah under the tamarisk at the high place, and his spear **was** in his hand, and all his servants **were** stationed by him. And Saul said to his servants who were stationed by him, "Listen, please, Benjaminites! Will the son of Jesse also give to all of you fields and vineyards? Will he appoint all of you commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds, that all of you have conspired against me, and there is no one uncovering my ear when my son makes **a covenant** with the son of Jesse, and there is none of you pained for me or uncovering my ear that my son has stirred up my servant against me as one lying in wait, as **at** this day?"*

"And Saul was sitting in Gibeah under the tamarisk at the high place, and his spear was in his hand." A tamarisk is a desert tree with feathery branches. A high place was a hilltop where people met for worship or gathered for meetings. The picture says a lot. David was gathering men in a cave. Saul was sitting under a tree with a spear in his hand, surrounded by his servants, and full of suspicion.

"Listen, please, Benjaminites!" Saul appealed to his own tribe. "Will the son of Jesse also give to all of you fields and vineyards?" Saul was saying, I am a Benjaminite and I have rewarded you. David is from Judah. Do you think he will do the same for you? Samuel had warned that a king would take fields and vineyards and give them to his servants (8:14). Saul had done exactly that.

"All of you have conspired against me, and there is no one uncovering my ear when my son makes a covenant with the son of Jesse." Saul accused everyone. He blamed Jonathan for stirring up David against him "as one lying in wait." None of it was true. David was not lying in wait for Saul. He was hiding from him. But a jealous, fearful heart sees enemies everywhere.

22:9-10 *And Doeg the Edomite answered, and he **was** stationed over the servants of Saul, and he said, "I saw the son of Jesse coming to Nob, to Ahimelech the son of Ahitub. And he inquired of the LORD for him, and he gave him provisions, and the sword of Goliath the Philistine he gave to him."*

"And Doeg the Edomite answered." Doeg saw his chance to win the king's favor. "I saw the son of Jesse coming to Nob, to Ahimelech the son of Ahitub. And he inquired of the LORD for him, and he gave him provisions, and the sword of Goliath the Philistine he gave to him."

Some of this was true, the bread and the sword. Chapter 21 does not tell us that Ahimelech inquired of the LORD for David. Ahimelech's answer in 22:15 suggests he had done that before, as a normal part of serving the king's commander. But Doeg left out the most important fact. He did not tell Saul that David had lied to Ahimelech, and that the priest thought David was on the king's business. He told a story with true facts arranged to make an innocent man look guilty. Psalm 52, written "when Doeg the Edomite came and told Saul," asks, "Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man?" (Psalm 52:1), and says his tongue plans destruction.

22:11-13 *And the king sent to summon Ahimelech the son of Ahitub the priest, and all the house of his father, the priests who **were** in Nob; and all of them came to the king. And Saul said, "Listen, please, son of Ahitub." And he said, "Here I **am**, my lord." And Saul said to him, "Why have you conspired against me, you and the son of Jesse, in your giving him bread and a sword, and inquiring of God for him, to rise up against me as one lying in wait, as **at** this day?"*

"And the king sent to summon Ahimelech the son of Ahitub the priest, and all the house of his father, the priests who were in Nob." They all came. They had no reason to be afraid. They had done nothing wrong.

"Listen, please, son of Ahitub." Saul did not even call him by name. "Here I am, my lord." Ahimelech answered respectfully.

"Why have you conspired against me, you and the son of Jesse, in your giving him bread and a sword, and inquiring of God for him, to rise up against me as one lying in wait?" Saul had already decided Ahimelech was guilty. The trial was a show.

22:14-15 *And Ahimelech answered the king, and he said, "And who among all your servants **is** like David, faithful, and son-in-law of the king, and turning aside to your bodyguard, and honored in your house? Did I begin today to inquire of God for him? Far be it from me! Let the king not put anything against his servant, against all the house of my father, for your servant did not know anything of all this, small or great."*

Ahimelech gave an honest and brave answer. "And who among all your servants is like David, faithful, and son-in-law of the king, and turning aside to your bodyguard, and honored in your house?" He was saying, David is the most loyal man you have. He is your son-in-law and the captain of your guard. Why would I think he was your enemy?

"Did I begin today to inquire of God for him? Far be it from me!" Ahimelech had helped David before as the king's officer. "For your servant did not know anything of all this, small or great." Ahimelech told the truth. He did not know.

22:16-17 *And the king said, "You shall surely die, Ahimelech, you and all the house of your father." And the king said to the runners who were stationed by him, "Turn around and put to death the priests of the LORD, because their hand also **is** with David, and because they knew that he was fleeing and did not uncover my ear." And the servants of the king were not willing to stretch out their hand to fall on the priests of the LORD.*

"You shall surely die, Ahimelech, you and all the house of your father." Saul did not weigh the evidence. He did not listen. He passed a death sentence on a whole family of priests.

"Turn around and put to death the priests of the LORD." Saul ordered his runners, his royal guard, to kill them. Notice what Saul called them: "the priests of the LORD." He knew who they were. He knew who they served.

"And the servants of the king were not willing to stretch out their hand to fall on the priests of the LORD." Saul's own guards refused. They feared God more than the king. This is one of the few

bright spots in the chapter. These men knew that some orders must not be obeyed, even from a king (Acts 5:29).

22:18-19 *And the king said to Doeg, "You, turn around and fall on the priests." And Doeg the Edomite turned around, and he, he fell on the priests, and he killed on that day eighty-five men carrying a linen ephod. And Nob, the city of the priests, he struck by the mouth of the sword, from man to woman, from child to nursing infant, and ox and donkey and sheep, by the mouth of the sword.*

"You, turn around and fall on the priests." So Saul turned to Doeg, the foreigner, the informer, a man who had no fear of God. "And Doeg the Edomite turned around, and he, he fell on the priests, and he killed on that day eighty-five men carrying a linen ephod." The linen ephod was the simple garment that ordinary priests wore when they served (2:18). These were men dressed for the service of God, and they were murdered.

"And Nob, the city of the priests, he struck by the mouth of the sword, from man to woman, from child to nursing infant, and ox and donkey and sheep." This is terrible to read, and it should be. Doeg wiped out the whole town.

Look closely at the words. "From man to woman, from child to nursing infant, and ox and donkey and sheep." These are almost the same words God used when He commanded Saul to devote Amalek to destruction (15:3). Saul refused to carry out God's judgment on Amalek, a guilty nation God had been patient with for centuries. Now he carried out his own "judgment" on the innocent priests of God, with all the fury he had not shown against Amalek. That is what happens when a man hardens his heart. He becomes merciful where God calls for justice, and cruel where God calls for mercy. This was not God's command. It was murder, plain and simple, and Saul bears the guilt for it.

Why did God allow it? This is a hard question, and I want to answer it carefully. Scripture does not tell us all of God's reasons. But it does tell us something. Many years before, God had warned Eli that because of his sons' sin, his family would be cut off from the priesthood, "so that there will not be an old man in your house" (2:31). Ahimelech was Eli's great-grandson. This massacre was part of the fulfillment of that word, and the rest came when Solomon removed Abiathar from the priesthood (1 Kings 2:27).

That does not mean the priests of Nob deserved what Saul and Doeg did to them. Ahimelech was an innocent man, and so were the women and children. Saul and Doeg were fully guilty, and God would hold them to account. But God, who sees the end from the beginning, can work even through the sins of wicked men to bring about what He has said, without ever approving their sin. The cross is the greatest example of that. Wicked men crucified Jesus, and they were guilty, and yet it was God's plan to save the world (Acts 2:23).

If you have ever suffered injustice, especially at the hands of someone with power, this chapter tells you that God sees. The blood of the priests of Nob was not forgotten. Saul's own end, in chapter 31, will come on a mountain where he dies with his sons. And there is a day coming when every wrong will be made right (Revelation 21:4).

22:20-21 *And one son of Ahimelech the son of Ahitub escaped, and his name **was** Abiathar, and he fled after David. And Abiathar told David that Saul had killed the priests of the LORD.*

"And one son of Ahimelech the son of Ahitub escaped, and his name was Abiathar, and he fled after David." God spared one. Abiathar brought the ephod with him (23:6), so from now on David had a priest and a way to seek God's will, while Saul had murdered his own priests. Saul cut himself off from God's guidance with his own hand.

"And Abiathar told David that Saul had killed the priests of the LORD." Imagine that conversation.

22:22-23 *And David said to Abiathar, "I knew on that day, because Doeg the Edomite **was** there, that he would surely tell Saul. I, I have caused **the death of** every soul of the house of your father. Stay with me; do not be afraid; for he who seeks my life seeks your life; for you **are** in safekeeping with me."*

"I knew on that day, because Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul. I, I have caused the death of every soul of the house of your father."

These are some of the most honest words David ever spoke. He did not blame Saul alone, though Saul was the murderer. He did not blame Doeg alone. He said, I caused this. He had seen Doeg at Nob. He had lied to Ahimelech and drawn him in without telling him the danger. David took responsibility.

This is the difference between David and Saul. When Saul was confronted, he blamed the people (15:15, 21). When David saw what he had done, he owned it. That does not undo the harm. But it is the beginning of a right heart before God.

"Stay with me; do not be afraid; for he who seeks my life seeks your life; for you are in safekeeping with me." David could not bring back Abiathar's family, but he could protect the one who was left. He made Abiathar's safety his own responsibility. Abiathar stayed with David for the rest of David's life.

There is something of the gospel in those words. Jesus says to those who come to Him, You are safe with Me. "No one will snatch them out of My hand" (John 10:28).

Chapter 22 Summary

David escaped to the cave of Adullam, and his family came to him, along with about four hundred men who were in distress, in debt or bitter of soul, and he became their leader. He took his father and mother to the king of Moab for safety. The prophet Gad told him to go back into Judah, and he went to the forest of Hereth. Saul, sitting under a tamarisk at Gibeah with his spear in his hand, accused his Benjaminite servants and his son Jonathan of conspiring with David. Doeg the Edomite told Saul that Ahimelech had given David provisions and Goliath's sword and had inquired of the LORD for him. Saul summoned Ahimelech and all the priests of Nob. Ahimelech answered that David was the king's most faithful servant and that he knew nothing of any plot, but Saul condemned him and his whole family. Saul's guards refused to kill the priests of the LORD, so Doeg killed eighty-five priests and struck down the town of Nob, men, women, children

and animals. Ahimelech's son Abiathar escaped to David, and David said he had caused the death of Abiathar's family and promised to keep him safe.

People and Places

- Cave of Adullam: a cave near the town of Adullam in the low hills of Judah.
- Mizpeh of Moab: a place in Moab, east of the Dead Sea, where David's parents found shelter.
- Gad: a prophet who advised David for the rest of his life.
- Forest of Hereth: a wooded area in Judah.
- Tamarisk: a desert tree with small, feathery branches.
- Abiathar: the son of Ahimelech, the only priest of Nob to escape; later high priest under David.
- Linen ephod: the simple linen garment worn by priests when they served.

Chapter 22 Study Questions

1. What kind of men gathered to David at the cave of Adullam? (22:1-2)

2. Why do you think David took his parents to Moab? (22:3-4; Ruth 4:13, 17)

3. What did Gad the prophet tell David to do, and did he obey? (22:5)

4. What did Saul accuse his servants and Jonathan of doing? (22:7-8)

5. What did Doeg tell Saul, and what did he leave out? (22:9-10; 21:2)

6. How did Ahimelech defend himself? (22:14-15)

7. Why did Saul's guards refuse his order, and who carried it out instead? (22:17-18)

8. How did David respond when he heard what had happened? (22:22-23)

9. God gathered broken, indebted and bitter men to David and made them mighty men. How does that encourage you about what God can do with your life?

10. David said, "I, I have caused" it. When you have done wrong, what keeps you from owning it the way David did, and what would change if you did?

Chapter 23: David Rescues Keilah and Flees From Saul

Scripture

23:1-14 And they told David, saying, "Look, ***the*** Philistines are fighting against Keilah, and they are plundering the threshing floors." And David inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall I go, and shall I strike these Philistines?" And the LORD said to David, "Go, and you shall strike the Philistines, and you shall deliver Keilah." And the men of David said to him, "Look, we here in Judah are afraid; and how much more if we go ***to*** Keilah against the battle lines of ***the*** Philistines?" And David once again inquired of the LORD, and the LORD answered him and said, "Arise, go down ***to*** Keilah, for I am giving ***the*** Philistines into your hand." And David and his men went ***to*** Keilah, and he fought against the Philistines, and he drove away their livestock, and he struck them ***with*** a great blow; and David delivered the inhabitants of Keilah. And it was, when Abiathar the son of Ahimelech fled to David ***at*** Keilah, an ephod came down in his hand. And it was told to Saul that David had come ***to*** Keilah. And Saul said, "God has given him over into my hand, for he has shut himself in by entering a city of doors and bar." And Saul summoned all the people to battle, to go down ***to*** Keilah, to lay siege against David and against his men. And David knew that Saul was plotting the evil against him, and he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod near." And David said, "O LORD, God of Israel, Your servant has certainly heard that Saul is seeking to come to Keilah to destroy the city because of me. Will the citizens of Keilah deliver me up into his hand? Will Saul come down just as Your servant has heard? O LORD, God of Israel, please tell Your servant." And the LORD said, "He will come down." And David said, "Will the citizens of Keilah deliver me and my men up into the hand of Saul?" And the LORD said, "They will deliver ***you*** up." And David and his men, about six hundred men, arose, and they went out from Keilah, and they went about wherever they went about. And to Saul it was told that David had escaped from Keilah, and he ceased to go out. And David dwelt in the wilderness in the strongholds, and he dwelt in the hill country in the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul sought him all the days, and God did not give him into his hand.

23:15-29 And David saw that Saul had come out to seek his life; and David ***was*** in the wilderness of Ziph at Horesh. And Jonathan the son of Saul arose and went to David ***at*** Horesh, and he strengthened his hand in God. And he said to him, "Do not be afraid, for the hand of Saul my father will not find you; and you, you will reign over Israel, and I, I will be second to you; and also Saul my father knows ***it is*** so." And the two of them made a covenant before the LORD; and David remained at Horesh, and Jonathan went to his house. And ***the*** Ziphites went up to Saul to Gibeah, saying, "Is not David hiding himself with us in the strongholds at Horesh, on the hill of Hachilah, which ***is*** on the south of the Jeshimon? And now, according to all the desire of your soul, O king, to come down, come down; and ours ***is*** to deliver him up into the hand of the king." And Saul said, "Blessed ***are*** you by the LORD, for you have had compassion on me. Go, please, make ***it*** certain still more, and know and see his place where his foot is, ***and*** who has seen him there; for one has said to me, 'He is very crafty.' And see and know from all the hiding places where he hides himself, and return to me with ***what is*** certain, and I will go with you; and it shall be, if he is in the land, then I will search him out among all the thousands of Judah." And they arose and went to Ziph before Saul. And David and his men ***were*** in the wilderness of Maon in the Arabah, on the

south of the Jeshimon. And Saul and his men went to seek ***him***; and they told David, and he went down ***to*** the rock and remained in the wilderness of Maon. And Saul heard, and he pursued after David ***in*** the wilderness of Maon. And Saul went on this side of the mountain, and David and his men ***were*** on that side of the mountain. And David was hurrying to go away from before Saul, and Saul and his men were surrounding David and his men to seize them. And a messenger came to Saul, saying, "Hurry and come, for ***the*** Philistines have made a raid on the land." And Saul turned back from pursuing after David, and he went to meet ***the*** Philistines. Therefore they called that place Sela-hammahlekoth. And David went up from there, and he dwelt in the strongholds of Engedi.

Chapter 23 Preview

While Saul is busy hunting David, the Philistines raid the town of Keilah in Judah and rob its threshing floors. David asks the LORD whether he should go, and the LORD says yes. His frightened men need more assurance, so David asks again, and the LORD promises victory. David saves Keilah. But when Saul hears that David is inside a walled town, he thinks he has him trapped. David asks God through the ephod whether the people of Keilah will hand him over, and God says they will. So David leaves.

The rest of the chapter is a chase through the wilderness of Judah. In the middle of it Jonathan comes to David one last time and strengthens his hand in God. Then the men of Ziph betray David's hiding place to Saul. Saul's army closes in on one side of a mountain while David hurries away on the other. Just as Saul is about to catch him, a messenger arrives: the Philistines have invaded. Saul turns back, and David escapes. The chapter shows us David learning to seek God's direction at every step, and God protecting him at the last possible moment.

Chapter 23 Study

23:1-2 *And they told David, saying, "Look, **the** Philistines are fighting against Keilah, and they are plundering the threshing floors." And David inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall I go, and shall I strike these Philistines?" And the LORD said to David, "Go, and you shall strike the Philistines, and you shall deliver Keilah."*

"Look, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah, and they are plundering the threshing floors." Keilah was a walled town in the low hills of Judah, a few miles south of Adullam. A threshing floor was a flat, hard surface where grain was beaten out of its husks after harvest. Raiding the threshing floors meant stealing a town's food for the year.

Where was King Saul? It was his job to protect Israel's towns. But Saul was busy chasing David. A leader consumed by jealousy neglects the people he is supposed to serve.

"And David inquired of the LORD, saying, Shall I go, and shall I strike these Philistines?" David did not rush in. He asked God first. This is the first of many times in these chapters that David inquires of the LORD. It is a sharp contrast with Saul, who often acted first and asked later, or did not ask at all. "Go, and you shall strike the Philistines, and you shall deliver Keilah."

23:3-5 *And the men of David said to him, "Look, we here in Judah are afraid; and how much more if we go* ***to*** *Keilah against the battle lines of* ***the*** *Philistines?" And David once again inquired of the LORD, and the LORD answered him and said, "Arise, go down* ***to*** *Keilah, for I am giving* ***the*** *Philistines into your hand." And David and his men went* ***to*** *Keilah, and he fought against the Philistines, and he drove away their livestock, and he struck them* ***with*** *a great blow; and David delivered the inhabitants of Keilah.*

David's men were not so sure. "Look, we here in Judah are afraid; and how much more if we go to Keilah against the battle lines of the Philistines?" They were already outlaws hiding from Saul. Now they were supposed to take on the Philistine army too?

"And David once again inquired of the LORD." David did not scold his men, and he did not just push ahead. He went back to God. Is it wrong to ask God a second time? Not when we ask to be sure of His will, as Gideon did (Judges 6:36-40). God was patient with David's men. "Arise, go down to Keilah, for I am giving the Philistines into your hand."

"And David and his men went to Keilah, and he fought against the Philistines, and he drove away their livestock, and he struck them with a great blow." David delivered the town. The outlaw did the king's job.

23:6 *And it was, when Abiathar the son of Ahimelech fled to David* ***at*** *Keilah, an ephod came down in his hand.*

"When Abiathar the son of Ahimelech fled to David at Keilah, an ephod came down in his hand." This verse explains how David could inquire of the LORD. Abiathar had escaped the massacre at Nob (22:20) and brought the ephod with him. The ephod here is the high priest's ephod, with the Urim and Thummim, the sacred lots used to learn God's answer to a yes or no question (Exodus 28:30; Numbers 27:21). The verse may mean Abiathar reached David before Keilah and was with him there.

Here is the tragic irony. Saul had killed the priests of the LORD. Now the one priest left, and the ephod, were with David. Saul had cut himself off from God's guidance. Later, when he desperately wanted to hear from God, God would not answer him "by Urim" (28:6).

23:7-8 *And it was told to Saul that David had come* ***to*** *Keilah. And Saul said, "God has given him over into my hand, for he has shut himself in by entering a city of doors and bar." And Saul summoned all the people to battle, to go down* ***to*** *Keilah, to lay siege against David and against his men.*

"God has given him over into my hand, for he has shut himself in by entering a city of doors and bar." Saul thought David was trapped inside a walled town with gates and bars. Notice that Saul said, God has given him over. Saul talked as if God was on his side, while he was hunting the man God had chosen. It is a dangerous thing to claim God's blessing on our sin.

"And Saul summoned all the people to battle, to go down to Keilah, to lay siege against David." Saul would call out the whole army against David, but he had not come out to save Keilah from the Philistines.

23:9-13 *And David knew that Saul was plotting the evil against him, and he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod near." And David said, "O LORD, God of Israel, Your servant has certainly heard that Saul is seeking to come to Keilah to destroy the city because of me. Will the citizens of Keilah deliver me up into his hand? Will Saul come down just as Your servant has heard? O LORD, God of Israel, please tell Your servant." And the LORD said, "He will come down." And David said, "Will the citizens of Keilah deliver me and my men up into the hand of Saul?" And the LORD said, "They will deliver* ***you*** *up." And David and his men, about six hundred men, arose, and they went out from Keilah, and they went about wherever they went about. And to Saul it was told that David had escaped from Keilah, and he ceased to go out.*

"David knew that Saul was plotting the evil against him, and he said to Abiathar the priest, Bring the ephod near." Again David sought God.

"Will the citizens of Keilah deliver me up into his hand? Will Saul come down just as Your servant has heard?" David asked two questions. God answered the second first: "He will come down." Then David asked again about Keilah. "They will deliver you up."

After all David had done for them, the people of Keilah would hand him over to save their own skins. They had seen what Saul did to Nob. Perhaps they were afraid. But it was still ingratitude.

This passage also teaches us something about God. God knew not only what would happen, but what would happen if David stayed. Saul did not come, and Keilah did not betray David, because David left. But God knew what they would have done. God's knowledge is perfect. He knows every path we could take and where each one would lead (Psalm 139:1-4). That is why it is so wise to ask Him before we choose.

"And David and his men, about six hundred men, arose, and they went out from Keilah." David's band had grown from four hundred (22:2) to six hundred. "They went about wherever they went about." They kept moving. "And to Saul it was told that David had escaped from Keilah, and he ceased to go out."

23:14 *And David dwelt in the wilderness in the strongholds, and he dwelt in the hill country in the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul sought him all the days, and God did not give him into his hand.*

"And David dwelt in the wilderness in the strongholds, and he dwelt in the hill country in the wilderness of Ziph." The wilderness of Judah is a dry, rugged land of cliffs and canyons sloping down to the Dead Sea. Ziph was a town south of Hebron.

"And Saul sought him all the days, and God did not give him into his hand." This one sentence sums up these chapters. Saul had the army, the spies and the power. David had six hundred men and caves. But God was protecting David, and nothing Saul did could change that. When God has a plan for your life, no enemy can cut it short.

23:15-18 *And David saw that Saul had come out to seek his life; and David **was** in the wilderness of Ziph at Horesh. And Jonathan the son of Saul arose and went to David **at** Horesh, and he strengthened his hand in God. And he said to him, "Do not be afraid, for the hand of Saul my father will not find you; and you, you will reign over Israel, and I, I will be second to you; and also Saul my father knows **it is** so." And the two of them made a covenant before the LORD; and David remained at Horesh, and Jonathan went to his house.*

"And David saw that Saul had come out to seek his life." Imagine what David felt. Day after day, running and hiding, never sure whom to trust. "And David was in the wilderness of Ziph at Horesh," a word that means forest or thicket.

"And Jonathan the son of Saul arose and went to David at Horesh, and he strengthened his hand in God." This is one of the most beautiful verses in the book. Jonathan risked his life and his father's anger to find his friend. And notice what he did. He did not only cheer David up. "He strengthened his hand in God." He pointed David back to the LORD.

That is the best thing a friend can do for us in a hard time. Not just to say, it will be all right, but to remind us that God is faithful. Who in your life does that for you? And for whom can you do it?

"Do not be afraid, for the hand of Saul my father will not find you; and you, you will reign over Israel, and I, I will be second to you." Jonathan said it plainly. He knew God's plan, and he accepted it with joy. "And also Saul my father knows it is so." Saul knew, too (20:31; 24:20). He was fighting what he knew to be God's will.

"And the two of them made a covenant before the LORD." They renewed their covenant (18:3; 20:16-17). "And David remained at Horesh, and Jonathan went to his house." This was the last time they saw each other. Jonathan's hope of being second to David would not come true in this life. He died with his father (31:2). But his words to David came true, and his faithful love has been an example to God's people ever since. "The two are better than the one," Solomon would later write, because when one falls, the other can lift him up (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10).

23:19-20 *And **the** Ziphites went up to Saul to Gibeah, saying, "Is not David hiding himself with us in the strongholds at Horesh, on the hill of Hachilah, which **is** on the south of the Jeshimon? And now, according to all the desire of your soul, O king, to come down, come down; and ours **is** to deliver him up into the hand of the king."*

"And the Ziphites went up to Saul to Gibeah." The men of Ziph were from David's own tribe of Judah, and they betrayed him. "Is not David hiding himself with us in the strongholds at Horesh, on the hill of Hachilah, which is on the south of the Jeshimon?" The Jeshimon was the barren wasteland of the Judean desert. "And ours is to deliver him up into the hand of the king."

Psalm 54 has the heading "when the Ziphites came and said to Saul." In it David cries to God to save him, because strangers had risen against him, and he says, "Look, God is my helper" (Psalm 54:4). When his own people betrayed him, David turned to God.

23:21-23 *And Saul said, "Blessed **are** you by the LORD, for you have had compassion on me. Go, please, make **it** certain still more, and know and see his place where his foot is, **and** who has seen him there; for one has said to me, 'He is very crafty.' And see and know from all the hiding places where he hides himself, and return to me with **what is** certain, and I will go with you; and it shall be, if he is in the land, then I will search him out among all the thousands of Judah."*

"Blessed are you by the LORD, for you have had compassion on me." What a twisted thing to say. Saul called down the LORD's blessing on men for helping him murder an innocent man. He even felt sorry for himself: "you have had compassion on me." Self-pity and jealousy often go together.

"Go, please, make it certain still more, and know and see his place where his foot is." Saul wanted exact information. He had heard that David "is very crafty." "If he is in the land, then I will search him out among all the thousands of Judah." Saul was determined. He would hunt David down clan by clan.

23:24-26 *And they arose and went to Ziph before Saul. And David and his men **were** in the wilderness of Maon in the Arabah, on the south of the Jeshimon. And Saul and his men went to seek **him**; and they told David, and he went down **to** the rock and remained in the wilderness of Maon. And Saul heard, and he pursued after David **in** the wilderness of Maon. And Saul went on this side of the mountain, and David and his men **were** on that side of the mountain. And David was hurrying to go away from before Saul, and Saul and his men were surrounding David and his men to seize them.*

"And David and his men were in the wilderness of Maon in the Arabah." Maon was a town south of Ziph, and the Arabah here means the dry rift land toward the Dead Sea. The Ziphites led Saul toward David, and David moved further south.

"And he went down to the rock and remained in the wilderness of Maon." Saul pursued. The chase came down to one mountain. "Saul went on this side of the mountain, and David and his men were on that side of the mountain." Saul's men were circling around both ends to close the trap. "David was hurrying to go away from before Saul, and Saul and his men were surrounding David and his men to seize them."

It looked like the end. There was nowhere left to run.

23:27-29 *And a messenger came to Saul, saying, "Hurry and come, for **the** Philistines have made a raid on the land." And Saul turned back from pursuing after David, and he went to meet **the** Philistines. Therefore they called that place Sela-hammahlekoth. And David went up from there, and he dwelt in the strongholds of Engedi.*

"And a messenger came to Saul, saying, Hurry and come, for the Philistines have made a raid on the land." At the last possible moment, God stepped in. He used the Philistines, Israel's enemies, to pull Saul away. The very people Saul had failed to fight at Keilah now forced him to stop chasing David.

"And Saul turned back from pursuing after David, and he went to meet the Philistines. Therefore they called that place Sela-hammahlekoth." The name means Rock of Escape, and the Hebrew

may also carry the idea of a rock of separation, the place where Saul and David were parted. Either way, David's men would never forget that rock.

"And David went up from there, and he dwelt in the strongholds of Engedi." Engedi is an oasis on the western shore of the Dead Sea, with a spring and waterfalls in the middle of the desert, and cliffs full of caves. It is still there today.

What does this teach us? God's timing is perfect, even when it seems late. Have you ever felt surrounded, with no way out? God is never surprised. He may not deliver you the way you expect, or as early as you want, but He is never too late. "God is my helper" (Psalm 54:4).

Chapter 23 Summary

When David heard that the Philistines were raiding Keilah, he asked the LORD whether to go, and the LORD said yes. His men were afraid, so he asked again, and the LORD promised to give the Philistines into his hand. David saved Keilah. Abiathar the priest had come to David with the ephod. When Saul heard David was in Keilah, a walled town, he thought God had given David into his hand and called out his army. David asked the LORD through the ephod, and the LORD said Saul would come and the people of Keilah would hand David over, so David and his six hundred men left, and Saul gave up the march. David stayed in the strongholds of the wilderness of Ziph, and Saul searched for him every day, but God did not give David into his hand. Jonathan came to David at Horesh and strengthened his hand in God, telling him he would be king, and they made a covenant before the LORD. The Ziphites told Saul where David was, and Saul blessed them and set out to search him out. In the wilderness of Maon, Saul was closing in around the mountain when a messenger came to say the Philistines had raided the land. Saul turned back, and the place was called the Rock of Escape. David went to the strongholds of Engedi.

People and Places

- Keilah: a walled town in the low hills of Judah, south of Adullam.
- Threshing floor: a flat, hard surface where harvested grain was beaten out of its husks.
- Urim and Thummim: sacred lots kept with the high priest's ephod, used to seek God's answer.
- Wilderness of Ziph: dry hill country around Ziph, south of Hebron.
- Horesh: a wooded place in the wilderness of Ziph.
- Jeshimon: the barren wasteland of the Judean desert.
- Wilderness of Maon: the desert around Maon, south of Ziph.
- Engedi: an oasis with a spring and caves on the western shore of the Dead Sea.

Chapter 23 Study Questions

1. What did David do before going to rescue Keilah, and why did he ask a second time? (23:1-4)

2. Why was it David, not Saul, who rescued Keilah? What does that say about Saul? (23:1-8)

3. How did David learn what Saul and the people of Keilah would do? (23:6, 9-12)

4. What does 23:14 tell us about God's care for David?

5. What did Jonathan do for David at Horesh, and what did he say? (23:16-17)

6. How did the Ziphites treat David, and what did Saul say to them? (23:19-21)

7. How was David saved at the mountain in the wilderness of Maon? (23:26-28)

8. David asked God at every step. How did that help him? (23:2, 4, 10-12)

9. Jonathan "strengthened his hand in God." Who has done that for you, and who could you do it for this week?

10. David was surrounded with no way out, and God rescued him at the last moment. Is there a situation in your life where you need to trust God's timing?

Chapter 24: David Spares Saul in the Cave

Scripture

24:1-12 And it was, just when Saul returned from after the Philistines, that they told him, saying, "Look, David ***is*** in the wilderness of Engedi." And Saul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel, and he went to seek David and his men on the face of the Rocks of the Mountain Goats. And he came to the folds of the sheep on the way, and a cave ***was*** there; and Saul went in to cover his feet. And David and his men ***were*** sitting in the innermost parts of the cave. And the men of David said to him, "Look, the day of which the LORD said to you, 'Look, I am giving your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him just as it is good in your eyes.'" And David arose, and he cut off the skirt of the robe which ***belonged*** to Saul in secret. And it was afterward, and the heart of David struck him because he had cut off the skirt which ***belonged*** to Saul. And he said to his men, "Far be it for me from the LORD that I should do this thing to my lord, to the anointed of the LORD, to stretch out my hand against him, for he ***is*** the anointed of the LORD." And David rebuked his men with the words, and he did not permit them to rise up against Saul. And Saul arose from the cave, and he went on the way. And David arose afterward, and he went out from the cave, and he called out after Saul, saying, "My lord the king!" And Saul looked behind him, and David bowed low, face toward the ground, and he bowed down. And David said to Saul, "Why do you listen to the words of men, saying, 'Look, David is seeking your harm'? Look, this day your eyes have seen that the LORD gave you today into my hand in the cave; and one said to kill you, and ***mẏ eẏe*** had pity on you; and I said, 'I will not stretch out my hand against my lord, for he ***is*** the anointed of the LORD.' And my father, see, yes, see the skirt of your robe in my hand; for in my cutting off the skirt of your robe and not killing you, know and see that there is not evil or transgression in my hand, and I have not sinned against you; and you are lying in wait for my life to take it. May the LORD judge between me and you, and the LORD will avenge me on you; and my hand shall not be against you.

24:13-22 Just as the proverb of the ancients says, 'From wicked ***ones*** comes forth wickedness'; and my hand shall not be against you. After whom has the king of Israel come out? After whom are you pursuing? After a dead dog, after one flea! And the LORD shall be judge, and He shall judge between me and you; and may He see, and may He plead my case, and may He vindicate me from your hand." And it was, when David finished speaking these words to Saul, that Saul said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" And Saul lifted up his voice, and he wept. And he said to David, "You ***are*** more righteous than I, for you, you have dealt good to me, and I, I have dealt evil to you. And you, you have told today that you have done good with me, that the LORD delivered me up into your hand, and you did not kill me. And if a man finds his enemy, will he send him away on a good way? And may the LORD repay you good in return for this day, for that which you have done to me. And now, look, I know that you will certainly reign, and the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand. And now, swear to me by the LORD that you will not cut off my offspring after me, and that you will not destroy my name from the house of my father." And David swore to Saul. And Saul went to his house, and David and his men went up to the stronghold.

Chapter 24 Preview

Saul comes back from fighting the Philistines and takes three thousand chosen men to hunt David near Engedi. On the way he goes alone into a cave to relieve himself, not knowing that David and his men are hiding deep inside it. David's men whisper that this is the day God has given his enemy into his hand. David creeps up and cuts off the edge of Saul's robe, and then his conscience strikes him even for that. He will not lift his hand against "the anointed of the LORD."

When Saul leaves, David comes out of the cave, bows to the ground and calls after him. He holds up the piece of the robe as proof that he could have killed Saul and did not. He leaves judgment to the LORD. Saul weeps and says, "You are more righteous than I," and admits that David will surely be king. This chapter is about trusting God enough to wait for His timing, and refusing to take by force what God has promised to give.

Chapter 24 Study

24:1-2 *And it was, just when Saul returned from after the Philistines, that they told him, saying, "Look, David **is** in the wilderness of Engedi." And Saul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel, and he went to seek David and his men on the face of the Rocks of the Mountain Goats.*

"Look, David is in the wilderness of Engedi." Someone told Saul right away. As soon as he was done with the Philistines, he was back to hunting David.

"And Saul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel." Three thousand of his best soldiers against David's six hundred. They searched "on the face of the Rocks of the Mountain Goats." Wild goats, called ibex, still climb the cliffs around Engedi today. The name tells us how steep and rugged the country was.

24:3 *And he came to the folds of the sheep on the way, and a cave **was** there; and Saul went in to cover his feet. And David and his men **were** sitting in the innermost parts of the cave.*

"And he came to the folds of the sheep on the way, and a cave was there." Shepherds often used the mouths of caves as sheepfolds, building low stone walls in front. "And Saul went in to cover his feet." This is a polite Hebrew way of saying he went in to relieve himself (Judges 3:24). Saul went in alone, for privacy.

"And David and his men were sitting in the innermost parts of the cave." Some of the caves near Engedi are deep. From the dark back of the cave, David's men could see Saul against the light at the entrance, while Saul could see nothing of them.

Of all the caves in that wilderness, Saul walked into this one. Was it chance? No. God had arranged this moment as a test for David.

24:4 *And the men of David said to him, "Look, the day of which the LORD said to you, 'Look, I am giving your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him just as it is good in your eyes.'" And David arose, and he cut off the skirt of the robe which* ***belonged*** *to Saul in secret.*

"Look, the day of which the LORD said to you." They quoted a promise: "I am giving your enemy into your hand." David's men were sure this was God's answer. The Bible does not record God saying those exact words to David. Perhaps the men were putting their own spin on God's promise that David would be king. It is easy to hear what we want to hear and call it God's voice. An open door is not always God's will.

"And David arose, and he cut off the skirt of the robe which belonged to Saul in secret." The skirt was the edge or hem of Saul's robe. David crept close enough to kill him, and cut off a piece of cloth instead.

Remember what happened in 15:27-28. Saul tore the hem of Samuel's robe, and Samuel said the LORD had torn the kingdom from Saul. Now David held a piece of Saul's robe in his hand. The picture was clear. The kingdom was passing to David. But David would not grab it.

24:5-7 *And it was afterward, and the heart of David struck him because he had cut off the skirt which* ***belonged*** *to Saul. And he said to his men, "Far be it for me from the LORD that I should do this thing to my lord, to the anointed of the LORD, to stretch out my hand against him, for he* ***is*** *the anointed of the LORD." And David rebuked his men with the words, and he did not permit them to rise up against Saul. And Saul arose from the cave, and he went on the way.*

"And it was afterward, and the heart of David struck him because he had cut off the skirt which belonged to Saul." His conscience bothered him. Why? It was only a piece of cloth. But David knew it was an act against the king's honor, a small step toward the very thing he refused to do. A tender conscience does not wait until it has done something big to feel guilty.

"Far be it for me from the LORD that I should do this thing to my lord, to the anointed of the LORD, to stretch out my hand against him, for he is the anointed of the LORD."

This is the heart of the chapter. Saul was wicked. He had murdered the priests. He was trying to murder David. God had rejected him as king. And David still called him "my lord" and "the anointed of the LORD." Why? Because God had put Saul on the throne, and only God had the right to remove him. David would not take God's place.

David had God's promise that he would be king. The throne was his by God's choice. But he would not take it by murder. He would wait for God to give it in God's way and God's time. If he had killed Saul that day, he would have become king the same way pagan kings did, by the sword. He would have taught Israel that the way to the throne is to kill the man on it. Instead, he left the matter in God's hands.

"And David rebuked his men with the words, and he did not permit them to rise up against Saul." It took real leadership to hold back six hundred angry men from killing the man who was hunting them. "And Saul arose from the cave, and he went on the way." He never knew how close he had come.

24:8 *And David arose afterward, and he went out from the cave, and he called out after Saul, saying, "My lord the king!" And Saul looked behind him, and David bowed low, face toward the ground, and he bowed down.*

"And David arose afterward, and he went out from the cave, and he called out after Saul, saying, My lord the king!" This was a risky move. Saul had three thousand men nearby. But David wanted Saul to know the truth.

"And Saul looked behind him, and David bowed low, face toward the ground, and he bowed down." David bowed before the man who wanted him dead. That is humility, and it is respect for God's order.

24:9-11 *And David said to Saul, "Why do you listen to the words of men, saying, 'Look, David is seeking your harm'? Look, this day your eyes have seen that the LORD gave you today into my hand in the cave; and one said to kill you, and **my eye** had pity on you; and I said, 'I will not stretch out my hand against my lord, for he **is** the anointed of the LORD.' And my father, see, yes, see the skirt of your robe in my hand; for in my cutting off the skirt of your robe and not killing you, know and see that there is not evil or transgression in my hand, and I have not sinned against you; and you are lying in wait for my life to take it.*

"Why do you listen to the words of men," who said, "Look, David is seeking your harm"? David gave Saul a way to save face. He blamed the advisers who had poisoned Saul's mind, men like Doeg.

"This day your eyes have seen that the LORD gave you today into my hand in the cave." David told Saul plainly what had happened. Some of David's men had told him to kill Saul, "and my eye had pity on you." David had said, "I will not stretch out my hand against my lord, for he is the anointed of the LORD."

"And my father, see, yes, see the skirt of your robe in my hand." David called Saul "my father." Saul was his father-in-law, and David still wanted to honor him as a son. Then came the proof. "In my cutting off the skirt of your robe and not killing you, know and see that there is not evil or transgression in my hand, and I have not sinned against you." The piece of cloth said it all. If I wanted you dead, you would be dead.

"And you are lying in wait for my life to take it." David spoke the truth plainly. He was not the one lying in wait. Saul was.

24:12-15 *May the LORD judge between me and you, and the LORD will avenge me on you; and my hand shall not be against you. Just as the proverb of the ancients says, 'From wicked **ones** comes forth wickedness'; and my hand shall not be against you. After whom has the king of Israel come out? After whom are you pursuing? After a dead dog, after one flea! And the LORD shall be judge, and He shall judge between me and you; and may He see, and may He plead my case, and may He vindicate me from your hand."*

"May the LORD judge between me and you, and the LORD will avenge me on you; and my hand shall not be against you." David did not say Saul's wrongs did not matter. He said God would deal

with them. That is the difference between giving up and giving it to God. David was not pretending nothing had happened. He was trusting God to judge.

Paul says the same thing to us: "not avenging yourselves, beloved, but give place to the wrath; for it has been written, Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord" (Romans 12:19). And Peter says of Jesus that when He suffered, "He did not threaten, but He kept handing Himself over to the One who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:23).

"Just as the proverb of the ancients says." The proverb was, "From wicked ones comes forth wickedness." This was an old saying. Wicked deeds come from wicked people. David was saying, if I were wicked, I would have killed you. I did not, so judge for yourself what is in my heart.

"After whom has the king of Israel come out? After whom are you pursuing? After a dead dog, after one flea!" A dead dog was the lowest thing a person could call himself (2 Samuel 9:8). A single flea was not worth chasing. David was saying, why is the king of Israel wasting his army chasing someone so small? It was humble, and it was a little bit of a rebuke too.

"And the LORD shall be judge, and He shall judge between me and you; and may He see, and may He plead my case, and may He vindicate me from your hand." David put his whole case in God's hands. God would be his judge and his defense attorney at once.

What does this mean for us? When someone wrongs you, especially someone in authority over you, God does not ask you to call evil good. He asks you not to take revenge. He asks you to leave it with Him. And notice: David did not stay in the palace and let Saul kill him. He ran. He protected himself and his men. Refusing to take revenge does not mean staying where you will be hurt. If someone is in danger, it is right to get to safety and to go to the proper authorities (Romans 13:1-4). What David refused was to take matters into his own hands and strike down the one God had placed in authority.

24:16-19 *And it was, when David finished speaking these words to Saul, that Saul said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" And Saul lifted up his voice, and he wept. And he said to David, "You **are** more righteous than I, for you, you have dealt good to me, and I, I have dealt evil to you. And you, you have told today that you have done good with me, that the LORD delivered me up into your hand, and you did not kill me. And if a man finds his enemy, will he send him away on a good way? And may the LORD repay you good in return for this day, for that which you have done to me.*

"Is this your voice, my son David?" Saul could not quite believe it. "And Saul lifted up his voice, and he wept." For a moment the old Saul was touched.

"You are more righteous than I, for you, you have dealt good to me, and I, I have dealt evil to you." This was true, and Saul said it. "You did not kill me." Saul knew that any other man would have. "And if a man finds his enemy, will he send him away on a good way?" David had done what almost no one does. He had repaid evil with good. "Do not be overcome by the evil, but overcome the evil with the good" (Romans 12:21).

"And may the LORD repay you good in return for this day." Saul even blessed him.

24:20-22 *And now, look, I know that you will certainly reign, and the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand. And now, swear to me by the LORD that you will not cut off my offspring after me, and that you will not destroy my name from the house of my father." And David swore to Saul. And Saul went to his house, and David and his men went up to the stronghold.*

"And now, look, I know that you will certainly reign, and the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand." Saul said out loud what he had known for a long time (20:31; 23:17). David would be king.

"Swear to me by the LORD that you will not cut off my offspring after me, and that you will not destroy my name from the house of my father." Saul asked David the same thing Jonathan had asked (20:14-15). He knew what new kings usually did to the old king's family.

"And David swore to Saul." David kept this oath too. He spared Jonathan's son Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 9; 21:7).

"And Saul went to his house, and David and his men went up to the stronghold." Notice that David did not go home with Saul. He knew Saul's tears did not mean a changed heart. Saul had wept and made promises before (19:6). Two chapters later, Saul will be hunting David again. David was wise. He forgave Saul, but he did not trust him. Forgiveness and trust are not the same thing. We can forgive someone fully and still be careful not to put ourselves back in harm's way.

Many of us will never face an enemy in a cave. But we all face the temptation to take what God has promised by our own methods, on our own schedule, or to pay back those who have hurt us. David's answer was to wait on the LORD. "The LORD shall be judge" (24:15). That is still the answer.

Chapter 24 Summary

When Saul returned from the Philistines, he took three thousand chosen men to hunt David near Engedi. He went alone into a cave to relieve himself, where David and his men were hiding in the back. David's men said this was the day the LORD had given his enemy into his hand. David secretly cut off the edge of Saul's robe, but his heart struck him, and he told his men he would never stretch out his hand against the anointed of the LORD, and he held them back. When Saul left, David came out, bowed to the ground, and called after him. He asked why Saul listened to men who said David sought his harm, showed him the edge of his robe as proof that he had spared his life, and said that the LORD would judge between them and that his hand would never be against Saul. Saul wept, said David was more righteous than he, blessed him, and admitted that David would surely be king. He asked David to swear not to cut off his descendants, and David swore. Saul went home, and David and his men went up to the stronghold.

People and Places

- Engedi: an oasis with springs and caves on the western shore of the Dead Sea.
- Rocks of the Mountain Goats: the cliffs near Engedi where wild goats lived.
- Cover his feet: a polite Hebrew way of saying a man relieved himself.

- Skirt of the robe: the hem or edge of Saul's royal robe.
- The anointed of the LORD: the king God had set apart by anointing.

Chapter 24 Study Questions

1. How many men did Saul take to hunt David, and where did they search? (24:1-2)

2. What did David's men say when Saul came into the cave? Was it really God's word? (24:4)

3. What did David do, and why did his heart strike him afterward? (24:4-5)

4. Why would David not harm Saul? (24:6, 10)

5. What proof did David give Saul that he meant him no harm? (24:11)

6. What did David say about who would judge between him and Saul? (24:12, 15)

7. What did Saul admit after David spoke to him? (24:17-20)

8. Why did David not go home with Saul, even after Saul wept? (24:22; 26:2)

9. Is there someone you are tempted to pay back for how they treated you? What would it look like to leave that with the LORD?

10. David refused to take God's promise by his own methods. Where are you tempted to force something God has not yet given you?

Chapter 25: David, Nabal and Abigail

Scripture

25:1-13 And Samuel died, and all Israel gathered together, and they mourned for him, and they buried him at his house in Ramah. And David arose, and he went down to the wilderness of Paran. And a man ***was*** in Maon, and his business ***was*** in Carmel; and the man ***was*** very great, and he had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. And it was ***the time*** when he was shearing his sheep in Carmel. And the name of the man ***was*** Nabal, and the name of his wife ***was*** Abigail. And the woman ***was*** good of insight and beautiful of appearance; and the man ***was*** hard and evil of deeds, and he ***was*** a Calebite. And David heard in the wilderness that Nabal was shearing his sheep. And David sent ten young men, and David said to the young men, "Go up to Carmel, and go to Nabal, and ask him in my name about ***his*** welfare. And you shall say thus: 'To life! And peace ***to*** you, and peace ***to*** your house, and peace ***to*** all that ***is*** yours. And now I have heard that you have shearers. Now the shepherds who ***belong*** to you have been with us; we did not humiliate them, and nothing was missing to them all the days they were in Carmel. Ask your young men, and they will tell you. And let the young men find favor in your eyes, for we have come on a good day. Please give whatever your hand finds to your servants and to your son, to David.'" And the young men of David came, and they spoke to Nabal according to all these words in the name of David, and they waited. And Nabal answered the servants of David, and he said, "Who ***is*** David, and who ***is*** the son of Jesse? Today the servants who break away, each from before his master, are many. And shall I take my bread and my water and my slaughtered meat that I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give ***it*** to men whom I do not know where they ***are*** from?" And the young men of David turned around to their way, and they returned, and they came, and they told him according to all these words. And David said to his men, "Gird on each man his sword." And they girded on each man his sword, and David also girded on his sword. And about four hundred men went up after David, and two hundred remained with the baggage.

25:14-31 And one young man of the young men told Abigail, the wife of Nabal, saying, "Look, David sent messengers from the wilderness to bless our master, and he railed at them. And the men ***were*** very good to us, and we were not humiliated, and we did not miss anything all the days we went about with them, when we were in the field. A wall they were around us both night and day, all the days we were with them shepherding the flock. And now, know and see what you will do, for the evil has been determined against our master and against all his household; and he ***is*** a son of worthlessness, past speaking to." And Abigail made haste, and she took two hundred ***loaves of*** bread and two jars of wine and five prepared sheep and approximately 35 quarts (five seahs) of roasted grain and a hundred clusters of raisins and two hundred cakes of figs, and she put ***them*** on the donkeys. And she said to her servants, "Pass on before me; look, I ***am*** coming after you." And she did not tell her husband Nabal. And it was, she ***was*** riding on the donkey and going down in the cover of the mountain, and look, David and his men ***were*** going down to meet her; and she met them. And David had said, "Surely in vain I have guarded all that this ***man*** has in the wilderness, and nothing of all that ***belongs*** to him was missing; and he has returned to me evil in place of good. Thus may God do to the enemies of David, and thus may He add, if I leave of all that ***belongs*** to him until the morning one who urinates against a wall." And Abigail saw

David, and she made haste, and she came down from the donkey, and she fell before the face of David on her face, and she bowed down ***to*** the ground. And she fell at his feet, and she said, "On me, me, my lord, ***be*** the iniquity; and please let your maidservant speak in your ears, and hear the words of your maidservant. Please let not my lord set his heart to this man of worthlessness, to Nabal; for as his name ***is***, so ***is*** he: Nabal ***is*** his name, and disgraceful folly ***is*** with him. And I, your maidservant, I did not see the young men of my lord whom you sent. And now, my lord, ***as*** the LORD lives and ***as*** your soul lives, seeing that the LORD has restrained you from coming into bloodshed and ***from*** your hand saving you, now then let your enemies and those who seek evil against my lord be like Nabal. And now, this blessing which your maidservant has brought to my lord, it shall be given to the young men who go about at the feet of my lord. Please forgive the transgression of your maidservant; for the LORD will certainly make for my lord an enduring house, for my lord is fighting the battles of the LORD, and evil shall not be found in you throughout your days. And a man has risen up to pursue you and to seek your life, and the life of my lord shall be bound up in the bundle of the living with the LORD your God; and the life of your enemies, He shall sling it out in the midst of the hollow of the sling. And it shall be, when the LORD does for my lord according to all the good that He has spoken concerning you, and He appoints you ruler over Israel, then this shall not be for you a staggering and a stumbling of heart for my lord, to pour out blood without cause and for my lord to save himself. And the LORD will do good to my lord, and you shall remember your maidservant."

25:32-44 And David said to Abigail, "Blessed ***be*** the LORD, the God of Israel, who has sent you this day to meet me. And blessed ***be*** your discernment, and blessed ***be*** you, who have restrained me this day from coming into bloodshed and ***from*** my hand saving me. And yet, ***as*** the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, who has restrained me from doing harm to you, unless you had made haste and come to meet me, surely there would not have been left to Nabal until the light of the morning one who urinates against a wall." And David took from her hand what she had brought to him, and to her he said, "Go up in peace to your house. See, I have listened to your voice, and I have lifted up your face." And Abigail came to Nabal, and look, he had a feast in his house like the feast of the king; and the heart of Nabal ***was*** good within him, and he ***was*** drunk to excess. And she did not tell him anything, small or great, until the light of the morning. And it was in the morning, when the wine had gone out from Nabal, that his wife told him these things; and his heart died within him, and he became stone. And it was about ten days ***later***, and the LORD struck Nabal, and he died. And David heard that Nabal had died, and he said, "Blessed ***be*** the LORD, who has pleaded the case of my disgrace from the hand of Nabal, and He has restrained His servant from evil; and the evil of Nabal the LORD has turned back on his own head." And David sent, and he spoke concerning Abigail, to take her for himself as a wife. And the servants of David came to Abigail to Carmel, and they spoke to her, saying, "David has sent us to you to take you for himself as a wife." And she arose, and she bowed down, face toward the ground, and she said, "Look, your maidservant ***is*** a maid to wash the feet of the servants of my lord." And Abigail made haste and arose, and she rode on the donkey, and her five maids who walked at her feet ***went with her***; and she went after the messengers of David, and she became his wife. And David had taken Ahinoam from Jezreel, and the two of them also became his wives. And Saul had given Michal his daughter, the wife of David, to Palti the son of Laish, who ***was*** from Gallim.

Chapter 25 Preview

The chapter opens with a short, sad line: Samuel dies, and all Israel mourns him. Then the story moves to the wilderness of Judah. David and his men have been protecting the flocks of a rich man named Nabal. At sheep-shearing time, a time of feasting and generosity, David sends ten young men to ask politely for whatever Nabal can spare. Nabal insults David and sends them away with nothing. David's temper explodes. He straps on his sword and sets out with four hundred men to wipe out every male in Nabal's household.

Nabal's wife Abigail hears what has happened. She is wise and quick. She loads donkeys with food, rides out to meet David, falls at his feet and speaks some of the wisest words in the book. She reminds David that the LORD will make him a lasting house, and that he does not want a stain of needless bloodshed on his conscience when he becomes king. David listens and thanks God for her. Ten days later the LORD strikes Nabal and he dies, and David asks Abigail to be his wife. In chapter 24 David held back from killing Saul. In chapter 25 he almost kills a foolish man in anger. This chapter shows us how even a godly man can lose his head, and how God can use a wise and humble person to turn him back.

Chapter 25 Study

25:1 *And Samuel died, and all Israel gathered together, and they mourned for him, and they buried him at his house in Ramah. And David arose, and he went down to the wilderness of Paran.*

"And Samuel died, and all Israel gathered together, and they mourned for him, and they buried him at his house in Ramah." Samuel had served the LORD from childhood (3:19-20). He was the last of the judges, a great prophet and a man of prayer. He had anointed both Saul and David. The whole nation mourned him. A man who once told Israel, "far be it from me to sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you" (12:23), was gone.

For David, this was a heavy loss. Samuel was the man he had run to when he first fled (19:18). Now David was more alone than ever. But God was still with him.

"And David arose, and he went down to the wilderness of Paran." Paran was a large wilderness far to the south, in the Sinai region. Some old Greek copies read the wilderness of Maon here, which fits the rest of the chapter better. Either way, David moved south.

25:2-3 *And a man **was** in Maon, and his business **was** in Carmel; and the man **was** very great, and he had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. And it was **the time** when he was shearing his sheep in Carmel. And the name of the man **was** Nabal, and the name of his wife **was** Abigail. And the woman **was** good of insight and beautiful of appearance; and the man **was** hard and evil of deeds, and he **was** a Calebite.*

"And a man was in Maon, and his business was in Carmel." This is the Carmel in southern Judah, near Maon, where Saul once set up his monument (15:12). "The man was very great, and he had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats." He was wealthy. And "it was the time when he was shearing his sheep." Sheep-shearing was a time of feasting and celebration, a kind of harvest

festival for shepherds, and it was a time when people were expected to be generous (2 Samuel 13:23-24).

"And the name of the man was Nabal, and the name of his wife was Abigail." Nabal means fool. In the Bible, a fool is not someone who lacks intelligence. It is someone who lives as if God does not matter. "A fool has said in his heart, There is no God" (Psalm 14:1).

Look at how differently the two are described. Abigail was "good of insight and beautiful of appearance." Nabal "was hard and evil of deeds." And "he was a Calebite," a descendant of Caleb, the faithful spy (Numbers 14:24). What a fall. Caleb's descendant had none of Caleb's faith.

25:4-9 *And David heard in the wilderness that Nabal was shearing his sheep. And David sent ten young men, and David said to the young men, "Go up to Carmel, and go to Nabal, and ask him in my name about **his** welfare. And you shall say thus: 'To life! And peace **to** you, and peace **to** your house, and peace **to** all that **is** yours. And now I have heard that you have shearers. Now the shepherds who **belong** to you have been with us; we did not humiliate them, and nothing was missing to them all the days they were in Carmel. Ask your young men, and they will tell you. And let the young men find favor in your eyes, for we have come on a good day. Please give whatever your hand finds to your servants and to your son, to David.'" And the young men of David came, and they spoke to Nabal according to all these words in the name of David, and they waited.*

"And David heard in the wilderness that Nabal was shearing his sheep." David sent ten young men with a polite and gracious greeting: "To life! And peace to you, and peace to your house, and peace to all that is yours."

David's men had protected Nabal's shepherds and flocks out in the wilderness. "We did not humiliate them, and nothing was missing to them all the days they were in Carmel." In that wild country, raiders and wild animals were a constant danger. David's six hundred men had acted like a wall of protection around Nabal's flocks, and they had never taken a single sheep for themselves.

"Ask your young men, and they will tell you." David was not making it up. "For we have come on a good day." A feast day. "Please give whatever your hand finds to your servants and to your son, to David." David asked humbly. He even called himself Nabal's son, a term of respect. He did not demand a fixed payment. He left the amount to Nabal.

25:10-11 *And Nabal answered the servants of David, and he said, "Who **is** David, and who **is** the son of Jesse? Today the servants who break away, each from before his master, are many. And shall I take my bread and my water and my slaughtered meat that I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give **it** to men whom I do not know where they **are** from?"*

"Who is David, and who is the son of Jesse?" Everyone in Israel knew who David was. Nabal was pretending not to know, as an insult. "Today the servants who break away, each from before his master, are many." In other words, David is just a runaway slave, a rebel against his master Saul.

"And shall I take my bread and my water and my slaughtered meat that I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men whom I do not know where they are from?" Notice all the my's. My

bread, my water, my meat, my shearers. Nabal saw everything as his. He did not thank God for his wealth, and he did not want to share it. Jesus told a story about a rich man like this, who said to himself he would build bigger barns, and God said to him, "Fool! This night they are demanding your soul from you" (Luke 12:20).

25:12-13 *And the young men of David turned around to their way, and they returned, and they came, and they told him according to all these words. And David said to his men, "Gird on each man his sword." And they girded on each man his sword, and David also girded on his sword. And about four hundred men went up after David, and two hundred remained with the baggage.*

David's young men came back and told him everything. "Gird on each man his sword." David did not pray. He did not inquire of the LORD, as he had at Keilah (23:2, 4). He did not wait. He reached for his sword. "And about four hundred men went up after David, and two hundred remained with the baggage."

What happened to the man who held back from killing Saul? In the cave, David was calm because he was thinking about the LORD. Here, he was angry because he was thinking about his own honor. Saul had wronged him far more than Nabal. But sometimes a small insult on a bad day does more to us than a great wrong. When we are tired, hungry and hurt, our temper is closest to the surface. Paul says, "Be angry, and do not sin; let the sun not set on your anger" (Ephesians 4:26). David was angry, and he was about to sin.

25:14-17 *And one young man of the young men told Abigail, the wife of Nabal, saying, "Look, David sent messengers from the wilderness to bless our master, and he railed at them. And the men **were** very good to us, and we were not humiliated, and we did not miss anything all the days we went about with them, when we were in the field. A wall they were around us both night and day, all the days we were with them shepherding the flock. And now, know and see what you will do, for the evil has been determined against our master and against all his household; and he **is** a son of worthlessness, past speaking to."*

"And one young man of the young men told Abigail." One of Nabal's servants saw what was coming, and he went to the one person in the household with sense. "Look, David sent messengers from the wilderness to bless our master, and he railed at them." To rail at someone is to scream insults at him.

The servant confirmed everything David had said. "The men were very good to us." "A wall they were around us both night and day, all the days we were with them shepherding the flock."

"And now, know and see what you will do, for the evil has been determined against our master and against all his household." The servant knew David would not let this pass. "And he is a son of worthlessness, past speaking to." A son of worthlessness was a wicked, useless man (see 2:12). Nobody could reason with Nabal. Even his own servants knew it.

25:18-22 *And Abigail made haste, and she took two hundred **loaves of** bread and two jars of wine and five prepared sheep and approximately 35 quarts (five seahs) of roasted grain and a hundred clusters of raisins and two hundred cakes of figs, and she put **them** on the donkeys. And she said to her servants, "Pass on before me; look, I **am** coming after you." And she did not tell her husband Nabal. And it was, she **was** riding on the donkey and going down in the cover of the mountain, and look, David and his men **were** going down to meet her; and she met them. And David had said, "Surely in vain I have guarded all that this **man** has in the wilderness, and nothing of all that **belongs** to him was missing; and he has returned to me evil in place of good. Thus may God do to the enemies of David, and thus may He add, if I leave of all that **belongs** to him until the morning one who urinates against a wall."*

"And Abigail made haste." She did not wait or argue. She gathered a huge gift: two hundred loaves of bread, two jars of wine, five sheep ready to cook, five seahs of roasted grain (about 35 quarts), a hundred clusters of raisins and two hundred cakes of figs. It was enough to feed David's army well. She sent her servants ahead and followed behind. "And she did not tell her husband Nabal." She knew he would stop her, and there was no time.

Was it wrong for her to act without her husband? Nabal was about to get his whole household killed, and he could not be reasoned with. Abigail acted to save lives, and Scripture praises her for it. Godly submission in marriage never means standing by while a husband leads his family into destruction.

Meanwhile, David was coming down the mountain, still fuming. "Surely in vain I have guarded all that this man has in the wilderness." "He has returned to me evil in place of good." Then David made a terrible oath: "Thus may God do to the enemies of David, and thus may He add, if I leave of all that belongs to him until the morning" a single male alive. The Hebrew uses a coarse expression for every male. David meant to kill every man and boy in Nabal's household, servants included, for one man's insult.

25:23-25 *And Abigail saw David, and she made haste, and she came down from the donkey, and she fell before the face of David on her face, and she bowed down **to** the ground. And she fell at his feet, and she said, "On me, me, my lord, **be** the iniquity; and please let your maidservant speak in your ears, and hear the words of your maidservant. Please let not my lord set his heart to this man of worthlessness, to Nabal; for as his name **is**, so **is** he: Nabal **is** his name, and disgraceful folly **is** with him. And I, your maidservant, I did not see the young men of my lord whom you sent.*

"And Abigail saw David, and she made haste, and she came down from the donkey, and she fell before the face of David on her face." She humbled herself completely. "On me, me, my lord, be the iniquity." She took the blame on herself, though she had done nothing wrong. "Please let your maidservant speak in your ears."

"Please let not my lord set his heart to this man of worthlessness, to Nabal; for as his name is, so is he: Nabal is his name, and disgraceful folly is with him." Abigail did not defend her husband's behavior. She was honest. He is a fool, she said. Do not take a fool's words to heart.

"And I, your maidservant, I did not see the young men of my lord whom you sent." If she had seen them, she would have given them what they asked.

Look at how wise she was. "A soft answer turns away rage" (Proverbs 15:1). She did not argue, accuse or make demands. She came with humility, a gift and the truth.

25:26-31 *And now, my lord, **as** the LORD lives and **as** your soul lives, seeing that the LORD has restrained you from coming into bloodshed and **from** your hand saving you, now then let your enemies and those who seek evil against my lord be like Nabal. And now, this blessing which your maidservant has brought to my lord, it shall be given to the young men who go about at the feet of my lord. Please forgive the transgression of your maidservant; for the LORD will certainly make for my lord an enduring house, for my lord is fighting the battles of the LORD, and evil shall not be found in you throughout your days. And a man has risen up to pursue you and to seek your life, and the life of my lord shall be bound up in the bundle of the living with the LORD your God; and the life of your enemies, He shall sling it out in the midst of the hollow of the sling. And it shall be, when the LORD does for my lord according to all the good that He has spoken concerning you, and He appoints you ruler over Israel, then this shall not be for you a staggering and a stumbling of heart for my lord, to pour out blood without cause and for my lord to save himself. And the LORD will do good to my lord, and you shall remember your maidservant."*

"Seeing that the LORD has restrained you from coming into bloodshed." Abigail spoke as if David had already decided not to do it. She gave him a way to turn back with honor. She said it was the LORD who was holding him back, and she was right. God had sent her.

"Please forgive the transgression of your maidservant; for the LORD will certainly make for my lord an enduring house." An enduring house means a lasting dynasty, a family line of kings. Abigail spoke words that sound like a prophecy of what God would later promise David in 2 Samuel 7:16. "For my lord is fighting the battles of the LORD, and evil shall not be found in you throughout your days." She reminded David who he was. You fight the LORD's battles, not your own.

"The life of my lord shall be bound up in the bundle of the living with the LORD your God." A bundle was a pouch where precious things were kept safe. Abigail was saying, God is keeping your life safe with Him like a treasure. "And the life of your enemies, He shall sling it out in the midst of the hollow of the sling." David would remember slinging a stone at Goliath. God would deal with David's enemies the same way. David did not need to do it himself.

Then she came to the heart of it. When God made David "ruler over Israel," this would not be "a staggering and a stumbling of heart for my lord, to pour out blood without cause." Do you want to become king with innocent blood on your hands? she asked. Do you want this on your conscience for the rest of your life? Saul had shed innocent blood at Nob. David did not want to become like Saul.

"And you shall remember your maidservant." She asked only to be remembered.

25:32-35 *And David said to Abigail, "Blessed **be** the LORD, the God of Israel, who has sent you this day to meet me. And blessed **be** your discernment, and blessed **be** you, who have restrained me this day from coming into bloodshed and **from** my hand saving me. And yet, **as** the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, who has restrained me from doing harm to you, unless you had made haste and come to meet me, surely there would not have been left to Nabal until the light of the morning one who urinates against a wall." And David took from her hand what she had brought to him, and to her he said, "Go up in peace to your house. See, I have listened to your voice, and I have lifted up your face."*

"Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who has sent you this day to meet me." David saw God's hand in it at once. "And blessed be your discernment, and blessed be you, who have restrained me this day from coming into bloodshed."

This is one of the best things about David. He could take correction. He was the future king, a famous warrior, with four hundred armed men behind him, and he listened to a woman kneeling in the road and said, you are right, and God sent you. Saul never could do that. When Samuel rebuked him, he made excuses. When Abigail rebuked David, he gave thanks.

Do you welcome correction? "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9). Abigail was a peacemaker. And David was humble enough to be made peace with.

"Go up in peace to your house. See, I have listened to your voice, and I have lifted up your face." To lift up her face meant he had accepted her request.

25:36-38 *And Abigail came to Nabal, and look, he had a feast in his house like the feast of the king; and the heart of Nabal **was** good within him, and he **was** drunk to excess. And she did not tell him anything, small or great, until the light of the morning. And it was in the morning, when the wine had gone out from Nabal, that his wife told him these things; and his heart died within him, and he became stone. And it was about ten days **later**, and the LORD struck Nabal, and he died.*

"And Abigail came to Nabal, and look, he had a feast in his house like the feast of the king." Nabal was throwing a party fit for a king, while the real king was hiding in caves. "And the heart of Nabal was good within him, and he was drunk to excess." He had no idea how close he had come to death. Abigail wisely waited until morning, when he was sober.

"When the wine had gone out from Nabal, that his wife told him these things; and his heart died within him, and he became stone." This may describe a stroke or a heart attack, brought on by the shock. He was paralyzed.

"And it was about ten days later, and the LORD struck Nabal, and he died." The writer wants us to see who did it. Not David. The LORD.

25:39 *And David heard that Nabal had died, and he said, "Blessed **be** the LORD, who has pleaded the case of my disgrace from the hand of Nabal, and He has restrained His servant from evil; and the evil of Nabal the LORD has turned back on his own head." And David sent, and he spoke concerning Abigail, to take her for himself as a wife.*

"Blessed be the LORD, who has pleaded the case of my disgrace from the hand of Nabal, and He has restrained His servant from evil; and the evil of Nabal the LORD has turned back on his own head." David saw what God had done. God had defended David's honor, and He had kept David from sinning. It is the lesson of chapter 24 again. "The LORD shall be judge" (24:15). If David had killed Nabal, he would have sinned. By waiting, he saw God do it far better.

"And David sent, and he spoke concerning Abigail, to take her for himself as a wife."

25:40-44 *And the servants of David came to Abigail to Carmel, and they spoke to her, saying, "David has sent us to you to take you for himself as a wife." And she arose, and she bowed down, face toward the ground, and she said, "Look, your maidservant **is** a maid to wash the feet of the servants of my lord." And Abigail made haste and arose, and she rode on the donkey, and her five maids who walked at her feet **went with her**; and she went after the messengers of David, and she became his wife. And David had taken Ahinoam from Jezreel, and the two of them also became his wives. And Saul had given Michal his daughter, the wife of David, to Palti the son of Laish, who **was** from Gallim.*

"David has sent us to you to take you for himself as a wife." Abigail's answer was full of humility. "Look, your maidservant is a maid to wash the feet of the servants of my lord." She was willing to do the lowest job in David's household. She went with five of her maids and became David's wife.

"And David had taken Ahinoam from Jezreel, and the two of them also became his wives." This Jezreel was a town in Judah, not the better-known city in the north. "And Saul had given Michal his daughter, the wife of David, to Palti the son of Laish." While David was away, Saul gave David's wife to another man, one more way of cutting David off from the royal family.

What about David's many wives? The Bible records it, but it does not approve it. God's plan from the beginning was one man and one woman (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5). The law warned that the king "shall not multiply wives for himself" (Deuteronomy 17:17). David's many wives would bring great sorrow to his family later, as 2 Samuel shows. The Bible tells the truth about its heroes, even where they fell short of God's design.

Chapter 25 Summary

Samuel died, and all Israel mourned and buried him at Ramah. David went south. A rich man named Nabal, a hard and evil man, was shearing his sheep in Carmel, and his wife Abigail was wise and beautiful. David's men had protected Nabal's shepherds, so David sent ten young men to greet Nabal in peace and ask for whatever he could give. Nabal insulted David as a runaway servant and refused. David armed four hundred men and swore to kill every male in Nabal's household by morning. One of Nabal's servants told Abigail how David's men had been a wall around them, and she quickly loaded donkeys with food and rode out without telling her

husband. She fell at David's feet, took the blame on herself, called Nabal a fool, and reminded David that the LORD would make him an enduring house and that he should not become king with needless bloodshed on his conscience. David blessed the LORD for sending her and accepted her gift. Nabal was drunk at a feast, and in the morning when Abigail told him, his heart died within him, and ten days later the LORD struck him and he died. David praised the LORD for keeping him from evil and asked Abigail to be his wife, and she came. David had also married Ahinoam, and Saul had given Michal to Palti.

People and Places

- Samuel: prophet and last judge of Israel, who died and was buried at Ramah.
- Wilderness of Paran: a large desert region far to the south.
- Maon and Carmel: towns in the hill country of southern Judah.
- Nabal: a rich and foolish man; his name means fool.
- Abigail: Nabal's wise wife, who later married David.
- Calebite: a descendant of Caleb, the faithful spy.
- Ahinoam of Jezreel: another of David's wives, from Jezreel in Judah.
- Palti son of Laish: the man to whom Saul gave Michal.

God has used family, friends, pastors and especially my wife to correct me. On May 29, 2020, my wife caught me drinking after I had denied it for a long time. The hurt on her face broke through my pride. She told me I needed help and took me to my first 12-step meeting that same day. A hard truth spoken in love can save a life.

Chapter 25 Study Questions

1. What happened to Samuel at the start of this chapter, and how did Israel respond? (25:1)

2. How are Nabal and Abigail described? (25:3)

3. What had David's men done for Nabal, and what did David ask for? (25:5-8, 15-16)

4. How did Nabal answer, and what does his answer show about his heart? (25:10-11)

5. How did David react, and how was that different from chapter 24? (25:13, 21-22)

6. What did Abigail do and say to turn David back? (25:18-31)

7. How did David respond to Abigail's words? (25:32-35)

8. What happened to Nabal, and who does the text say did it? (25:36-39)

9. When are you most likely to lose your temper the way David did here? What helps you stop and think before you act?

10. Abigail spoke truth humbly and David received it. Who has God used to correct you, and how did you respond? Is there someone you need to thank?

Chapter 26: David Spares Saul Again

Scripture

26:1-12 And the Ziphites came to Saul to Gibeah, saying, "Is not David hiding himself on the hill of Hachilah, on the face of the Jeshimon?" And Saul arose, and he went down to the wilderness of Ziph, and with him ***were*** three thousand men, the chosen of Israel, to seek David in the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul encamped on the hill of Hachilah, which ***is*** on the face of the Jeshimon, by the way. And David ***was*** dwelling in the wilderness, and he saw that Saul had come after him into the wilderness. And David sent spies, and he knew that Saul had come for certain. And David arose, and he went to the place where Saul had encamped. And David saw the place where Saul lay, and Abner the son of Ner, the commander of his army; and Saul ***was*** lying in the encampment, and the people ***were*** encamped around him. And David answered, and he said to Ahimelech the Hittite and to Abishai the son of Zeruiah, the brother of Joab, saying, "Who will go down with me to Saul into the camp?" And Abishai said, "I, I will go down with you." And David and Abishai came to the people by night, and look, Saul ***was*** lying asleep in the encampment, and his spear ***was*** stuck in the ground at his head; and Abner and the people ***were*** lying around him. And Abishai said to David, "God has delivered up your enemy into your hand today; and now, please let me strike him with the spear, even into the ground, one time, and I will not repeat ***it*** on him." And David said to Abishai, "Do not destroy him; for who has stretched out his hand against the anointed of the LORD and been free from guilt?" And David said, "***As*** the LORD lives, surely the LORD will strike him; or his day will come, and he will die; or he will go down into battle, and he will be swept away. Far be it for me from the LORD to stretch out my hand against the anointed of the LORD. And now, please take the spear that ***is*** at his head and the jug of water, and let us go for ourselves." And David took the spear and the jug of water from the head of Saul, and they went for themselves; and there was no one seeing, and there was no one knowing, and there was no one awaking, for all of them ***were*** sleeping, for a deep sleep of the LORD had fallen on them.

26:13-25 And David passed over to the other side, and he stood on the top of the hill from afar; great ***was*** the place between them. And David called out to the people and to Abner the son of Ner, saying, "Will you not answer, Abner?" And Abner answered, and he said, "Who ***are*** you ***who*** have called out to the king?" And David said to Abner, "***Are*** you not a man? And who ***is*** like you in Israel? And why did you not guard your lord the king? For one of the people came to destroy the king your lord. This thing that you have done ***is*** not good. ***As*** the LORD lives, surely you ***are*** sons of death, who did not guard your lord, the anointed of the LORD. And now, see where the spear of the king ***is***, and the jug of water that ***was*** at his head." And Saul recognized the voice of David, and he said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" And David said, "***It is*** my voice, my lord the king." And he said, "Why ***is*** this, ***that*** my lord ***is*** pursuing after his servant? For what have I done, and what evil ***is*** in my hand? And now, please let my lord the king hear the words of his servant: If the LORD has incited you against me, let Him smell an offering; but if the sons of mankind, cursed ***are*** they before the LORD, for they have driven me out today from having a share in the inheritance of the LORD, saying, 'Go, serve other gods.' And now, let not my blood fall to the ground away from the presence of the LORD; for the king of Israel has come out to seek one flea, just as one pursues the partridge in the mountains." And Saul said, "I have sinned. Return, my son David, for I will not do

harm to you again, because my life was precious in your eyes this day. Look, I have acted foolishly, and I have erred very greatly." And David answered, and he said, "Look, the spear of the king! And let one of the young men pass over and take it. And the LORD will return to each man his righteousness and his faithfulness; for the LORD gave you today into ***my*** hand, and I was not willing to stretch out my hand against the anointed of the LORD. And look, just as your life was great this day in my eyes, so may my life be great in the eyes of the LORD, and may He deliver me from all distress." And Saul said to David, "Blessed ***are*** you, my son David; you will both certainly do ***much*** and certainly prevail." And David went on his way, and Saul returned to his place.

Chapter 26 Preview

Once more the men of Ziph tell Saul where David is hiding, and once more Saul comes with three thousand chosen men. This time David goes to Saul. At night he and his nephew Abishai slip into the middle of Saul's camp, where the king lies asleep with his spear stuck in the ground by his head and his army all around him. Abishai begs to pin Saul to the ground with one blow. David says no. He will not stretch out his hand against the LORD's anointed. The LORD Himself will deal with Saul. David takes the spear and the water jug, and they walk out, because "a deep sleep of the LORD" has fallen on the whole camp.

From a hilltop across the valley David calls out, mocks Abner for failing to guard the king, and holds up the spear. Saul knows his voice. For the second time Saul confesses, "I have sinned," and blesses David. But David does not go back with him. This chapter is much like chapter 24, and the repetition is on purpose: David's choice to trust God was not a one-time feeling. It was a settled conviction.

Chapter 26 Study

26:1-3 *And the Ziphites came to Saul to Gibeah, saying, "Is not David hiding himself on the hill of Hachilah, on the face of the Jeshimon?" And Saul arose, and he went down to the wilderness of Ziph, and with him **were** three thousand men, the chosen of Israel, to seek David in the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul encamped on the hill of Hachilah, which **is** on the face of the Jeshimon, by the way. And David **was** dwelling in the wilderness, and he saw that Saul had come after him into the wilderness.*

"Is not David hiding himself on the hill of Hachilah, on the face of the Jeshimon?" The Ziphites had betrayed David before (23:19). Now they did it again. The hill of Hachilah was in the wilderness of Ziph, facing the barren desert.

"And Saul arose, and he went down to the wilderness of Ziph, and with him were three thousand men, the chosen of Israel." Just a short time before, Saul had wept and said David would surely be king (24:16-20). Now he was hunting him again. Saul's tears had not changed his heart. Feelings of sorrow are not the same as repentance. Real repentance turns around and goes a different way. Paul says godly sorrow produces repentance, while worldly sorrow produces death (2 Corinthians 7:10).

"And Saul encamped on the hill of Hachilah." David "saw that Saul had come after him into the wilderness."

26:4-5 *And David sent spies, and he knew that Saul had come for certain. And David arose, and he went to the place where Saul had encamped. And David saw the place where Saul lay, and Abner the son of Ner, the commander of his army; and Saul **was** lying in the encampment, and the people **were** encamped around him.*

"And David sent spies, and he knew that Saul had come for certain." David did not panic, and he did not believe every rumor. He checked the facts.

Then he did something bold. "David arose, and he went to the place where Saul had encamped." He went to look for himself. "And David saw the place where Saul lay, and Abner the son of Ner, the commander of his army." In an ancient army camp, the king slept in the middle, protected by the wagons and baggage and surrounded by his soldiers. "And the people were encamped around him." Saul was in the safest spot in the camp.

26:6 *And David answered, and he said to Ahimelech the Hittite and to Abishai the son of Zeruiah, the brother of Joab, saying, "Who will go down with me to Saul into the camp?" And Abishai said, "I, I will go down with you."*

"Who will go down with me to Saul into the camp?" David asked two men. Ahimelech the Hittite is not mentioned anywhere else. The Hittites were one of the old peoples of Canaan, and like Uriah the Hittite later (2 Samuel 11:3), some of them served in David's army. Abishai was "the son of Zeruiah, the brother of Joab." Zeruiah was David's sister (1 Chronicles 2:16), so Abishai and Joab were David's nephews. They were fierce fighters, and they will play a big part in 2 Samuel.

"I, I will go down with you." Abishai volunteered right away. He was brave. As we will see, he was also quick to kill.

26:7-8 *And David and Abishai came to the people by night, and look, Saul **was** lying asleep in the encampment, and his spear **was** stuck in the ground at his head; and Abner and the people **were** lying around him. And Abishai said to David, "God has delivered up your enemy into your hand today; and now, please let me strike him with the spear, even into the ground, one time, and I will not repeat **it** on him."*

"And look, Saul was lying asleep in the encampment, and his spear was stuck in the ground at his head." The spear was the sign of the king's authority and his weapon at hand. It was the same spear Saul had thrown at David more than once (18:11; 19:10). "And Abner and the people were lying around him." Everyone was asleep.

"God has delivered up your enemy into your hand today." Abishai said almost exactly what David's men had said in the cave (24:4). It seemed obvious. "And now, please let me strike him with the spear, even into the ground, one time, and I will not repeat it on him." One blow. That is all it will take. You do not even have to do it yourself.

This was an even greater temptation than the cave. David did not have to lift his own hand. He only had to say yes and let someone else do it.

26:9-11 *And David said to Abishai, "Do not destroy him; for who has stretched out his hand against the anointed of the LORD and been free from guilt?" And David said, "**As** the LORD lives, surely the LORD will strike him; or his day will come, and he will die; or he will go down into battle, and he will be swept away. Far be it for me from the LORD to stretch out my hand against the anointed of the LORD. And now, please take the spear that **is** at his head and the jug of water, and let us go for ourselves."*

"Do not destroy him; for who has stretched out his hand against the anointed of the LORD and been free from guilt?" David's answer had not changed since chapter 24. Letting Abishai do it would be the same as doing it himself. The guilt would still be on David.

"As the LORD lives, surely the LORD will strike him; or his day will come, and he will die; or he will go down into battle, and he will be swept away." David gave three ways Saul's life might end. The LORD might strike him, as He struck Nabal (25:38). He might die of old age. Or he might die in battle. Any of those was in God's hands. David would not make it happen himself. In the end, Saul did die in battle (31:3-6).

David had just learned this lesson with Nabal. He had watched God deal with a man who wronged him, without David lifting a finger. That made it easier to trust God with Saul.

"Far be it for me from the LORD to stretch out my hand against the anointed of the LORD. And now, please take the spear that is at his head and the jug of water, and let us go." The spear and the water jug were proof, like the piece of the robe in chapter 24. In the desert a water jug was life itself. David took the king's weapon and his water, and left the king alive.

26:12 *And David took the spear and the jug of water from the head of Saul, and they went for themselves; and there was no one seeing, and there was no one knowing, and there was no one awaking, for all of them **were** sleeping, for a deep sleep of the LORD had fallen on them.*

"And David took the spear and the jug of water from the head of Saul, and they went." Look at how carefully the writer puts it: "there was no one seeing, and there was no one knowing, and there was no one awaking." How could two men walk into the middle of three thousand soldiers and out again without anyone waking? "For all of them were sleeping, for a deep sleep of the LORD had fallen on them."

God did it. The same word for deep sleep is used when God put Adam into a deep sleep (Genesis 2:21) and when He put Abram into one (Genesis 15:12). God had opened the way. And notice that even with God opening the way, David still did not take Saul's life. When God gives us an opportunity, it is not a license to do what He has forbidden.

26:13-16 *And David passed over to the other side, and he stood on the top of the hill from afar; great **was** the place between them. And David called out to the people and to Abner the son of Ner, saying, "Will you not answer, Abner?" And Abner answered, and he said, "Who **are** you **who** have called out to the king?" And David said to Abner, "**Are** you not a man? And who **is** like you in Israel? And why did you not guard your lord the king? For one of the people came to destroy the king your lord. This thing that you have done **is** not good. **As** the LORD lives, surely you **are** sons of death, who did not guard your lord, the anointed of the LORD. And now, see where the spear of the king **is**, and the jug of water that **was** at his head."*

"And David passed over to the other side, and he stood on the top of the hill from afar." This time David kept his distance. He had learned from the cave that Saul's moods could change quickly.

"Will you not answer, Abner?" David called to the army commander, not the king. "Who are you who have called out to the king?" Abner was annoyed at being woken.

"Are you not a man? And who is like you in Israel? And why did you not guard your lord the king?" David was mocking Abner. You are the great commander, the best man in Israel, and you let someone walk right up to the king? "One of the people came to destroy the king your lord."

"This thing that you have done is not good. As the LORD lives, surely you are sons of death, who did not guard your lord, the anointed of the LORD." Sons of death means men who deserve to die. A guard who let the king be killed would be executed. David turned the charge around. Saul had called David "a son of death" (20:31). Now David said it was Abner and the guards who deserved that name, because they had failed to protect the LORD's anointed, while David had protected him.

"And now, see where the spear of the king is, and the jug of water that was at his head." Look for them. They are gone.

26:17-20 *And Saul recognized the voice of David, and he said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" And David said, "**It is** my voice, my lord the king." And he said, "Why **is** this, **that** my lord **is** pursuing after his servant? For what have I done, and what evil **is** in my hand? And now, please let my lord the king hear the words of his servant: If the LORD has incited you against me, let Him smell an offering; but if the sons of mankind, cursed **are** they before the LORD, for they have driven me out today from having a share in the inheritance of the LORD, saying, 'Go, serve other gods.' And now, let not my blood fall to the ground away from the presence of the LORD; for the king of Israel has come out to seek one flea, just as one pursues the partridge in the mountains."*

"Is this your voice, my son David?" Saul recognized him, just as in the cave (24:16). "It is my voice, my lord the king."

"Why is this, that my lord is pursuing after his servant? For what have I done, and what evil is in my hand?" David asked again what he had asked before (20:1; 24:11).

"If the LORD has incited you against me, let Him smell an offering." David considered every possibility. If God was behind this, because of some sin of David's, then David would offer a

sacrifice and make peace with God. "But if the sons of mankind, cursed are they before the LORD." If men were stirring Saul up, God would judge them.

"For they have driven me out today from having a share in the inheritance of the LORD." In effect they were saying, "Go, serve other gods." This is a striking line. David was being driven out of the land of Israel, the LORD's inheritance. In those days people thought of each land as belonging to its own gods. To be driven to a foreign land was, in effect, to be told, go and worship other gods. David did not mean he would. He meant this was what his enemies were pushing him toward, being cut off from God's people and God's worship.

"And now, let not my blood fall to the ground away from the presence of the LORD." Do not make me die in a foreign land. "For the king of Israel has come out to seek one flea, just as one pursues the partridge in the mountains." A partridge is a bird that runs along the ground instead of flying, and hunters chased it until it was exhausted. That is how David felt.

26:21 *And Saul said, "I have sinned. Return, my son David, for I will not do harm to you again, because my life was precious in your eyes this day. Look, I have acted foolishly, and I have erred very greatly."*

"I have sinned. Return, my son David, for I will not do harm to you again, because my life was precious in your eyes this day. Look, I have acted foolishly, and I have erred very greatly."

These are some of the most honest words Saul ever spoke. "I have acted foolishly, and I have erred very greatly." He was right. But again, they were only words. Saul said, "I have sinned" to Samuel (15:24, 30), and his heart did not change. He said it again here, and it did not change. Saying the right words is not the same as turning to God.

"Return, my son David." David did not.

26:22-24 *And David answered, and he said, "Look, the spear of the king! And let one of the young men pass over and take it. And the LORD will return to each man his righteousness and his faithfulness; for the LORD gave you today into* ***my*** *hand, and I was not willing to stretch out my hand against the anointed of the LORD. And look, just as your life was great this day in my eyes, so may my life be great in the eyes of the LORD, and may He deliver me from all distress."*

"Look, the spear of the king! And let one of the young men pass over and take it." David would not walk into Saul's camp again. He sent the spear back by a servant.

"And the LORD will return to each man his righteousness and his faithfulness." David trusted God to reward right living and faithfulness. "For the LORD gave you today into my hand, and I was not willing to stretch out my hand against the anointed of the LORD."

"And look, just as your life was great this day in my eyes, so may my life be great in the eyes of the LORD, and may He deliver me from all distress." David did not ask Saul to protect him. He did not trust Saul's promise. He asked the LORD. David had learned that the only one he could fully trust was God.

26:25 *And Saul said to David, "Blessed **are** you, my son David; you will both certainly do **much** and certainly prevail." And David went on his way, and Saul returned to his place.*

"Blessed are you, my son David; you will both certainly do much and certainly prevail." Saul blessed David a second time and as good as said again that David would be king.

"And David went on his way, and Saul returned to his place." This was the last time the two men saw each other. They went in opposite directions, and they never met again. Saul would die on Mount Gilboa. David would be crowned in Hebron.

Why does the Bible tell two such similar stories, in chapters 24 and 26? Because they show us a pattern, not a moment. Many people can do the right thing once, in the heat of the moment. David did it twice, and the second time was even harder, because the opportunity was easier and he had more reason to be tired of waiting. Faith that holds once is good. Faith that keeps holding is better. "Let us not lose heart in doing the good" (Galatians 6:9).

Chapter 26 Summary

The Ziphites told Saul again where David was hiding, and Saul came with three thousand chosen men and camped on the hill of Hachilah. David sent spies, then went to see the camp, where Saul lay in the middle with Abner and the army around him. David and his nephew Abishai went down at night and found Saul asleep with his spear stuck in the ground by his head. Abishai asked to kill him with one blow, but David said no one could stretch out his hand against the LORD's anointed and be guiltless, and that the LORD would deal with Saul in His own way and time. They took the spear and the water jug and left, because a deep sleep from the LORD had fallen on the camp. From a far hilltop David called to Abner, rebuked him for not guarding the king, and showed that the spear and jug were gone. Saul knew David's voice, and David asked why Saul was pursuing him and driving him out of the LORD's inheritance. Saul confessed that he had sinned and acted foolishly, and promised not to harm David. David sent back the spear, asked the LORD to value his life as he had valued Saul's, and Saul blessed him. David went on his way, and Saul returned home.

People and Places

- Hill of Hachilah: a hill in the wilderness of Ziph.
- Ahimelech the Hittite: one of David's men, from the old Hittite people of Canaan; not the priest Ahimelech.
- Abishai: son of Zeruiah, David's sister, and brother of Joab; a fierce warrior.
- Abner son of Ner: Saul's cousin and the commander of his army.
- Partridge: a bird that runs along the ground and was hunted in the hills.

Chapter 26 Study Questions

1. Why do you think Saul came after David again after weeping in chapter 24? (26:1-2; 24:16-20)

2. Where was Saul sleeping, and why should that have been the safest place in the camp? (26:5, 7)

3. What did Abishai want to do, and why was this a greater temptation than the cave? (26:8)

4. What three ways did David say Saul's life might end? (26:10)

5. How did David and Abishai get in and out of the camp without being caught? (26:12)

6. Why did David rebuke Abner? (26:15-16)

7. What did David mean when he said his enemies were telling him to go and serve other gods? (26:19)

8. What did Saul confess, and why did David still not go back with him? (26:21-25)

9. David did the right thing a second time, when it was easier to give in. Where in your life do you need faith that keeps holding, not just faith for one moment?

10. David had just seen God deal with Nabal, and that helped him trust God with Saul. How can remembering what God has done help you wait on Him now?

Chapter 27: David Among the Philistines

Scripture

27:1-12 And David said to his heart, "Now I shall be swept away one day by the hand of Saul. ***There is*** nothing good for me but that I should certainly escape to the land of ***the*** Philistines; and Saul will despair of me, of seeking me any more in all the territory of Israel, and I will be delivered from his hand." And David arose, and he passed over, he and six hundred men who ***were*** with him, to Achish the son of Maoch, the king of Gath. And David dwelt with Achish in Gath, he and his men, each man and his household, David and his two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelite ***woman*** and Abigail the wife of Nabal, the Carmelite ***woman***. And it was told to Saul that David had fled ***to*** Gath, and he did not again seek him any more. And David said to Achish, "If, please, I have found favor in your eyes, let them give me a place in one of the cities of the field, and let me dwell there; and why should your servant dwell in the city of royalty with you?" And Achish gave him Ziklag on that day; therefore Ziklag has belonged to the kings of Judah until this day. And the number of the days that David dwelt in the region of ***the*** Philistines was a year and four months. And David and his men went up, and they made raids against the Geshurites and the Gizrites and the Amalekites; for they ***were*** inhabiting the land which ***was*** from of old, as you come toward Shur and to the land of Egypt. And David would strike the land, and he would not let a man or a woman live, and he would take sheep and cattle and donkeys and camels and clothing; and he returned, and he came to Achish. And Achish said, "Against where did you raid today?" And David said, "Against the Negeb of Judah, and against the Negeb of the Jerahmeelites, and against the Negeb of the Kenites." And David did not let a man or a woman live to bring ***them to*** Gath, saying, "Lest they tell about us, saying, 'Thus David has done, and thus ***has been*** his practice all the days that he has dwelt in the region of ***the*** Philistines.'" And Achish trusted in David, saying, "He has certainly made himself odious among his people, in Israel; and he shall be to me a perpetual servant."

Chapter 27 Preview

After years on the run, David is worn out. He says to himself that one day Saul will catch him, and that the only safe place left is the land of the Philistines. So he takes his six hundred men and their families to Achish, king of Gath, the same king he once fled from by pretending to be mad. This time Achish welcomes him. David asks for a town of his own, and Achish gives him Ziklag. For a year and four months David lives among Israel's enemies.

From Ziklag David raids the desert peoples to the south, the Geshurites, the Gizrites and the Amalekites, and he leaves no one alive to tell what he has done. When Achish asks where he raided, David lies and says he has been raiding the south of Judah. Achish believes him and thinks David has made himself hated in Israel for good. This is a short chapter and a hard one. David is safe from Saul, but he is far from where God wants him, and the chapter does not hide the deceit and bloodshed that come with it.

Chapter 27 Study

27:1 *And David said to his heart, "Now I shall be swept away one day by the hand of Saul. **There is** nothing good for me but that I should certainly escape to the land of **the** Philistines; and Saul will despair of me, of seeking me any more in all the territory of Israel, and I will be delivered from his hand."*

"And David said to his heart, Now I shall be swept away one day by the hand of Saul." Notice who David was talking to. Not the LORD. Not Gad the prophet. Not Abiathar with the ephod. He was talking to himself. In chapter 23 David asked God at every step. Here there is no prayer at all.

And listen to what he told himself. "Now I shall be swept away one day by the hand of Saul." But God had promised David the throne. Samuel had anointed him. Jonathan had said it. Abigail had said it. Even Saul had said it (24:20; 26:25). God had just protected David by putting a whole army to sleep (26:12). And David still said, one day Saul will get me.

That is what discouragement does. It makes us forget what God has said and what He has done. David was tired. He had been running for years. It is understandable. But it was not faith.

"There is nothing good for me but that I should certainly escape to the land of the Philistines." David decided the best thing he could do was to leave the land God had promised. "And Saul will despair of me." In one sense, his plan worked. Saul stopped hunting him (27:4). But David paid for that safety. Just a short time before, he had told Saul that being driven out of the LORD's inheritance was like being told, "Go, serve other gods" (26:19). Now he went there on his own.

Have you ever been there? Tired of waiting, tired of trusting, and ready to take the easy way out, even if it means leaving where God wants you? God does not abandon us when we do that. But we often find, as David did, that the easy way brings its own troubles.

27:2-4 *And David arose, and he passed over, he and six hundred men who **were** with him, to Achish the son of Maoch, the king of Gath. And David dwelt with Achish in Gath, he and his men, each man and his household, David and his two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelite **woman** and Abigail the wife of Nabal, the Carmelite **woman**. And it was told to Saul that David had fled **to** Gath, and he did not again seek him any more.*

"And David arose, and he passed over, he and six hundred men who were with him, to Achish the son of Maoch, the king of Gath." The last time David came to Achish he was alone, and he had to pretend to be mad to escape (21:10-15). This time he came with six hundred fighting men, and he was now known as Saul's enemy. Achish saw him as a useful ally.

"And David dwelt with Achish in Gath, he and his men, each man and his household." The men had their families with them. "David and his two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelite woman and Abigail the wife of Nabal, the Carmelite woman." This was a whole community, perhaps two thousand people or more.

"And it was told to Saul that David had fled to Gath, and he did not again seek him any more." Saul gave up. He could not chase David into Philistine land.

27:5-7 *And David said to Achish, "If, please, I have found favor in your eyes, let them give me a place in one of the cities of the field, and let me dwell there; and why should your servant dwell in the city of royalty with you?" And Achish gave him Ziklag on that day; therefore Ziklag has belonged to the kings of Judah until this day. And the number of the days that David dwelt in the region of* ***the*** *Philistines was a year and four months.*

"Let them give me a place in one of the cities of the field, and let me dwell there; and why should your servant dwell in the city of royalty with you?" David spoke humbly, as if he did not deserve to live in the king's city. But he had good reasons to want his own town. In Gath, Achish's people would be watching him all the time. In a town of his own, he could do what he wanted without being seen.

"And Achish gave him Ziklag on that day." Ziklag was a town in the south, in the Negeb, toward the desert. It had been given to the tribe of Simeon and Judah long before (Joshua 15:31; 19:5), but the Philistines had taken it. "Therefore Ziklag has belonged to the kings of Judah until this day." This line shows the book was written after there were kings of Judah, after the kingdom divided (see the Background).

"And the number of the days that David dwelt in the region of the Philistines was a year and four months."

27:8-11 *And David and his men went up, and they made raids against the Geshurites and the Gizrites and the Amalekites; for they* ***were*** *inhabiting the land which* ***was*** *from of old, as you come toward Shur and to the land of Egypt. And David would strike the land, and he would not let a man or a woman live, and he would take sheep and cattle and donkeys and camels and clothing; and he returned, and he came to Achish. And Achish said, "Against where did you raid today?" And David said, "Against the Negeb of Judah, and against the Negeb of the Jerahmeelites, and against the Negeb of the Kenites." And David did not let a man or a woman live to bring* ***them to*** *Gath, saying, "Lest they tell about us, saying, 'Thus David has done, and thus* ***has been*** *his practice all the days that he has dwelt in the region of* ***the*** *Philistines.'"*

"And David and his men went up, and they made raids against the Geshurites and the Gizrites and the Amalekites." These were peoples who lived in the desert between southern Judah and Egypt, "as you come toward Shur and to the land of Egypt." The Geshurites here were a people of the south near the Philistines, named in Joshua 13:2 as part of the land still to be taken. The Amalekites we already know. They were the people God had condemned for their cruelty to Israel (Exodus 17:14; Deuteronomy 25:17-19; 1 Samuel 15:2-3).

"And David would strike the land, and he would not let a man or a woman live, and he would take sheep and cattle and donkeys and camels and clothing." This is hard to read. David's men killed everyone in the places they raided and took the animals and goods.

Then David lied to Achish. "Against where did you raid today?" "Against the Negeb of Judah, and against the Negeb of the Jerahmeelites, and against the Negeb of the Kenites." The Negeb means the dry south country. The Jerahmeelites were a clan of Judah (1 Chronicles 2:9), and the Kenites were friends of Israel (15:6). David made Achish think he was raiding his own people.

"And David did not let a man or a woman live to bring them to Gath, saying, Lest they tell about us." The text tells us plainly why no one was left alive. It was so no one could tell Achish the truth.

How should we understand this? Bible teachers have read it in more than one way, and I want to be fair to them.

Some point out that the peoples David attacked were ones God had already placed under judgment. Amalek had been condemned for centuries, and Saul had been rejected for failing to carry out God's command against them (15:2-3, 23). The Geshurites and others were part of the land God told Israel to take (Joshua 13:2). On this reading, David was doing what Saul failed to do, and making the southern border safe for Judah. It is true that David never raided Judah, and that he later sent gifts of the plunder to the towns of Judah (30:26-31).

Others point out that the text never says God commanded these raids, and it never says David asked the LORD about them. The reason the text gives for killing everyone is not obedience to God, but to keep his lies hidden from Achish. On this reading, this is one of the darkest times in David's life. He was living by his own wits, among God's enemies, telling lies and covering them with blood.

Good Bible teachers hold each of these views. Whichever one we take, the text is careful to give David's reason for leaving no one alive, and that reason was to keep his lie hidden. The chapter begins with fear, not faith (27:1). The book does not praise what David did here. It simply records it, the way Scripture records the sins of Abraham, Jacob, and David himself in 2 Samuel 11. The Bible is honest about its heroes. It never asks us to approve of everything they did. And no one can point to these verses to excuse violence or deceit today. God had given Saul a command about Amalek through His prophet (15:2-3). He gave no such command here.

What can we learn? When we stop asking God and start running our own lives out of fear, one wrong step leads to another. David went to Philistia to be safe. To stay safe, he had to lie. To protect the lie, he shed blood. Sin is like that. It is never just one thing. And in the next chapters, David's choice will put him in a place where he is expected to march with the Philistines against Israel, and it will cost him nearly everything at Ziklag. God will rescue him, but David will learn the hard way.

27:12 *And Achish trusted in David, saying, "He has certainly made himself odious among his people, in Israel; and he shall be to me a perpetual servant."*

"And Achish trusted in David, saying, He has certainly made himself odious among his people, in Israel; and he shall be to me a perpetual servant." Odious means hated, like a bad smell. Achish thought David had burned all his bridges with Israel and would serve him forever. He was completely fooled.

There is a sad irony here. David, God's anointed king of Israel, was now thought of by a Philistine king as his servant for life. David had not stopped being God's chosen king. God's promise had not changed. But David had put himself in a place where he looked like anything but Israel's king.

Yet God was not done with him. God's promises do not depend on our faithfulness. Paul wrote, "if we are faithless, He remains faithful; He is not able to deny Himself" (2 Timothy 2:13). The God who chose David would bring him out of Philistia and onto the throne. That is good news for every believer who has wandered. God does not give up on His own.

Chapter 27 Summary

David told himself that one day Saul would kill him, and that the best thing he could do was escape to the land of the Philistines. He went with his six hundred men and their households to Achish king of Gath, and when Saul heard it, he stopped seeking him. David asked Achish for a town in the country, and Achish gave him Ziklag, which has belonged to the kings of Judah ever since. David lived in Philistine country a year and four months. From there he raided the Geshurites, the Gizrites and the Amalekites in the desert toward Shur and Egypt, killing every man and woman and taking the livestock and clothing. When Achish asked where he had raided, David said the south of Judah and the lands of the Jerahmeelites and Kenites. He left no one alive so no one could tell Achish the truth. Achish trusted David, believing he had made himself hated in Israel and would serve him forever.

People and Places

- Achish son of Maoch: the Philistine king of Gath.
- Ziklag: a town in the Negeb that Achish gave David, later belonging to Judah's kings.
- Geshurites and Gizrites: desert peoples south of Judah, toward Egypt.
- Amalekites: a desert people under God's judgment for their cruelty to Israel.
- Shur: the desert region on the way to Egypt.
- Negeb: the dry south country of Judah.
- Jerahmeelites: a clan of Judah living in the Negeb.
- Kenites: a people friendly to Israel, the family of Moses' father-in-law.

Chapter 27 Study Questions

1. Who did David talk to before deciding to go to the Philistines, and who did he not talk to? (27:1)

2. What had God already promised and done for David that he seemed to forget? (27:1; 24:20; 26:12)

3. How was David's second visit to Achish different from the first? (27:2-3; 21:10-15)

4. Why do you think David wanted a town of his own instead of living in Gath? (27:5)

5. Whom did David raid, and what did he tell Achish? (27:8-10)

6. What reason does the text give for why David left no one alive? (27:11)

7. What did Achish think about David, and was he right? (27:12)

8. How does one wrong step lead to another in this chapter?

9. When you are worn out and discouraged, who do you talk to in your heart? How can you bring those thoughts to God instead?

10. David wandered, but God did not give up on him (2 Timothy 2:13). How does that encourage you if you have wandered from where God wants you?

Chapter 28: Saul and the Medium at Endor

Scripture

28:1-14 And it was in those days, and ***the*** Philistines gathered their armies for war, to fight against Israel. And Achish said to David, "You will certainly know that you will go out with me in the camp, you and your men." And David said to Achish, "Therefore you, you will know what your servant will do." And Achish said to David, "Therefore I will make you keeper of my head all the days." And Samuel had died, and all Israel had mourned for him, and they had buried him in Ramah, even in his own city. And Saul had removed the necromancers and the spiritists from the land. And ***the*** Philistines gathered together, and they came, and they encamped at Shunem; and Saul gathered all Israel, and they encamped at Gilboa. And Saul saw the camp of ***the*** Philistines, and he was afraid, and his heart trembled exceedingly. And Saul inquired of the LORD, and the LORD did not answer him, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets. And Saul said to his servants, "Seek for me a woman, a mistress of necromancy, and let me go to her, and let me consult her." And his servants said to him, "Look, a woman, a mistress of necromancy, ***is*** in En-dor." And Saul disguised himself, and he put on other garments, and he went, he and two men with him, and they came to the woman by night. And he said, "Please divine for me by necromancy, and bring up for me ***the one*** whom I will name to you." And the woman said to him, "Look, you, you know what Saul has done, that he has cut off the necromancers and the spiritist from the land. And why are you laying a snare for my life, to cause me to die?" And Saul swore to her by the LORD, saying, "***As*** the LORD lives, punishment shall not befall you in this matter." And the woman said, "Whom shall I bring up for you?" And he said, "Bring up Samuel for me." And the woman saw Samuel, and she cried out with a loud voice; and the woman spoke to Saul, saying, "Why have you deceived me? And you ***are*** Saul!" And the king said to her, "Do not be afraid; for what have you seen?" And the woman said to Saul, "I have seen gods coming up from the earth." And he said to her, "What ***is*** his appearance?" And she said, "An old man is coming up, and he ***is*** wrapped ***in*** a robe." And Saul knew that it ***was*** Samuel, and he bowed low, face toward the ground, and he bowed down.

28:15-25 And Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me, to bring me up?" And Saul said, "It is very distressing for me; and ***the*** Philistines are fighting against me, and God has turned aside from me, and He has not answered me any more, neither by the hand of the prophets nor by dreams; and I have called you to make known to me what I shall do." And Samuel said, "And why do you ask me, and the LORD has turned aside from you, and He has become your enemy? And the LORD has done for Himself just as He spoke by my hand; and the LORD has torn the kingdom from your hand, and He has given it to your neighbor, to David. Because you did not listen to the voice of the LORD, and you did not execute the burning of His anger on Amalek, therefore the LORD has done this thing to you this day. And the LORD will also give Israel with you into the hand of ***the*** Philistines; and tomorrow you and your sons ***will be*** with me. The LORD will also give the camp of Israel into the hand of ***the*** Philistines." And Saul made haste, and he fell his full length to the ground, and he was exceedingly afraid because of the words of Samuel; also there was no strength in him, for he had not eaten food all the day and all the night. And the woman came to Saul, and she saw that he was exceedingly terrified, and she said to him, "Look, your

maidservant has listened to your voice, and I have put my life in my palm, and I have listened to your words that you spoke to me. And now, please listen, you also, to the voice of your maidservant, and let me set before you a piece of bread, and eat, and let there be strength in you, for you will go on the way." And he refused, and he said, "I will not eat." And his servants, and also the woman, urged him; and he listened to their voice, and he arose from the ground, and he sat on the bed. And the woman had a calf of the stall in the house, and she made haste, and she slaughtered it; and she took flour, and she kneaded ***it***, and she baked it ***into*** unleavened bread. And she brought ***it*** near before Saul and before his servants, and they ate; and they arose, and they went away on that night.

Chapter 28 Preview

The Philistines gather for a great war against Israel, and Achish tells David that he and his men will march with them. David gives a careful answer that promises nothing. Then the story turns to Saul. The Philistine army is camped at Shunem, and when Saul sees it, his heart trembles. He asks the LORD what to do, but the LORD does not answer him by dreams, by Urim or by prophets. Samuel is dead. So Saul does the very thing he had once banned from the land: he looks for a woman who calls up the dead.

In disguise and by night, Saul goes to a medium at Endor and asks her to bring up Samuel. When she sees Samuel, she screams, and she realizes her visitor is Saul. The figure of Samuel speaks and repeats the word Saul had heard years before: the LORD has torn the kingdom from him and given it to David, because he did not obey the LORD about Amalek. Tomorrow, Samuel says, Saul and his sons will be with him. Saul collapses to the ground. The woman feeds him, and he goes out into the night to face his last battle. This is one of the hardest and most mysterious chapters in the Bible. I will go through it carefully, and I will be honest about what Bible teachers believe happened.

Chapter 28 Study

28:1-2 *And it was in those days, and **the** Philistines gathered their armies for war, to fight against Israel. And Achish said to David, "You will certainly know that you will go out with me in the camp, you and your men." And David said to Achish, "Therefore you, you will know what your servant will do." And Achish said to David, "Therefore I will make you keeper of my head all the days."*

"The Philistines gathered their armies for war, to fight against Israel." This was the moment David's choice in chapter 27 had been leading toward. "You will certainly know that you will go out with me in the camp, you and your men." Achish expected David to fight against Israel.

David's answer was clever: "Therefore you, you will know what your servant will do." It sounded like a promise. It promised nothing. David did not say whose side he would fight on. Achish took it as a yes: "Therefore I will make you keeper of my head all the days," meaning his personal bodyguard.

David was trapped. If he fought against Israel, he could never be their king. If he turned against the Philistines in the battle, his men's families in Ziklag were in Philistine land. We will see in chapter 29 how God got him out. For now, the writer leaves David in suspense and turns to Saul.

28:3 *And Samuel had died, and all Israel had mourned for him, and they had buried him in Ramah, even in his own city. And Saul had removed the necromancers and the spiritists from the land.*

"And Samuel had died, and all Israel had mourned for him." We were told this in 25:1. The writer reminds us now because it matters for what comes next. Samuel was gone, and Saul had no prophet.

"And Saul had removed the necromancers and the spiritists from the land." A necromancer was a person who claimed to call up the dead and speak with them. A spiritist claimed to have special knowledge from the spirit world. God's law forbade both. Moses said there must not be found among Israel anyone who asks "a medium and a spiritist," or "one who inquires of the dead," because "everyone who does these things is an abomination to the LORD" (Deuteronomy 18:11-12). The law said, "Do not turn to the mediums and to the spiritists" (Leviticus 19:31), and those who practiced it were to be put to death (Leviticus 20:27).

Earlier in his reign, Saul had obeyed this law and driven them out. That was good. It makes what comes next even sadder.

28:4-6 *And **the** Philistines gathered together, and they came, and they encamped at Shunem; and Saul gathered all Israel, and they encamped at Gilboa. And Saul saw the camp of **the** Philistines, and he was afraid, and his heart trembled exceedingly. And Saul inquired of the LORD, and the LORD did not answer him, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets.*

"The Philistines gathered together, and they came, and they encamped at Shunem; and Saul gathered all Israel, and they encamped at Gilboa." The battle had moved far to the north, to the valley of Jezreel. Shunem was on the north side of the valley. Mount Gilboa was a ridge on the south side.

"And Saul saw the camp of the Philistines, and he was afraid, and his heart trembled exceedingly." The man who once rescued Jabesh-gilead with fire in his heart (11:6) now trembled. He knew God was no longer with him.

"And Saul inquired of the LORD, and the LORD did not answer him, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets." These were the three ways God spoke to His people in that day. God could speak in a dream. He could answer through the Urim of the high priest. And He spoke through prophets. Saul tried them all, and heaven was silent.

Why did God not answer? Saul had rejected God's word again and again (15:23). He had murdered the priests of Nob, so the high priest and the ephod were now with David (22:20; 23:6). He had refused to listen when Samuel spoke. Now, when he wanted to hear, God did not speak. Solomon warns of this: those who refuse God's call will one day call on Him, and He will not answer (Proverbs 1:24-28). That is a sobering thing. Today is the day to listen to God, while He is speaking (Hebrews 3:15).

And yet notice that 1 Chronicles 10:14 says Saul "did not inquire of the LORD." How can both be true? Saul went through the motions, but he never came to God in repentance. He wanted an answer. He did not want God.

28:7-8 *And Saul said to his servants, "Seek for me a woman, a mistress of necromancy, and let me go to her, and let me consult her." And his servants said to him, "Look, a woman, a mistress of necromancy, **is** in En-dor." And Saul disguised himself, and he put on other garments, and he went, he and two men with him, and they came to the woman by night. And he said, "Please divine for me by necromancy, and bring up for me **the one** whom I will name to you."*

"Seek for me a woman, a mistress of necromancy, and let me go to her, and let me consult her." When God was silent, Saul did not fall on his face in repentance. He went looking for another voice. His servants knew right where to find one: "Look, a woman, a mistress of necromancy, is in En-dor." Endor was a village on the north side of the valley, near the Philistine camp. To get there, Saul had to slip past the enemy army.

"And Saul disguised himself, and he put on other garments." He took off his royal robes. In a sense, this is the picture of Saul's whole life. He was always trying to look like something he was not. Now the king who had banned mediums sneaked out at night, in disguise, to consult one.

"Please divine for me by necromancy, and bring up for me the one whom I will name to you."

28:9-10 *And the woman said to him, "Look, you, you know what Saul has done, that he has cut off the necromancers and the spiritist from the land. And why are you laying a snare for my life, to cause me to die?" And Saul swore to her by the LORD, saying, "**As** the LORD lives, punishment shall not befall you in this matter."*

The woman was afraid. "Look, you, you know what Saul has done, that he has cut off the necromancers and the spiritist from the land. And why are you laying a snare for my life?" She thought it might be a trap.

"And Saul swore to her by the LORD, saying, As the LORD lives, punishment shall not befall you in this matter." Think about that. Saul swore by the LORD's name that he would not enforce the LORD's law. He used God's name to protect a sin God had forbidden. Saul's religion had become empty words.

28:11-14 *And the woman said, "Whom shall I bring up for you?" And he said, "Bring up Samuel for me." And the woman saw Samuel, and she cried out with a loud voice; and the woman spoke to Saul, saying, "Why have you deceived me? And you **are** Saul!" And the king said to her, "Do not be afraid; for what have you seen?" And the woman said to Saul, "I have seen gods coming up from the earth." And he said to her, "What **is** his appearance?" And she said, "An old man is coming up, and he **is** wrapped **in** a robe." And Saul knew that it **was** Samuel, and he bowed low, face toward the ground, and he bowed down.*

"Whom shall I bring up for you?" "Bring up Samuel for me." Saul wanted the prophet who had rebuked him all his life. In life, Saul would not listen to Samuel. Now he was desperate to hear him.

"And the woman saw Samuel, and she cried out with a loud voice." Something happened that she did not expect. She screamed. "Why have you deceived me? And you are Saul!" In that moment she knew who her visitor was.

"Do not be afraid; for what have you seen?" "I have seen gods coming up from the earth." The Hebrew word here is elohim. It usually means God or gods, but it can also mean a mighty spirit being. She saw a figure from the spirit world.

"What is his appearance?" "An old man is coming up, and he is wrapped in a robe." Samuel had worn a robe all his life, from the little robe his mother made him each year (2:19) to the robe Saul tore (15:27). "And Saul knew that it was Samuel, and he bowed low, face toward the ground."

Was it really Samuel? This is one of the most debated questions in the Old Testament. Good, Bible-believing teachers have held three main views.

The first view is that it really was Samuel, sent by God. Those who hold this point out that the text calls him Samuel again and again, and says, "Samuel said to Saul" (28:15). The woman's scream suggests that something happened she had never seen before, something she did not control. And the message was a true prophecy from the LORD that came to pass the next day (31:6). On this view, God, not the medium, brought Samuel, to give Saul one last word of judgment. It does not mean mediums have real power over the dead. God did something unique, as He did when Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus on the mountain (Matthew 17:3). This is probably the most widely held view among conservative teachers.

The second view is that it was an evil spirit pretending to be Samuel. Those who hold this point out that God had forbidden contact with the dead, and they do not believe He would answer through a practice He calls an abomination when He would not answer by His own appointed ways (28:6). Satan "disguises himself as an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14), and demons can know things and deceive. On this view, the writer calls the figure Samuel because that is who it appeared to be and who Saul thought it was.

The third view is that the woman was faking it, using tricks to fool Saul. Few hold this view today, because her terror and the exact fulfillment of the prophecy are hard to explain if she was only putting on a show.

Whichever view a person holds, some things are clear. First, this was sin. 1 Chronicles 10:13-14 tells us that Saul died for his unfaithfulness to the LORD, for not keeping the LORD's word, and "also for asking of a medium," and not inquiring of the LORD. Second, nothing in this chapter gives us permission to try to contact the dead. God's Word forbids it plainly (Deuteronomy 18:10-12). Isaiah asked, "should not a people consult its God? On behalf of the living should they consult the dead?" (Isaiah 8:19). Third, the dead are not ours to call up. "It is appointed to men to die once, and after this judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). Jesus taught that there is a great chasm between the dead and the living that cannot be crossed by our will (Luke 16:26).

Today people still try to reach the dead through mediums, psychics, seances, Ouija boards and the like. Some do it out of grief, missing someone they loved. I understand that pain. But I urge you, do

not open that door. If anything real answers, it is not your loved one, and it is not from God. Bring your grief to the Lord Jesus, who has "the keys of Hades and of Death" (Revelation 1:18). For those who die in Christ, our hope is not a seance. It is the resurrection, when we will be "caught away together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

28:15 *And Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me, to bring me up?" And Saul said, "It is very distressing for me; and* ***the*** *Philistines are fighting against me, and God has turned aside from me, and He has not answered me any more, neither by the hand of the prophets nor by dreams; and I have called you to make known to me what I shall do."*

"Why have you disturbed me, to bring me up?" Samuel was not pleased to be called.

"It is very distressing for me; and the Philistines are fighting against me, and God has turned aside from me, and He has not answered me any more, neither by the hand of the prophets nor by dreams; and I have called you to make known to me what I shall do." Listen to Saul. Philistines against me. God has turned from me. God will not answer me. So I called you. There is still no confession. Saul did not say, I have sinned, I have turned from God. He said, God has turned from me. He wanted advice. He did not want to repent.

28:16-19 *And Samuel said, "And why do you ask me, and the LORD has turned aside from you, and He has become your enemy? And the LORD has done for Himself just as He spoke by my hand; and the LORD has torn the kingdom from your hand, and He has given it to your neighbor, to David. Because you did not listen to the voice of the LORD, and you did not execute the burning of His anger on Amalek, therefore the LORD has done this thing to you this day. And the LORD will also give Israel with you into the hand of* ***the*** *Philistines; and tomorrow you and your sons* ***will be*** *with me. The LORD will also give the camp of Israel into the hand of* ***the*** *Philistines."*

"And why do you ask me, and the LORD has turned aside from you, and He has become your enemy?" If God will not answer you, why would His prophet give you a different word?

"And the LORD has done for Himself just as He spoke by my hand; and the LORD has torn the kingdom from your hand, and He has given it to your neighbor, to David." This is the same word Samuel spoke at Gilgal (15:28), but now with the neighbor's name: David.

"Because you did not listen to the voice of the LORD, and you did not execute the burning of His anger on Amalek." It all went back to chapter 15. "To listen is better than sacrifice" (15:22). Saul's refusal to listen had followed him to this night.

"And the LORD will also give Israel with you into the hand of the Philistines; and tomorrow you and your sons will be with me." Saul would die the next day, and so would his sons. "With me" means in the realm of the dead, which the Hebrew calls Sheol, the place of the departed. It does not tell us that Saul's eternal state would be the same as Samuel's. Scripture does not tell us about Saul's soul, and it is not our place to say more than it does.

28:20 *And Saul made haste, and he fell his full length to the ground, and he was exceedingly afraid because of the words of Samuel; also there was no strength in him, for he had not eaten food all the day and all the night.*

"And Saul made haste, and he fell his full length to the ground, and he was exceedingly afraid because of the words of Samuel." The tall king, head and shoulders above everyone (9:2), lay stretched out on the floor of a medium's house. "Also there was no strength in him, for he had not eaten food all the day and all the night." He was exhausted, starving and terrified.

It is a picture of where a life of disobedience ends. Saul began with every advantage. He had God's Spirit, God's prophet, a loyal son and a nation that loved him. He ended in the dark, in disguise, in a house God had told him never to enter, hearing that it was over.

28:21-25 *And the woman came to Saul, and she saw that he was exceedingly terrified, and she said to him, "Look, your maidservant has listened to your voice, and I have put my life in my palm, and I have listened to your words that you spoke to me. And now, please listen, you also, to the voice of your maidservant, and let me set before you a piece of bread, and eat, and let there be strength in you, for you will go on the way." And he refused, and he said, "I will not eat." And his servants, and also the woman, urged him; and he listened to their voice, and he arose from the ground, and he sat on the bed. And the woman had a calf of the stall in the house, and she made haste, and she slaughtered it; and she took flour, and she kneaded* ***it****, and she baked it* ***into*** *unleavened bread. And she brought* ***it*** *near before Saul and before his servants, and they ate; and they arose, and they went away on that night.*

"Look, your maidservant has listened to your voice, and I have put my life in my palm." The woman had risked her life to do what the king asked. Now she asked him to listen to her: "let me set before you a piece of bread, and eat, and let there be strength in you, for you will go on the way."

"I will not eat." But his servants and the woman pressed him, "and he listened to their voice." Saul listened to his servants, to the woman, to the people. Everyone, it seems, but the LORD.

"And the woman had a calf of the stall in the house, and she made haste, and she slaughtered it." A stall-fed calf was kept for a special occasion. She baked unleavened bread, bread made quickly without yeast. She showed kindness to a broken man, and the Bible records it.

"And they ate; and they arose, and they went away on that night." It is the last meal of Saul's life. He went out into the night, and he never came back. John writes of Judas, after he left the Last Supper, "and it was night" (John 13:30). Some nights are darker than others.

If you are reading this and you feel that God is silent, do not do what Saul did. Do not look for another voice. Saul's problem was not that God was unwilling to forgive. It was that Saul never truly turned. Even now, God says, "return to Me" (Malachi 3:7). Jesus said, "the one coming to Me I will certainly not cast out" (John 6:37). It is not too late for you.

Chapter 28 Summary

The Philistines gathered for war against Israel, and Achish told David he and his men would march with him. David gave an answer that promised nothing, and Achish made him his bodyguard. Samuel had died, and Saul had driven the necromancers and spiritists out of the land. The Philistines camped at Shunem and Israel at Gilboa, and when Saul saw their army, he was terrified. He inquired of the LORD, but the LORD did not answer him by dreams, by Urim or by prophets. Saul had his servants find a medium at Endor, and in disguise he went to her by night and swore by the LORD that she would not be punished. He asked her to bring up Samuel. When she saw Samuel, she cried out and knew her visitor was Saul. She described an old man wrapped in a robe, and Saul bowed down. Samuel asked why Saul had disturbed him, and Saul said God had turned from him and would not answer. Samuel said the LORD had become his enemy and had torn the kingdom from him and given it to David, because he did not obey the LORD about Amalek, and that tomorrow Saul and his sons would be with him and Israel would fall to the Philistines. Saul fell to the ground in fear, weak from hunger. The woman and his servants urged him to eat, and she prepared a calf and bread, and they ate and went away that night.

People and Places

- Necromancer (mistress of necromancy): a person who claims to call up the dead and speak with them; often called a medium.
- Spiritist: a person who claims special knowledge from the spirit world.
- Shunem: a town on the north side of the valley of Jezreel, where the Philistines camped.
- Gilboa: a mountain ridge on the south side of the valley of Jezreel, where Israel camped.
- Endor: a village north of the valley, near the Philistine camp.
- Urim: the sacred lot used by the high priest to seek God's answer.
- Sheol: the Hebrew word for the realm of the dead.

Chapter 28 Study Questions

1. What did Achish expect David to do, and how did David answer? (28:1-2)

2. What had Saul done earlier about necromancers and spiritists, and what does God's law say about them? (28:3; Deuteronomy 18:10-12)

3. In what three ways did Saul try to hear from the LORD, and what happened? (28:6)

4. Why do you think God did not answer Saul? (28:6; 15:23; 22:18)

5. What did Saul swear to the woman, and why was it so wrong? (28:10)

6. What are the main views on whether it was really Samuel who appeared? What is clear no matter which view we hold? (28:12-14; 1 Chronicles 10:13-14)

7. What did Samuel say to Saul, and what was the root reason? (28:16-19; 15:22-23)

8. How did Saul respond to Samuel's words? (28:20-25)

9. Why are mediums, psychics and the like so dangerous, and where should we take our grief and our questions instead? (Isaiah 8:19; Revelation 1:18)

10. Saul wanted an answer but not God Himself. When God seems silent in your life, what does it look like to seek Him and not just an answer?

Chapter 29: The Philistines Send David Away

Scripture

29:1-11 And ***the*** Philistines gathered all their armies to Aphek, and Israel ***was*** encamping at the spring which ***is*** in Jezreel. And the rulers of ***the*** Philistines ***were*** passing along by hundreds and by thousands, and David and his men ***were*** passing along at the rear with Achish. And the commanders of ***the*** Philistines said, "What ***are*** these Hebrews?" And Achish said to the commanders of ***the*** Philistines, "Is not this David, the servant of Saul the king of Israel, who has been with me these days or these years? And I have not found anything in him from the day he fell ***away*** until this day." And the commanders of ***the*** Philistines were angry with him, and the commanders of ***the*** Philistines said to him, "Send the man back, and let him return to his place where you assigned him; and he shall not go down with us into the battle, and he shall not become an adversary to us in the battle. And with what could this one make himself acceptable to his lord? ***Is it*** not with the heads of those men? Is not this David, of whom they sang in the dances, saying, 'Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands'?" And Achish called David, and he said to him, "***As*** the LORD lives, surely you ***are*** upright, and your going out and your coming in with me in the camp ***is*** good in my eyes; for I have not found evil in you from the day of your coming to me until this day. And in the eyes of the rulers you ***are*** not good. And now, turn back, and go in peace, and you shall not do evil in the eyes of the rulers of ***the*** Philistines." And David said to Achish, "But what have I done? And what have you found in your servant from the day that I was before you until this day, that I may not go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?" And Achish answered, and he said to David, "I know that you ***are*** good in my eyes like an angel of God; nevertheless the commanders of ***the*** Philistines have said, 'He shall not go up with us into the battle.' And now, rise early in the morning, and the servants of your lord who have come with you; and you shall rise early in the morning, and it shall be light for you, and go." And David rose early, he and his men, to go in the morning, to return to the land of ***the*** Philistines. And ***the*** Philistines went up ***to*** Jezreel.

Chapter 29 Preview

The story goes back to David, who was left in a trap at the start of chapter 28. The Philistine armies gather at Aphek and march past their rulers by hundreds and thousands, and at the very back come David and his men with King Achish. The Philistine commanders look at them and ask, "What are these Hebrews?" Achish vouches for David, but the commanders will not have it. They remember the song about David's ten thousands, and they are sure he will turn on them in the battle to win back Saul's favor.

So Achish sends David home. He tells David he has been as good in his eyes as an angel of God, but the other rulers do not trust him. David protests, and then he goes, early the next morning. It looks like a disappointment. It is really God's rescue. The LORD uses the suspicion of Israel's enemies to keep His anointed king from fighting against his own people.

Chapter 29 Study

29:1-2 *And **the** Philistines gathered all their armies to Aphek, and Israel **was** encamping at the spring which **is** in Jezreel. And the rulers of **the** Philistines **were** passing along by hundreds and by thousands, and David and his men **were** passing along at the rear with Achish.*

"And the Philistines gathered all their armies to Aphek, and Israel was encamping at the spring which is in Jezreel." Aphek was on the coastal plain, the same place the Philistines gathered when they captured the ark many years before (4:1). From there they would march north and east to the valley of Jezreel. This chapter takes place before the Philistines reached Shunem (28:4). The writer told us about Saul at Endor first, and now he goes back a little in time to show us what happened to David.

"And the rulers of the Philistines were passing along by hundreds and by thousands." The five Philistine rulers (6:16) were reviewing their troops as they marched past. "And David and his men were passing along at the rear with Achish." David was in the rear guard with the king of Gath, as his bodyguard (28:2).

Imagine how David felt. Every step took him closer to a battle against Saul, against Jonathan, against his own people. What would he do when the battle came? Scripture does not tell us what he planned. Perhaps he did not know himself.

29:3 *And the commanders of **the** Philistines said, "What **are** these Hebrews?" And Achish said to the commanders of **the** Philistines, "Is not this David, the servant of Saul the king of Israel, who has been with me these days or these years? And I have not found anything in him from the day he fell **away** until this day."*

"And the commanders of the Philistines said, What are these Hebrews?" The commanders spotted David's men at the back. Hebrews was what foreigners often called Israelites.

"Is not this David, the servant of Saul the king of Israel, who has been with me these days or these years?" Achish defended him. "And I have not found anything in him from the day he fell away until this day." Achish believed David had deserted Saul for good. He had no idea David had been raiding Israel's enemies, not Israel (27:10-12).

29:4-5 *And the commanders of **the** Philistines were angry with him, and the commanders of **the** Philistines said to him, "Send the man back, and let him return to his place where you assigned him; and he shall not go down with us into the battle, and he shall not become an adversary to us in the battle. And with what could this one make himself acceptable to his lord? **Is it** not with the heads of those men? Is not this David, of whom they sang in the dances, saying, 'Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands'?"*

"And the commanders of the Philistines were angry with him." They were not fooled. "Send the man back, and let him return to his place where you assigned him; and he shall not go down with us into the battle, and he shall not become an adversary to us in the battle."

The commanders understood something Achish did not. "And with what could this one make himself acceptable to his lord? Is it not with the heads of those men?" They expected David to turn on them in the middle of the battle and win his way back into Saul's favor with Philistine heads. Something like this had happened before. When Jonathan attacked the Philistines at Michmash, the Hebrews who had been serving with the Philistines turned and joined Israel (14:21).

"Is not this David, of whom they sang in the dances?" The song said, "Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands." That song again (18:7; 21:11). It made Saul jealous, it nearly got David killed in Gath, and now it got him sent home. The Philistines would not forget whose ten thousands those were.

29:6-7 *And Achish called David, and he said to him, "**As** the LORD lives, surely you **are** upright, and your going out and your coming in with me in the camp **is** good in my eyes; for I have not found evil in you from the day of your coming to me until this day. And in the eyes of the rulers you **are** not good. And now, turn back, and go in peace, and you shall not do evil in the eyes of the rulers of **the** Philistines."*

"As the LORD lives, surely you are upright." It is striking that Achish, a Philistine, swore by the LORD's name. Perhaps he was speaking in David's terms, out of respect for David's God. "Your going out and your coming in with me in the camp is good in my eyes; for I have not found evil in you." Achish liked David and trusted him. "And in the eyes of the rulers you are not good."

"And now, turn back, and go in peace, and you shall not do evil in the eyes of the rulers of the Philistines." Achish was outvoted.

29:8 *And David said to Achish, "But what have I done? And what have you found in your servant from the day that I was before you until this day, that I may not go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?"*

"But what have I done? And what have you found in your servant from the day that I was before you until this day, that I may not go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?"

What did David mean? It sounds as if he wanted to fight for Achish. But listen to his words: "the enemies of my lord the king." Which king did he mean? Achish heard "my lord the king" as himself. But David may have meant Saul, the LORD's anointed, whom he had called "my lord the king" before (24:8; 26:17). If so, the enemies of his lord the king were the Philistines. It may be another of David's double-meaning answers, like 28:2. Scripture does not tell us what was in his heart. It is also possible that David was simply keeping up his cover. A man who has been pretending for a long time must keep pretending, even when he is relieved.

29:9-10 *And Achish answered, and he said to David, "I know that you **are** good in my eyes like an angel of God; nevertheless the commanders of **the** Philistines have said, 'He shall not go up with us into the battle.' And now, rise early in the morning, and the servants of your lord who have come with you; and you shall rise early in the morning, and it shall be light for you, and go."*

"I know that you are good in my eyes like an angel of God." That was high praise from a Philistine. "Nevertheless the commanders of the Philistines have said," and they had said, "He shall not go up with us into the battle."

"And now, rise early in the morning, and the servants of your lord who have come with you." Achish called David's men "the servants of your lord," which probably means Saul's former servants. "And it shall be light for you, and go." Leave at first light.

29:11 *And David rose early, he and his men, to go in the morning, to return to the land of **the** Philistines. And **the** Philistines went up **to** Jezreel.*

"And David rose early, he and his men, to go in the morning, to return to the land of the Philistines. And the Philistines went up to Jezreel." The two groups went in opposite directions. The Philistines marched to the battle where Saul and Jonathan would die. David went back south to Ziklag.

Think about what God did here. David had walked himself into a corner. He had gone to live among the Philistines without asking God, and now he was marching with their army against Israel. If he fought against Israel, he could never be their king. If he turned on the Philistines, it would be treachery, and his family in Ziklag would be in danger. He had no good way out.

And God got him out. Not through a miracle or a prophet, but through the suspicion of Philistine commanders. God used David's enemies to rescue David from his own bad choice. 1 Chronicles 12:19-22 adds that during this time, men from the tribe of Manasseh came over to join David, and his army grew stronger day by day.

That is the grace of God. David did not deserve to be rescued from a mess he made. But God was faithful to His promise. "And we know that to those who love God all things work together for good" (Romans 8:28). That does not mean our bad choices do not matter. They do. David was about to find out how much, when he reached Ziklag. But it means God is never trapped by our mistakes. He is able to keep His promises even when we have wandered.

And notice the timing. If David had not been sent home, he would have marched on to the battle at Jezreel, even farther from Ziklag, and by the time he got back it would have been too late. God was already working on the next chapter.

Chapter 29 Summary

The Philistines gathered their armies at Aphek, while Israel camped by the spring in Jezreel. As the Philistine rulers reviewed their troops, David and his men marched at the rear with Achish. The Philistine commanders asked what these Hebrews were doing there. Achish defended David as a loyal servant who had deserted Saul, but the commanders were angry and told Achish to send

him back, because he might turn against them in the battle to win back Saul's favor. They remembered the song about David's ten thousands. Achish told David that he was upright and good in his eyes, but that the rulers did not trust him, and he told him to go home in peace. David asked what he had done to be kept from fighting the enemies of his lord the king. Achish said David was as good in his eyes as an angel of God, but the commanders had decided. David and his men rose early and went back to the land of the Philistines, and the Philistines went up to Jezreel.

People and Places

- Aphek: a town on the coastal plain where the Philistines gathered their armies.
- Jezreel: the valley and town in northern Israel where the battle would be fought.
- Rulers of the Philistines: the lords of the five Philistine cities.
- Hebrews: a name foreigners often used for the Israelites.

Chapter 29 Study Questions

1. Where did the Philistines gather, and where was David in the march? (29:1-2)

2. What did the Philistine commanders ask, and how did Achish answer? (29:3)

3. Why were the commanders afraid of having David in the battle? (29:4-5; 14:21)

4. What song did they remember, and how had it followed David? (29:5; 18:7; 21:11)

5. How did Achish describe David? (29:6, 9)

6. What might David have meant by "the enemies of my lord the king"? (29:8)

7. How did God use David's enemies to rescue him? (29:4-11)

8. Why was the timing of David's return important? (29:11; 30:1)

9. Have you ever made a choice that put you in a corner, and seen God make a way out you did not expect? What did you learn?

10. God did not let David's bad choice cancel His promise. How does that give you hope, and how does it also warn you not to take God's grace lightly?

Chapter 30: David Recovers All at Ziklag

Scripture

30:1-15 And it was, when David and his men came ***to*** Ziklag on the third day, and ***the*** Amalekites had made a raid against the Negeb and against Ziklag, and they had struck Ziklag, and they had burned it with fire. And they had taken captive the women who ***were*** in it, from small to great; they had not killed anyone, and they had driven ***them*** away, and they had gone on their way. And David and his men came to the city, and look, ***it was*** burned with fire, and their wives and their sons and their daughters had been taken captive. And David and the people who ***were*** with him lifted up their voice, and they wept until there was no strength in them to weep. And the two wives of David had been taken captive, Ahinoam the Jezreelite ***woman*** and Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite. And it was exceedingly distressing for David, for the people spoke of stoning him, for the soul of all the people was bitter, each man over his sons and over his daughters. And David strengthened himself in the LORD his God. And David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelech, "Please bring the ephod near to me." And Abiathar brought the ephod near to David. And David inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall I pursue after this marauding band? Shall I overtake it?" And He said to him, "Pursue, for you will certainly overtake ***them***, and you will certainly rescue ***them***." And David went, he and the six hundred men who ***were*** with him, and they came to the wadi of Besor, and those who were left behind remained. And David pursued, he and four hundred men; and two hundred men who were too exhausted to cross the wadi of Besor remained. And they found an Egyptian man in the open country, and they took him to David; and they gave him bread, and he ate, and they gave him water to drink. And they gave him a slice of fig cake and two clusters of raisins, and he ate, and his spirit returned to him; for he had not eaten bread and had not drunk water three days and three nights. And David said to him, "To whom do you ***belong***, and where ***are*** you from?" And he said, "I ***am*** an Egyptian young man, a slave of an Amalekite man; and my master abandoned me, because I became sick three days ***ago***. We, we made a raid ***on*** the Negeb of the Kerethites and on that which ***belongs*** to Judah and on the Negeb of Caleb; and Ziklag we burned with fire." And David said to him, "Will you bring me down to this marauding band?" And he said, "Swear to me by God that you will not kill me and that you will not deliver me up into the hand of my master, and I will bring you down to this marauding band."

30:16-31 And he brought him down, and look, they ***were*** spread out over the face of all the land, eating and drinking and celebrating because of all the great plunder that they had taken from the land of ***the*** Philistines and from the land of Judah. And David struck them from the twilight until the evening of their next day; and not a man of them escaped, except four hundred young men who rode on the camels, and they fled. And David rescued all that Amalek had taken, and David rescued his two wives. And nothing was missing to them, from the small and to the great, and to sons and daughters, and from the booty and to all that they had taken for themselves; David brought back everything. And David took all the sheep and the cattle; they drove ***them*** before that livestock, and they said, "This ***is*** the booty of David." And David came to the two hundred men who had been too exhausted to go after David, and whom they had left at the wadi of Besor; and they went out to meet David and to meet the people who ***were*** with him. And David approached the people, and he asked them about ***their*** welfare. And every evil man and ***man of***

worthlessness from the men who had gone with David answered, and they said, "Because they did not go with me, we will not give them ***any*** of the booty that we have recovered, except to each man his wife and his children; and let them lead ***them*** away, and let them go." And David said, "You shall not do so, my brothers, with what the LORD has given to us; and He has kept us, and He has given the marauding band that came against us into our hand. And who will listen to you in this matter? For like the share of the one who went down into the battle and like the share of the one who remained with the baggage, together they shall share." And it was from that day and onward, and he made it a statute and a judgment for Israel until this day. And David came to Ziklag, and he sent some of the booty to the elders of Judah, to his friends, saying, "Look, for you ***is*** a blessing from the booty of the enemies of the LORD": to those who ***were*** in Bethel, and to those who ***were*** in Ramoth of ***the*** Negeb, and to those who ***were*** in Jattir, and to those who ***were*** in Aroer, and to those who ***were*** in Siphmoth, and to those who ***were*** in Eshtemoa, and to those who ***were*** in Racal, and to those who ***were*** in the cities of the Jerahmeelites, and to those who ***were*** in the cities of the Kenites, and to those who ***were*** in Hormah, and to those who ***were*** in Bor-ashan, and to those who ***were*** in Athach, and to those who ***were*** in Hebron, and to all the places where David had gone about, he and his men.

Chapter 30 Preview

David and his men march three days back to Ziklag, glad to be out of the battle, and they find the town burned to the ground. The Amalekites have raided it while they were gone and carried off every wife and child, including David's two wives. The men weep until they cannot weep anymore. Then their grief turns to anger, and they talk of stoning David. It is the lowest moment of David's life so far. And here we read one of the great verses of the Bible: "David strengthened himself in the LORD his God."

For the first time in a long while, David calls for the ephod and asks the LORD what to do. God says, pursue, and you will recover all. With the help of an abandoned Egyptian slave, David finds the Amalekites celebrating, strikes them, and rescues every person and everything that was taken. When some of his men want to keep the plunder from those too tired to finish the march, David says no: what the LORD has given is shared by all. He even sends gifts to the towns of Judah. While Saul is about to die on Mount Gilboa, David is learning again to lead God's way.

Chapter 30 Study

30:1-2 *And it was, when David and his men came **to** Ziklag on the third day, and **the** Amalekites had made a raid against the Negeb and against Ziklag, and they had struck Ziklag, and they had burned it with fire. And they had taken captive the women who **were** in it, from small to great; they had not killed anyone, and they had driven **them** away, and they had gone on their way.*

"When David and his men came to Ziklag on the third day." Aphek was about fifty miles from Ziklag, a hard three days' march. They were tired and probably relieved that they did not have to fight against Israel.

"And the Amalekites had made a raid against the Negeb and against Ziklag, and they had struck Ziklag, and they had burned it with fire." While David was away with the Philistine army, his own town was left unprotected. The Amalekites saw their chance. Remember that David had been raiding the Amalekites from Ziklag (27:8). Now they paid him back. And remember that Saul had failed to finish what God told him to do about Amalek (15:9). Partial obedience has long consequences.

"And they had taken captive the women who were in it, from small to great; they had not killed anyone." This was the mercy of God. The Amalekites did not kill the women and children, probably because they planned to sell them as slaves. David had left no one alive in his raids (27:9, 11). The Amalekites left everyone alive. God was gracious to David in a way David had not been to others.

30:3-5 *And David and his men came to the city, and look, **it was** burned with fire, and their wives and their sons and their daughters had been taken captive. And David and the people who **were** with him lifted up their voice, and they wept until there was no strength in them to weep. And the two wives of David had been taken captive, Ahinoam the Jezreelite **woman** and Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite.*

"And David and his men came to the city, and look, it was burned with fire, and their wives and their sons and their daughters had been taken captive." Picture coming home to smoking ruins, and your family gone.

"And David and the people who were with him lifted up their voice, and they wept until there was no strength in them to weep." These were tough fighting men, and they wept until they had nothing left. There is no shame in weeping over loss. Grief is not a lack of faith.

"And the two wives of David had been taken captive, Ahinoam the Jezreelite woman and Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite." David had lost his family too.

30:6 *And it was exceedingly distressing for David, for the people spoke of stoning him, for the soul of all the people was bitter, each man over his sons and over his daughters. And David strengthened himself in the LORD his God.*

"And it was exceedingly distressing for David, for the people spoke of stoning him." Grief turned to anger, and anger looked for someone to blame. "For the soul of all the people was bitter, each man over his sons and over his daughters." These men had followed David for years. Some had been with him since the cave of Adullam. Now they were ready to kill him. They blamed him for taking them away and leaving the town unguarded.

Think about where David was. He had lost his home and his family. He was an outlaw from his own country and no longer welcome with the Philistines. His own men wanted to stone him. And he knew that much of this came from his own choice to go to the Philistines without asking God. Everything was gone.

"And David strengthened himself in the LORD his God."

This is one of the most important verses in 1 Samuel. When everything and everyone else was gone, David turned to the LORD. Not the LORD in general, but "the LORD his God." His own God. The God he had trusted against the lion and the bear and Goliath.

How do you strengthen yourself in the LORD? Scripture does not tell us exactly what David did that day. But his psalms show us how he did it at other times. He poured out his heart to God honestly (Psalm 62:8). He talked to his own soul and told it to hope in God (Psalm 42:5). He remembered what God had done in the past. He remembered God's promises. And he trusted God's character, even when he could not see God's plan.

Notice that Jonathan had once strengthened David's hand in God (23:16). Now there was no Jonathan. There was no Samuel. There was no one to encourage him. So David did it himself, before the LORD. There will be times in your life when no one is there to encourage you. Your friends may be far away, or they may even turn against you. In those moments, you can still go to God yourself.

This is also the turning point of David's whole time in Philistia. Since 27:1, David had been talking to himself instead of to God. Now, at the very bottom, he turned back. Sometimes God lets us lose everything so that we will find Him again.

Is there something in your life right now that has left you with no strength to weep? Do what David did. Go to the LORD your God. "Come to Me, all who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

30:7-8 *And David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelech, "Please bring the ephod near to me." And Abiathar brought the ephod near to David. And David inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall I pursue after this marauding band? Shall I overtake it?" And He said to him, "Pursue, for you will certainly overtake **them**, and you will certainly rescue **them**."*

"Please bring the ephod near to me." Once David strengthened himself in the LORD, he did what he had not done for a long time. He asked God. This is the first time since 23:9-12 that we read of David inquiring of the LORD.

"Shall I pursue after this marauding band? Shall I overtake it?" A marauding band is a raiding party. "Pursue, for you will certainly overtake them, and you will certainly rescue them." God did not scold David. He did not say, this is your own fault. He gave him a promise. When we come back to God, He is ready to receive us and to help.

30:9-10 *And David went, he and the six hundred men who **were** with him, and they came to the wadi of Besor, and those who were left behind remained. And David pursued, he and four hundred men; and two hundred men who were too exhausted to cross the wadi of Besor remained.*

"And David went, he and the six hundred men who were with him, and they came to the wadi of Besor." A wadi is a dry streambed that fills with water only in the rainy season. The Besor was south of Ziklag, deeper in the desert.

"And David pursued, he and four hundred men; and two hundred men who were too exhausted to cross the wadi of Besor remained." The men had just marched three days from Aphek, found their homes burned, wept until they had no strength, and set out again right away. A third of them could not go on. David did not shame them. He left them to guard the supplies and went on with the rest.

30:11-15 *And they found an Egyptian man in the open country, and they took him to David; and they gave him bread, and he ate, and they gave him water to drink. And they gave him a slice of fig cake and two clusters of raisins, and he ate, and his spirit returned to him; for he had not eaten bread and had not drunk water three days and three nights. And David said to him, "To whom do you* ***belong****, and where* ***are*** *you from?" And he said, "I* ***am*** *an Egyptian young man, a slave of an Amalekite man; and my master abandoned me, because I became sick three days* ***ago****. We, we made a raid* ***on*** *the Negeb of the Kerethites and on that which* ***belongs*** *to Judah and on the Negeb of Caleb; and Ziklag we burned with fire." And David said to him, "Will you bring me down to this marauding band?" And he said, "Swear to me by God that you will not kill me and that you will not deliver me up into the hand of my master, and I will bring you down to this marauding band."*

"And they found an Egyptian man in the open country." He was lying half dead in the desert. David's men took him to David and gave him bread, water, "a slice of fig cake and two clusters of raisins." They fed him before they questioned him. "And his spirit returned to him; for he had not eaten bread and had not drunk water three days and three nights."

"I am an Egyptian young man, a slave of an Amalekite man; and my master abandoned me, because I became sick three days ago." His master left him to die when he got sick. That tells us what kind of people the Amalekites were. They treated people as things to be thrown away when they were no longer useful. That was the same cruelty for which God had condemned them (Deuteronomy 25:17-18).

Look at how God worked. A sick slave, thrown away by his master, became the key to David's victory. If David's men had passed him by, they would never have found the Amalekites. Kindness to one man in need opened the door. God often places the answer to our prayers in the person we are tempted to ignore.

"We, we made a raid on the Negeb of the Kerethites and on that which belongs to Judah and on the Negeb of Caleb; and Ziklag we burned with fire." The Kerethites were a people linked with the Philistines, perhaps from Crete. Later, Kerethites served as David's royal bodyguard (2 Samuel 8:18).

"Will you bring me down to this marauding band?" "Swear to me by God that you will not kill me and that you will not deliver me up into the hand of my master." David agreed, and the Egyptian led the way.

30:16-17 *And he brought him down, and look, they **were** spread out over the face of all the land, eating and drinking and celebrating because of all the great plunder that they had taken from the land of **the** Philistines and from the land of Judah. And David struck them from the twilight until the evening of their next day; and not a man of them escaped, except four hundred young men who rode on the camels, and they fled.*

"And look, they were spread out over the face of all the land, eating and drinking and celebrating because of all the great plunder." The Amalekites thought they were safe. David was supposed to be far away with the Philistine army. They had taken plunder from Philistine land and from Judah, and they were having a party.

"And David struck them from the twilight until the evening of their next day." The battle went on for about a full day. "And not a man of them escaped, except four hundred young men who rode on the camels, and they fled." Even the four hundred who escaped equaled the size of David's whole fighting force. The Amalekite band was very large, and God gave David's tired men the victory.

30:18-20 *And David rescued all that Amalek had taken, and David rescued his two wives. And nothing was missing to them, from the small and to the great, and to sons and daughters, and from the booty and to all that they had taken for themselves; David brought back everything. And David took all the sheep and the cattle; they drove **them** before that livestock, and they said, "This **is** the booty of David."*

"And David rescued all that Amalek had taken, and David rescued his two wives." "And nothing was missing to them, from the small and to the great, and to sons and daughters, and from the booty and to all that they had taken for themselves; David brought back everything."

Every wife, every child, every possession. Nothing was lost. God did exactly what He had promised in 30:8. This is the God we serve. When He says He will rescue, He rescues.

"And David took all the sheep and the cattle," including the Amalekites' own flocks, "and they said, This is the booty of David." The same men who wanted to stone David the day before were now praising him.

30:21-25 *And David came to the two hundred men who had been too exhausted to go after David, and whom they had left at the wadi of Besor; and they went out to meet David and to meet the people who **were** with him. And David approached the people, and he asked them about **their** welfare. And every evil man and **man of** worthlessness from the men who had gone with David answered, and they said, "Because they did not go with me, we will not give them **any** of the booty that we have recovered, except to each man his wife and his children; and let them lead **them** away, and let them go." And David said, "You shall not do so, my brothers, with what the LORD has given to us; and He has kept us, and He has given the marauding band that came against us into our hand. And who will listen to you in this matter? For like the share of the one who went down into the battle and like the share of the one who remained with the baggage, together they shall share." And it was from that day and onward, and he made it a statute and a judgment for Israel until this day.*

"And David came to the two hundred men who had been too exhausted to go after David." They came out to meet him. "And David approached the people, and he asked them about their welfare." David greeted them warmly.

But not everyone felt that way. "Every evil man and man of worthlessness from the men who had gone with David answered, and they said, Because they did not go with me, we will not give them any of the booty that we have recovered." These men said the two hundred should get their wives and children back and nothing else.

"You shall not do so, my brothers, with what the LORD has given to us." Look at David's reasoning. The plunder was not theirs to keep. "What the LORD has given to us." It was God who "has kept us, and He has given the marauding band that came against us into our hand." The victory was a gift. It was not earned by the strong.

"For like the share of the one who went down into the battle and like the share of the one who remained with the baggage, together they shall share." The men who guarded the supplies would share equally with the men who fought. Moses had done something like this long before, dividing the plunder between those who went to war and those who stayed (Numbers 31:27). "And he made it a statute and a judgment for Israel until this day." David's ruling became law in Israel.

What does this teach us? In God's work, everyone matters. Some serve on the front lines. Some guard the baggage. Some are too worn out to go on, and their job for a while is simply to hold on. God values them all. Paul says that in the body of Christ, "those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary" (1 Corinthians 12:22). In the church today, the people who pray at home, teach the children, set up chairs and give quietly share in the victory with the ones whose work is seen. Grace is shared, not earned.

30:26-31 *And David came to Ziklag, and he sent some of the booty to the elders of Judah, to his friends, saying, "Look, for you **is** a blessing from the booty of the enemies of the LORD": to those who **were** in Bethel, and to those who **were** in Ramoth of **the** Negeb, and to those who **were** in Jattir, and to those who **were** in Aroer, and to those who **were** in Siphmoth, and to those who **were** in Eshtemoa, and to those who **were** in Racal, and to those who **were** in the cities of the Jerahmeelites, and to those who **were** in the cities of the Kenites, and to those who **were** in Hormah, and to those who **were** in Bor-ashan, and to those who **were** in Athach, and to those who **were** in Hebron, and to all the places where David had gone about, he and his men.*

"And David came to Ziklag, and he sent some of the booty to the elders of Judah, to his friends, saying, Look, for you is a blessing from the booty of the enemies of the LORD." David sent gifts to the towns of southern Judah. The Amalekites had raided Judah (30:14, 16), so in part David was giving back what had been taken. He also called it plunder from "the enemies of the LORD." He wanted Judah to see that he was fighting the LORD's battles, not Israel's.

The list of towns runs from Bethel (a town in the south, not the famous Bethel in the north) to Hebron. These were towns that had sheltered David and his men "where David had gone about, he and his men." Hebron is listed last, and it would be the first place David reigned as king (2 Samuel 2:1-4). David was thanking those who had helped him, and wisely making friends among the elders of Judah, who would soon make him king.

While all this was happening in the south, the battle of Gilboa was being fought in the north. The next chapter tells us what happened there. The same week Saul lost everything, David recovered all.

Chapter 30 Summary

David and his men came back to Ziklag on the third day and found that the Amalekites had raided it, burned it, and taken all the women and children captive, including David's two wives, though they had killed no one. The men wept until they had no strength left, and in their bitterness they spoke of stoning David. But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God. He asked Abiathar to bring the ephod and inquired of the LORD, who told him to pursue, because he would overtake them and rescue all. Two hundred exhausted men stayed at the wadi of Besor, and David went on with four hundred. They found an Egyptian slave whom his Amalekite master had abandoned when he was sick, fed him, and he led them to the raiders. David found the Amalekites celebrating and struck them from twilight to the next evening, and only four hundred escaped on camels. David recovered everything and everyone. When some evil men refused to share the plunder with the two hundred who stayed behind, David said that what the LORD had given would be shared equally by those who fought and those who stayed with the baggage, and he made it a statute in Israel. Back at Ziklag, David sent gifts from the plunder to the elders of Judah in many towns where he and his men had gone.

People and Places

- Ziklag: David's town in the Negeb, burned by the Amalekites.

- Amalekites: a desert people who raided Ziklag and carried off its families.
- Wadi of Besor: a dry streambed south of Ziklag.
- Kerethites: a people linked with the Philistines, perhaps from Crete; later part of David's bodyguard.
- Negeb of Caleb: the part of the south country settled by Caleb's descendants.
- Hebron: a city in Judah where David would soon be made king.

I did not lose my job or my things, but my sin cost me parts of my physical and mental health, and it damaged relationships. It felt like David at Ziklag, with everything I cared about at risk. What brought me back was strengthening myself in the LORD, not in my own resolve.

Chapter 30 Study Questions

1. What had happened to Ziklag while David was away? (30:1-3)

2. How did David's men react, and how did David react? (30:4-6)

3. What do you think it means to strengthen yourself in the LORD your God? (30:6; Psalm 42:5; 62:8)

4. What did David do after strengthening himself in the LORD, and what did God promise? (30:7-8)

5. How did David and his men find the Amalekites? (30:11-16)

6. What did David recover? (30:18-19)

7. How did David decide the plunder should be shared, and why? (30:22-25)

8. Why do you think David sent gifts to the elders of Judah? (30:26-31)

9. When have you felt as David did in 30:6, with everything gone? What helps you strengthen yourself in the LORD in times like that?

10. David said those who stayed with the baggage share equally. Who in your church serves quietly in ways no one sees, and how could you encourage them?

Chapter 31: The Death of Saul and His Sons

Scripture

31:1-13 And ***the*** Philistines ***were*** fighting against Israel, and the men of Israel fled from before ***the*** Philistines, and they fell slain on the mountain of Gilboa. And ***the*** Philistines pursued closely after Saul and after his sons, and ***the*** Philistines struck down Jonathan and Abinadab and Malchi-shua, the sons of Saul. And the battle was heavy against Saul, and the archers, men with the bow, found him, and he writhed exceedingly because of the archers. And Saul said to the bearer of his armor, "Draw your sword and pierce me through with it, lest these uncircumcised come, and they pierce me through, and they deal wantonly with me." And the bearer of his armor was not willing, for he was exceedingly afraid. And Saul took the sword, and he fell on it. And the bearer of his armor saw that Saul had died, and he also fell on his sword, and he died with him. And Saul died, and his three sons, and the bearer of his armor, also all his men, on that day together. And the men of Israel who ***were*** on the other side of the valley and who ***were*** on the other side of the Jordan saw that the men of Israel had fled and that Saul and his sons had died; and they abandoned the cities, and they fled, and ***the*** Philistines came, and they dwelt in them. And it was on the next day, and ***the*** Philistines came to strip the slain, and they found Saul and his three sons fallen on the mountain of Gilboa. And they cut off his head, and they stripped off his armor, and they sent into the land of ***the*** Philistines all around to bear the news ***to*** the house of their idols and ***to*** the people. And they put his armor ***in*** the house of Ashtaroth, and his corpse they fastened on the wall of Beth-shean. And the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard concerning him what ***the*** Philistines had done to Saul. And every man of strength arose, and they went all the night, and they took the corpse of Saul and the corpses of his sons from the wall of Beth-shean, and they went to Jabesh, and they burned them there. And they took their bones, and they buried ***them*** under the tamarisk tree in Jabesh, and they fasted seven days.

Chapter 31 Preview

The last chapter of 1 Samuel is short, and it is heavy. The battle on Mount Gilboa goes just as Samuel said it would the night before. Israel's army runs, and the Philistines close in on Saul and his sons. Jonathan and two of his brothers are killed. Saul is badly wounded by archers. Afraid of what the Philistines will do to him if they take him alive, he asks his armor-bearer to kill him. The armor-bearer will not, so Saul falls on his own sword, and his armor-bearer does the same.

The next day the Philistines find the bodies. They cut off Saul's head, put his armor in the temple of their goddess, and fasten his body to the wall of Beth-shean. Then the men of Jabesh-gilead, the town Saul rescued at the very start of his reign, march all night to take the bodies down and give them a burial. The book that began with a woman praying for a son ends with a king and his sons dead on a mountain. This is a sad chapter, and I will handle it gently. It touches a painful subject for many families, and it closes the story of Israel's first king.

Chapter 31 Study

31:1 *And **the** Philistines **were** fighting against Israel, and the men of Israel fled from before **the** Philistines, and they fell slain on the mountain of Gilboa.*

"And the Philistines were fighting against Israel, and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and they fell slain on the mountain of Gilboa." The writer does not describe the battle in detail. He goes straight to the result. Israel ran, and many died. Mount Gilboa is a long ridge on the southeast side of the valley of Jezreel. The Philistine chariots could move freely on the flat plain below, and Israel's army was driven up the slopes.

The people had asked for a king to "go out before us" and fight their battles (8:20). Their king had led them here.

31:2 *And **the** Philistines pursued closely after Saul and after his sons, and **the** Philistines struck down Jonathan and Abinadab and Malchi-shua, the sons of Saul.*

"And the Philistines pursued closely after Saul and after his sons, and the Philistines struck down Jonathan and Abinadab and Malchi-shua, the sons of Saul." Jonathan died beside his father.

This is one of the saddest lines in the book. Jonathan was one of the finest men in the Old Testament, brave, faithful, humble and generous. He had known for years that David would be king, and he loved David as his own soul. Yet he did not leave his father. He fought beside him to the end. He was loyal to his friend, and he was loyal to his father, and he never betrayed either one.

Why did God allow Jonathan to die? Scripture does not tell us. He shared in the judgment that fell on his father's house, though he himself was a man of faith. Sometimes the righteous suffer because of the sins of others. But Jonathan's story did not end on Gilboa. Scripture shows us a man who trusted the LORD (14:6) and loved the king God had chosen, and we can leave him with the Judge of all the earth, who does right (Genesis 18:25). And God kept faith with Jonathan through David's care for his son Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 9:7).

Another son of Saul, Ish-bosheth, also called Eshbaal (1 Chronicles 8:33), was not in this battle, and he reigned for a short time after Saul (2 Samuel 2:8-10).

31:3 *And the battle was heavy against Saul, and the archers, men with the bow, found him, and he writhed exceedingly because of the archers.*

"And the battle was heavy against Saul, and the archers, men with the bow, found him, and he writhed exceedingly because of the archers." Saul was hit by arrows and badly wounded. He was in great pain and knew he could not escape.

31:4-6 *And Saul said to the bearer of his armor, "Draw your sword and pierce me through with it, lest these uncircumcised come, and they pierce me through, and they deal wantonly with me." And the bearer of his armor was not willing, for he was exceedingly afraid. And Saul took the sword, and he fell on it. And the bearer of his armor saw that Saul had died, and he also fell on his sword, and he died with him. And Saul died, and his three sons, and the bearer of his armor, also all his men, on that day together.*

"Draw your sword and pierce me through with it, lest these uncircumcised come, and they pierce me through, and they deal wantonly with me." To deal wantonly means to abuse and mock. Saul knew what the Philistines had done to Samson when they captured him (Judges 16:21, 25). He did not want to be taken alive and tortured or put on display.

"And the bearer of his armor was not willing, for he was exceedingly afraid." The armor-bearer would not kill the king. Perhaps he was afraid to strike the LORD's anointed, as David had refused to do (24:6; 26:9).

"And Saul took the sword, and he fell on it." Saul took his own life.

I want to speak carefully here, because some who read this may have lost someone they love in this way, or may be struggling with such thoughts themselves.

First, what does the text say? It tells us plainly what happened. It does not praise it. It does not hold it up as noble or brave. It records it as the end of a man whose life had gone badly wrong. 1 Chronicles 10:13-14 sums up why Saul died: he was unfaithful to the LORD and did not keep His word, and he consulted a medium instead of inquiring of the LORD. Saul's death was the last step of a long road away from God. It was not the reason God judged him. The judgment had been spoken years before.

Second, our lives belong to God. He gives life, and He alone has the right to take it (Deuteronomy 32:39; Job 1:21). That is why the taking of a human life, including one's own, is a grave matter.

Third, if you have lost someone to suicide, hear this. This chapter is not about your loved one. Saul's story is the story of one man who had rejected God's word for many years. It does not tell us how God judges every person who dies this way, and it is not our place to say what Scripture does not say. Salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9), not by the way a person's life ends. Pain, illness and despair can overwhelm even a believer. God knows every heart, and He is far more merciful and just than we are. You can trust your loved one to Him. And if you carry guilt, wondering what you could have done, bring that to Him too. "The LORD is near to the broken of heart" (Psalm 34:18).

Fourth, if you are struggling with thoughts of ending your life, please do not keep it to yourself. Tell someone today: a pastor, a friend, a family member, a doctor or a crisis line. You are not a burden, and you are not alone. Saul had nowhere left to turn, because he had turned from God again and again. You do. Jesus said, "the one coming to Me I will certainly not cast out" (John 6:37). There is hope in Him, even in the darkest night.

"And the bearer of his armor saw that Saul had died, and he also fell on his sword, and he died with him." The armor-bearer was loyal to the end.

"And Saul died, and his three sons, and the bearer of his armor, also all his men, on that day together." "All his men" probably means the men closest to him, his bodyguard and officers, not every soldier in Israel's army, since many fled (31:7). Abner, for one, survived (2 Samuel 2:8). The parallel in 1 Chronicles 10:6 says "all his house," meaning his family line in the sense that Saul's house lost the throne that day, though Ish-bosheth lived on for a time.

How does this chapter fit with 2 Samuel 1? There, a young Amalekite comes to David and says that he found Saul on Mount Gilboa, leaning on his spear, and that Saul asked him to kill him, so he did. He brings David Saul's crown and armlet (2 Samuel 1:6-10). Most Bible teachers believe the Amalekite was lying. He probably came across Saul's body before the Philistines did, took the crown, and made up a story so David would reward him for killing his enemy. Instead, David had him put to death for claiming to strike the LORD's anointed (2 Samuel 1:14-16). Other teachers think Saul's fall on his sword did not kill him at once, and the Amalekite really did finish him. Either way, 1 Samuel 31 and 1 Chronicles 10:4-5 tell us plainly how Saul died. And there is a sad irony in it: Saul lost his kingdom for sparing Amalek (15:9, 18-19), and an Amalekite came to claim the credit for his death.

31:7 *And the men of Israel who **were** on the other side of the valley and who **were** on the other side of the Jordan saw that the men of Israel had fled and that Saul and his sons had died; and they abandoned the cities, and they fled, and **the** Philistines came, and they dwelt in them.*

"And the men of Israel who were on the other side of the valley and who were on the other side of the Jordan saw that the men of Israel had fled and that Saul and his sons had died; and they abandoned the cities, and they fled, and the Philistines came, and they dwelt in them." The defeat was a disaster for the whole north. Israelites living in the valley of Jezreel and even east of the Jordan left their towns, and the Philistines moved in. The land God had given Israel was overrun. This is where the reign of the king the people asked for ended: with Israel in worse shape than when it began.

31:8-10 *And it was on the next day, and **the** Philistines came to strip the slain, and they found Saul and his three sons fallen on the mountain of Gilboa. And they cut off his head, and they stripped off his armor, and they sent into the land of **the** Philistines all around to bear the news **to** the house of their idols and **to** the people. And they put his armor **in** the house of Ashtaroth, and his corpse they fastened on the wall of Beth-shean.*

"And it was on the next day, and the Philistines came to strip the slain, and they found Saul and his three sons fallen on the mountain of Gilboa." After a battle, the winners went over the field to take weapons and valuables from the dead.

"And they cut off his head, and they stripped off his armor." Years before, David had cut off Goliath's head and taken his sword (17:51, 54). Now the Philistines did the same to Saul. "And they sent into the land of the Philistines all around to bear the news to the house of their idols and to the people." They gave the credit to their gods. When Israel had been faithful, the Philistine god

Dagon fell on its face before the ark (5:3-4). Now, because of Saul's unfaithfulness, the Philistines could boast in their idols. Our sin does not only hurt us. It gives the world reason to mock the name of God (Romans 2:24).

"And they put his armor in the house of Ashtaroth." Ashtaroth is the plural of Ashtoreth, a Canaanite goddess of war and fertility whom Israel had often been drawn to worship (7:3-4; Judges 2:13). The Philistines hung Saul's armor in her temple as a trophy. 1 Chronicles 10:10 adds that they fastened his head in the temple of Dagon.

"And his corpse they fastened on the wall of Beth-shean." Beth-shean was a strong city at the east end of the valley of Jezreel, near the Jordan. Hanging the body on the city wall was the final insult, to show the world that Israel's king had been defeated. It was the very thing Saul feared in 31:4. He took his own life to avoid being mocked, and he was mocked anyway.

31:11-13 *And the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard concerning him what **the** Philistines had done to Saul. And every man of strength arose, and they went all the night, and they took the corpse of Saul and the corpses of his sons from the wall of Beth-shean, and they went to Jabesh, and they burned them there. And they took their bones, and they buried **them** under the tamarisk tree in Jabesh, and they fasted seven days.*

"And the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard concerning him what the Philistines had done to Saul." Do you remember Jabesh-gilead? At the very start of Saul's reign, the Ammonites besieged the town and threatened to gouge out the right eye of every man there. Saul, full of the Spirit of God, gathered Israel and rescued them (11:1-11). It was Saul's finest hour.

The people of Jabesh-gilead never forgot it. "And every man of strength arose, and they went all the night, and they took the corpse of Saul and the corpses of his sons from the wall of Beth-shean." It was a dangerous march, perhaps ten or more miles across the Jordan valley into enemy territory, at night. They risked their lives to honor the man who had once saved theirs.

"And they went to Jabesh, and they burned them there." Israel did not usually burn the dead. The bodies may have been badly mistreated, or the men may have wanted to make sure the Philistines could never take them again. "And they took their bones, and they buried them under the tamarisk tree in Jabesh, and they fasted seven days." A seven-day fast was a sign of deep mourning (Genesis 50:10). Later, David praised the men of Jabesh for this kindness (2 Samuel 2:5), and he brought the bones of Saul and Jonathan back to be buried in the tomb of Saul's father Kish in Benjamin (2 Samuel 21:12-14).

There is a lesson in this last act. Saul's life ended badly. But a kindness he did years before was remembered. Gratitude kept the men of Jabesh faithful when everyone else had fled. Never underestimate what a single act of kindness can mean to someone.

And so 1 Samuel ends. The people asked for a king like the nations, and they got one. He was tall and strong and impressive, and he ended dead on a mountain, his body hung on a wall, his armor in a pagan temple. Meanwhile, in the south, God's chosen king, the shepherd from Bethlehem,

was waiting at Ziklag. In the next book, the LORD will set David on the throne, and through David's line He will one day send the King who will reign forever (Luke 1:32-33).

Chapter 31 Summary

The Philistines fought against Israel on Mount Gilboa, and the men of Israel fled and fell slain. The Philistines pursued Saul and his sons and killed Jonathan, Abinadab and Malchi-shua. Saul was badly wounded by archers, and he asked his armor-bearer to kill him so the Philistines would not abuse him, but the armor-bearer was afraid and refused. So Saul fell on his own sword, and his armor-bearer did the same. Saul, his three sons, his armor-bearer and his men all died that day. When the Israelites in the valley and beyond the Jordan saw it, they abandoned their cities, and the Philistines moved in. The next day the Philistines found the bodies, cut off Saul's head, stripped his armor and sent the news through their land to their idols' temples and their people. They put his armor in the temple of Ashtaroth and fastened his body to the wall of Beth-shean. When the people of Jabesh-gilead heard, their brave men traveled all night, took down the bodies of Saul and his sons, brought them to Jabesh and burned them there, then buried their bones under the tamarisk tree and fasted seven days.

People and Places

- Mount Gilboa: a ridge on the southeast side of the valley of Jezreel, where Saul died.
- Jonathan, Abinadab and Malchi-shua: Saul's three sons who died with him.
- Ish-bosheth (Eshbaal): Saul's son who survived and reigned briefly after him.
- Ashtaroth: a Canaanite goddess of war and fertility, also called Ashtoreth.
- Beth-shean: a strong city at the east end of the valley of Jezreel, near the Jordan.
- Jabesh-gilead: a town east of the Jordan that Saul had rescued (chapter 11).

Chapter 31 Study Questions

1. How did the battle on Mount Gilboa go for Israel? (31:1, 7)

2. Who died with Saul, and what do you remember about Jonathan from earlier chapters? (31:2; 18:1-4; 23:16-17)

3. What did Saul ask his armor-bearer, and why? (31:4)

4. According to 1 Chronicles 10:13-14, why did Saul die?

5. What did the Philistines do with Saul's body and armor, and who did they give the credit to? (31:8-10)

6. Who rescued the bodies of Saul and his sons, and why do you think they did it? (31:11-13; 11:1-11)

7. How does the Amalekite's story in 2 Samuel 1:6-10 compare with this chapter?

8. How does the end of Saul's life connect back to his disobedience in chapter 15? (15:22-23; 28:18)

9. The men of Jabesh-gilead remembered a kindness from many years before. Who has shown you kindness that you have never forgotten, and how can you thank them?

10. Saul's life began with every advantage and ended in tragedy. What warnings and what hope do you take from his story for your own walk with God?

Conclusion

1 Samuel begins with a woman weeping in prayer at Shiloh and ends with a king dead on Mount Gilboa. In between, God moved His people from the judges to the kings. He answered Hannah and gave her Samuel. He spoke to a boy in the night when the word of the LORD was rare. He humbled Dagon before His ark. He gave Israel the king they asked for, and when Saul would not listen, He chose a king for Himself, the youngest son of Jesse, out with the sheep. Hannah sang it before any of it happened: "He brings low, also He exalts" (2:7).

As I said at the start of this study, the guiding principle throughout has been to read God's Word plainly, as it is written, and let Scripture explain Scripture. Read that way, 1 Samuel keeps setting two kinds of hearts side by side. Saul looked like a king, but he cared more about what people thought than what God said, and he kept making excuses until there was no one left to hear them. David was far from perfect. He lied, he lost his temper, and he ran to the Philistines when he was afraid. But when he sinned, he came back, and when everything was gone, he "strengthened himself in the LORD his God" (30:6). The difference was not in their outside. "For it is not what man sees, for man sees according to the eyes, and the LORD sees according to the heart" (16:7). And the warning of the whole book is the one Samuel gave Saul: "to listen is better than sacrifice" (15:22).

I hope this study has done what I set out to do: bring you closer to God, help you grow in your walk with Him, and encourage you to trust Him the way David did in the valley of Elah and in the ruins of Ziklag. He is still the God who raises up the humble, who fights for His people, and who keeps His promises even when we stumble. The battle still belongs to the LORD (17:47).

1 Samuel also leaves us looking forward. Hannah prayed that the LORD would "give strength to His king and exalt the horn of His anointed" (2:10). Saul failed, and David, the shepherd king from Bethlehem, was only the beginning. Paul told the synagogue at Antioch that God raised up David, and that from his seed, according to promise, "God raised up for Israel a Savior, Jesus" (Acts 13:23). The angel told Mary that God would give her Son "the throne of David His father" (Luke 1:32), and that "of His kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:33). Jesus is the Anointed One, the true King after God's own heart, who went out alone against our greatest enemy and won. The only thing required of us to spend eternity with God is to receive His Son, Jesus, as our Lord and Savior.

If you haven't yet entered into a relationship with Jesus, or if you want to deepen the one you already have with Him, I invite you to pray this prayer with me:

Lord Jesus, You are the Savior of the world, and You forgive all who come to You. I come before You to confess that I have sinned against You. I have rebelled against You and put myself first above You and all others. I want to have a deep, meaningful relationship with You where I can show others by my demeanor and character that You are first in my life. I am asking for Your forgiveness for all my sins. You died for me on the cross so that I could be forgiven and made right with God. Please help me not forget that You gave Your very life for me. I am asking that You take control of

my life and make a new creature out of me and into the person You want me to be. I thank You, Lord, and I love You. Amen.

If you prayed this prayer, tell another believer, ask a pastor about being baptized, and find a church where you can grow and serve. And when you are tired or afraid, do what David did: go to the LORD your God and strengthen yourself in Him (1 Samuel 30:6).

Bibliography

The following source was consulted throughout this study. The commentary reflects my own study and convictions, and any direct quotation from an outside source is identified and cited at the point where it appears.

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