

## THE LORD LOOKS AT THE HEART: STUDIES IN 1 SAMUEL

### Notes For Week One: There Is No One Holy Like The Lord (1 Samuel 1 & 2)

*The book of 1 Samuel describes a period of significant change for Israel. The era of the judges comes to an end: Samuel first serves for a time as prophet, priest and judge; then a permanent kingship is established, beginning with Saul's erratic reign. At a deeper level, we shall also see how God understands each of us and how he looks at our hearts.*

#### ***Introduction & Overview***

In 1 Samuel, we shall often see how the lives of individuals can be interwoven with events on a larger scale. Just as today, an individual's faith or lack of faith can affect the lives of others, while we too can be influenced by many things. We'll see how God allows people to make their own choices, whether they are good or bad, though at times we will see him directly influence events.

As 1 Samuel begins, for many years Israel has gone through the repeating cycle in the book of Judges - after being guided for a time by a faithful 'judge' (or leader), afterwards most of the people would drift away from God. Then, for a time they would face oppression from one of the neighboring countries, which they would endure until they were humbled and called on God. Then, God would raise up another 'judge', which usually began a new cycle.

At the beginning of 1 Samuel, we meet two families, including Hannah, Eli, and Samuel, as their paths cross (1 Samuel 1-7). As God answers Hannah's prayer, he is also giving a new priest to Israel, as Samuel will replace Eli and his family. During this time, we will also see what happens when the ark of the covenant falls into the hands of the Philistines.

Towards the end of Samuel's life, the people decide that they want a king like the nations around them have. This desire is so persistent that God tells Samuel to acquiesce, which leads to Israel becoming a kingdom with Saul as their king (1 Samuel 8-15). After a good start, Saul begins to go astray, which leads God to send Samuel to anoint David as the future king.

The rest of the book follows the tension between Saul and David (1 Samuel 16-31). Saul becomes irrational as he continues drifting away from God, and soon he openly attacks David. David, for his part, endures Saul's hostility and violence, and is merciful to the king. As the book ends, Saul dies, and 2 Samuel will describe how David overcame the remaining obstacles to become king.

As Samuel looks at Eli's sons to wait for God to show him which one will be king, God tells him, "People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). This theme is often shown throughout 1 Samuel, as we see how God shows his understanding of Hannah, Eli and his sons, Samuel, Saul and others, as well as of the Israelites.

Questions For Discussion Or Further Study: What might we be able to learn about God as we study these events? In what ways might we see God's understanding of human nature and how he knows everyone's hearts?

### ***Hannah's Prayers (1 Samuel 1:1-2:11)***

Hannah, a woman of faith and devotion, is distressed by the insensitivity of those close to her, so she prays humbly for God to grant her a child. She promises to give her firstborn son right back to the Lord in devoted service, and her prayer of thanksgiving is moving and encouraging. Here we shall see how God acts both to bless her and also to use her situation to bless others.

After years of enduring cruelty and humiliation, Hannah offers a prayer out of her anguish and grief on one of the family's journeys to Shiloh\* (1:1-18). Knowing that her future was in God's hands, instead of lashing out or taking vengeance, Hannah instead humbly appeals to God to let her have a child. In so doing, she also promises that she will at once give the child to God to be his lifelong servant.

\* For many years, Shiloh was the location of the ark and a center of the Levitical priesthood. The tabernacle had been set up there in Joshua's time (see Joshua 18:1).

So we see several things as Samuel is born (1:19-28). In naming him Samuel ('heard by God'), Hannah acknowledges that only God could have made this happen. Then she follows through on her promise to give him to God, so that he may live before the Lord always. We shall soon see how God ties her faithfulness and devotion into the needs of the nation.

In Hannah's prayer of thanksgiving, we see both her devotion to God and also some insights into God's nature and how he works (2:1-11). There is indeed no Rock like God, who knows all about us and who is our source of hope and meaning and much more. The Lord humbles and he exalts, and he brings down and he raises up (compare this with Mary's prayer in Luke 1:46-52), and he knows what we need. Hannah had seen how he can lift us from the 'dust' and despair we may face.

God's gracious answer to Hannah's prayer for a son was also a gift of grace to Israel, since Samuel's life of selfless ministry would bless everyone. His steady hand would often protect them from the worst, even from problems entirely of their own making. Though the Israelites often didn't appreciate Samuel, he never wavered in his faithfulness to God or in his concern for others.

Questions For Discussion Or Further Study: How can we see God acting both on the personal level and also on a broader level? What does this tell us about God and his nature? Consider the birth of Jesus to Mary - what are some parallels and what are some differences? What does this tell us about God and his nature?

### ***Two Families (1 Samuel 2:12-36)***

Eli the priest is well-meaning but ineffective, and his two sons are guilty of the most blatant abuses of their responsibilities. In contrast, young Samuel and his faithful mother quietly live by faith. This was not an easy time for those who sought to know and serve God faithfully, yet this family simply concentrates on what they can do in faith, as God readies them for the path ahead.

Despite Eli's good intentions, his sons have caused considerable harm (2:12-17). As 1 Samuel says, they had 'no regard for the Lord', they were guilty of numerous offenses, and these had increased as Eli grew older. Given the need for many Israelites to go to the priests, Eli's sons had harmed many of them. Eli's reproof for their offenses (2:22-25) is well-founded, yet he was unable to remedy the problems.

Meanwhile Hannah continues to fulfill her pledge, as she and Samuel live simple lives of faith (2:18-21). As Hannah makes her annual visits to Shiloh to provide Samuel with new garments, Eli remembers what she has done, and he prays for God to provide her with more children, as God indeed does. As Eli's sons continue to mistreat the Israelites, Samuel's own faith and devotion become widely known (2:26).

Soon God gives the message to Eli that he will remove Eli's family from the priesthood (2:27-36). It comes only after a long pattern of abuse and spiritual deception, and God's decision has become a spiritual necessity for the sake of others. As the man of God says, the Lord honors those who honor him. So God will remove Eli's family from the priesthood, and will raise for himself a faithful priest, Samuel. Next time we'll see how this comes to pass.

From heaven the Lord sees all humanity; and as the psalm says, he formed each of our hearts, and indeed nothing can be hidden from him (Psalm 33:13-22). God's eyes look at our hearts, and he looks for those who revere him and put our hope in his unfailing love rather than in human strength, and who trust in his mercy and understanding.

Questions For Discussion Or Further Study: What can we learn about God's nature from these events? How can we see God's understanding of human hearts and human needs? What can we learn from 1 Samuel 1 and 2 about our own relationship with God?

*- Mark Garner, June 2019*

## **THE LORD LOOKS AT THE HEART: STUDIES IN 1 SAMUEL**

### **Notes For Week Two: The Lord Is About To Do Something (1 Samuel 3, 4, & 5)**

*Last time, we saw how God can interweave individual lives with his overall purposes, as God both blessed Hannah and also gave a gift of grace to Israel at the same time. Now we shall read about some sad times in Israel, while we'll also see that God in his grace has already laid the foundation for renewal. We'll also see some things to help us understand God's holiness.*

#### ***The Lord Calls Samuel (1 Samuel 3:1-4:1a)***

God now reveals his intentions to both Eli and Samuel. It is an interesting, even moving, scene: the innocent Samuel repeatedly mistakes God's call for Eli's voice, while Eli begins to realize the role that Samuel will play when God brings down Eli's own family. As the nation must face difficult times, God draws Samuel closer to him and prepares him for the future.

God calls Samuel by name three times, and each time Samuel replies, 'Here I am', assuming that the voice is Eli's (3:1-10). Eli finally realizes that it is God who is calling Samuel, so he patiently tells his young assistant what to do. We read in verse 1 that Eli himself has rarely heard from the Lord, so he wants to make sure that Samuel hears what God has to say.

God's message to Samuel is somber, and Samuel does not want to tell Eli about it (3:11-4:1a). God describes it as 'something that will make everyone's ears tingle', a message that will call everyone to rethink their perspectives, a message that reminds us of the significance of being in God's presence. God now confirms what he had already told Eli: that Eli and his sons will be removed from the priesthood, because of his sons' blasphemous behavior and his inability to remove them.

Eli sees that this troubles Samuel, so he asks Samuel to tell him the whole truth. Thus Eli learns that God will soon fulfill what Eli already knew. Eli responds humbly, and he simply says that the Lord should do what is good in his eyes. Eli raises no objections, for he understands how badly things have turned in the priesthood. From then on, God speaks through Samuel, and he 'let none of Samuel's words fall to the ground' (see also Isaiah 55:11).

Questions For Discussion Or Further Study: What can we learn about God from his interactions with Samuel? Is there anything we can learn from Eli's responses? What can we learn from Samuel's relationship with God? What can we learn about God's purposes?

#### ***The Ark Of God Is Captured (1 Samuel 4:1b-4:22)***

With the spiritual decay in Israel, God has chosen young, faithful Samuel as the starting point for a new beginning. We shall now see the circumstances God uses for a traumatic but necessary transition. We shall also learn some more about God's holiness and his nature, as he uses a serious defeat for Israel as the beginning of a process of inward renewal.

Sometime afterwards, the Israelites are defeated by the Philistines in one of their frequent battles, and then a false hope leads them into a worse defeat (4:1b-5). Human nature being what it is, the

people look for a simple remedy that will not call them to examine their relationship with God, so they think that if they bring the ark of the covenant along with them, they couldn't lose.

Indeed, when the ark comes into the camp (accompanied with Eli's notorious sons), the Israelites cheer loudly. Sadly, they have badly misunderstood what God's presence and his holiness mean. God is not a lucky charm who is supposed to give us everything in this world, his presence does not mean that we should always win worldly victories; rather, it is a call to reverence, and his presence and his holiness are reminders that God indeed is near and he knows our hearts.

The Philistines are at first intimidated, but then grimly prepare for the next battle, and they again defeat Israel (4:6-9). They make an ironic acknowledgement, as they themselves remember the ways that God had led Israel to remarkable victories in the past. So instead of taking God for granted as the Israelites do, they realize that their lives are in great peril, and as a result God allows them thoroughly defeat the Israelites.

So, by the end of the day Eli's two blasphemous sons are dead, and the ark has been captured (4:10-22). There was nothing deficient about the ark in itself; but the people had trusted in outward appearances instead of calling out in humility to God himself. Moreover, their hearts had drifted from God, so his presence was no longer a benefit to them. God is light and cannot have fellowship with darkness (see 1 John 1:5-7), yet he cleanses us when we walk in the light of Jesus.

The aftermath of these events is also sad, and this latest loss brings gloom in Israel, as they slowly realize what it means for the ark to have left Israel. The end of Eli's priesthood now comes, and it is easy to feel pity for him. The old priest hears the bad news of his sons' deaths, yet he is even more devastated by the loss of the ark than by his personal sorrows (and his dying daughter-in-law is equally distressed by it). Yet at the same time, God is already preparing for their recovery.

Questions For Discussion Or Further Study: Why did the ark become a false hope to the Israelites? What did the Philistines realize about it? What didn't they realize? What can we learn about God's holiness from these events? How might we see God's grace even in these sad occurrences?

### ***The Ark Of God Amidst Unbelievers (1 Samuel 5)***

Meanwhile, the Philistines grab the ark as a trophy of war, only to find it a hazard. Wherever they put the ark, God brings disruption and trouble, demonstrating the vulnerability of their idols and their human strength. Yet, in a certain sense, the Philistines understand the significance of God's presence better than the Israelites might have.

The Philistines haul away the ark of God to Ashdod, proudly put it in the temple of Dagon\*, one of their gods, only the next day they find Dagon bowing down to the ark of the Lord (5:1-5). Dagon's followers prop him up again, yet the next day he has fallen again, and this time his head and hands have been broken off.

\* Dagon was an idol in the shape of a fish, with the head and the hands of a human. It was their 'god' of agriculture and fertility.

It doesn't take long for the Philistines to realize that it is the Lord's hand (5:6-12). In Ashdod, there is also an outbreak of tumors. They decide to send the ark to Gath, and there is another outbreak of tumors there, causing widespread panic in that town. When the ark of God is next sent to Ekron, the residents there want nothing to do with it.

As the Philistines discuss what to do with this ark that has become a dire threat, they have the ironic realization that they and their 'gods' cannot deal with it. Indeed, their decision to let the ark 'go back to its own place' is, in a way, an implicit realization that they are not worthy (or at least able) to be in God's presence.

God is holy, and he calls us to learn what holiness means and to live in holiness and reverence and love (1 Peter 1:13-19). He calls us to set our hope in the grace of Jesus, for indeed we couldn't have ever been redeemed by the world's perishable things, rather we were redeemed by Jesus' precious lifeblood and God's grace that overflows through his Son.

Questions For Discussion Or Further Study: What do the Philistines realize about God's presence? What don't they realize about God's presence? What can we learn about what it means to be in God's presence? What can we learn about God's holiness from these three chapters? What can we learn from them about our walk with God?

*- Mark Garner, June 2019*

## **THE LORD LOOKS AT THE HEART: STUDIES IN 1 SAMUEL**

### **Notes For Week Three: God's Presence & His Holiness (1 Samuel 6 & 7)**

*In ancient Israel, the ark of the covenant represented God's presence and more. Now, the Philistines have defeated Israel in battle, and have seized the ark as a victory trophy. Possession of the ark brings nothing but trouble to the Philistines, yet its departure from Israel is still significant, for it parallels how the Israelites had lost sight of God's presence among them.*

#### ***What Shall We Do With The Ark Of The Lord? (1 Samuel 6:1-12)***

While Israel mourns over its defeat, the Philistines come to the sensible conclusion that they would do well to return the ark of God to Israel. In fact, the unbelieving Philistines have come to treat the ark with more respect than the Israelites did. They ask nothing in exchange for its return, and they do not even dare to carry it themselves.

When the Philistines realize that it would be best to sending the ark 'back to its place', they take the extra step of asking their own religious leaders, asking them what they should do with the ark of the Lord (6:1-6). Naturally, the Philistine priests are misguided about a lot of things, yet they show respect for God and for the ark, and they actually give some good advice to the Philistines.

They say by all means, send a guilt offering. Their choice of the offering may seem odd - five\* gold rats and five gold tumors to represent the outbreak of tumors that God had brought on them - yet in its own way they are acknowledging their offense in taking liberties with the ark of the living God. Most of all, the Philistine priests caution them not to harden their hearts, a reminder for us too, that with God the heart matters more than outward appearances.

\* Five of each, because the Philistines were ruled by the kings of each of their five key cities (see verse 17).

As an additional precaution, the ark is carried on a cattle cart (6:7-12). It is loaded with the gold objects of the guilt offering, and is hitched to two cows, who are sent on their way without interference. As the Philistines hoped, the cows go straight to Beth Shemesh (which was just outside Philistine territory), as their rulers follow the cart. They have been given the chance to learn about the living God, though over time most of them forgot what they had learned.

Questions For Discussion Or Further Study: What do the Philistines understand about God? What don't they understand? What do these events tell us about God's nature and about his purposes?

#### ***The Ark Returns To Israel (1 Samuel 6:13-7:2a)***

Now the ark goes back to Israel, and in a sense giving them a chance for a new start. The Philistine rulers are relieved and return home, as the Levites accept the ark and the gold objects the Philistines had sent, and they place the ark on a large rock. Yet the ark's return comes with a sobering lesson, another reminder of what it means to be in God's presence.

There is rejoicing in Beth Shemesh when the ark comes back (6:13-18). Some harvesters look up from their work, and they see the ark coming unexpectedly. The residents respond

appropriately with joy, sacrifice, and praise, and they place the ark and the gold objects on a large rock, which itself became a landmark and a spiritual reminder to the Israelites. Yet, they must still learn some basic principles that come with living in God's presence.

The ark doesn't stay long in Beth Shemesh, and from there it is sent on to Kiriath Jearim (6:19-7:2a). The celebration ends abruptly with a sudden calamity: some of the residents of Beth Shemesh, whether from curiosity or for some other reason, look inside the ark, and then die. At first this may seem drastic, and the rest of the people wonder, "Who can stand in the presence of this Holy God?"

As with similar events in the Old Testament (such as Leviticus 10:1-3 and 2 Samuel 6:5-6), this illustrates the magnitude of God's holiness and of his presence, and it helps us understand all the precautions God tells the Levites to take in their ministry. For us, it is also a reminder to be mindful of God's presence instead of taking it for granted, to worship him reverently and with deep respect (Hebrews 12:28-29), and to be deeply grateful for what Jesus has done for us.

Afterwards, a message is sent to Kiriath Jearim, a few miles northeast of Beth Shemesh, to provide a new home for the ark, and it stays there for quite a while\*. God then gives the Israelites a time to think about everything that has happened, and to give them a chance to return to him\*\*.

\* Later, David would bring the ark to Jerusalem. It was still in Kiriath-Jearim in his time (see 1 Chronicles 13:5-6 and 2 Samuel 6:1-2), and from there it eventually is taken to Jerusalem.

\*\* Verse 2 has also been translated as saying that for 20 years the ark remained at Kiriath-Jearim while the people mourned and sought after the Lord. The mourning could either be about what happened at Beth-Shemesh, or over the loss of Shiloh and what has happened to the ark.

Questions For Discussion Or Further Study: What can we learn from the way that God brings the ark back to Israel? How can the awareness of God's presence give us joy as it did in Beth Shemesh? Explain as best as you can, why some of their residents died. Since Jesus has now made it much easier to approach God, what can we still learn from this today about God's nature and about our walk with God?

### ***A Time Of Renewal (1 Samuel 7:2b-17)***

Despite his people's flaws, God brings them a period of renewal. Samuel's faith and devotion make him a source of strength and godly encouragement, he makes sure to turn to God in every circumstance, and he continues to remind the Israelites of their ongoing need for God. This is a reminder for us too.

As the Israelites begin to turn back to the Lord, Samuel asks them whether they are returning to God with all their hearts, not just with a few outward actions (7:2b-6). He then speaks truthfully for the need for them to humble themselves, to acknowledge their straying and idolatry, and to learn to devote themselves to God. As a result, they confess their sins and put away all of the idols they have found false hope in (James 4:6-8).

When the Philistines learn where the Israelites have assembled, they decide to attack (7:7-11). Samuel's response is to worship God and to call out to the Lord, as he asks for God to protect and save the Israelites. Even while he is sacrificing, the Philistines are lining up and formulating their military plans, yet at the same time God is ready for them. God himself sends the

Philistines into a panic, so it is then easy for the Israelites to rout them.

After the battle, Samuel sets up a stone to be a memorial, calling it Ebenezer, 'stone of help' (7:12-17). In so doing, he again acknowledges our need to depend on God every moment; as he says, "Thus far the Lord has helped us." These events form a noteworthy contrast with chapter four, when the Israelites put false hope in the ark being with them, taking God's help for granted.

Jesus is our living cornerstone, chosen by our Father in heaven (1 Peter 2:4-6). When we come to him with a soft and seeking heart, he can make us his living stones, he can build us up into a holy priesthood, he cleanses and sanctifies so that we can offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God, and he can teach us how to worship God in truth and in the Spirit, as his grace overflows to us. He is our precious cornerstone, and he calls us to put all our trust in him.

Questions For Discussion Or Further Study: In what ways might we be able to follow Samuel's advice to the Israelites? How might we be able to emulate his response to the Philistines' attack? What can we learn from these events about our need for God? What can we learn from them about God and his nature?

*- Mark Garner, June 2019*

## THE LORD LOOKS AT THE HEART: STUDIES IN 1 SAMUEL

### Notes For Week Four: The More Things Change (1 Samuel 8, 9, & 10)

*By God's grace, Samuel has become for Israel a faithful priest and judge, in place of Eli's faithless sons. This gives the Israelites a period of peace and security, which provides them also with an opportunity to learn from their mistakes. Yet, later they forget some of the things that God has taught them, and they make a decision with implications that they don't understand.*

#### ***A Fateful Decision (1 Samuel 8)***

When the Israelites realize that Samuel's sons are faithless and irresponsible, they draw the wrong conclusions, and they make a request that displeases God. When they ask for a king, God has Samuel reason with them, but the Israelites don't listen to either of them. Finally, God tells Samuel to give them a king, for he can use the situation to teach them and possibly even to bless them.

After a period of peace and safety, the Israelites decide that they want a king, instead of the form of guidance God has been giving them through Samuel (8:1-9). Samuel and his sons repeat an unfortunate pattern, as Samuel has apparently put unwarranted confidence in them, and they abuse their positions. Yet the Israelites make a choice that makes sense from a worldly point of view, but one that distresses Samuel, and more importantly, that displeases God.

They could have realized that any human being is highly fallible, so asking for an even more powerful human ruler wouldn't fix that. Instead, they wish to do away with the informal guidance of priests, prophets, and judges, and to replace this with a king, a strong ruler, 'such as all the other nations have'. This longing to adopt the world's ways can even affect believers in any era.

As a result, God says that they have rejected him, not Samuel. God also reminds Samuel of how the past shows how easily human nature is distracted by appearances and led by false hopes. At the same time, God has always understood human nature better than we ourselves do, so instead of asking Samuel to deny their request altogether, he asks him to help them understand first what having a king can lead to. Moreover, God had foreseen this long ago (see, for example, Deuteronomy 17:14-20).

Nothing can persuade the Israelites, and they still want a king (8:10-22). Samuel explains what earthly kings are like - it doesn't take long for them to feel entitled to take whatever they please, to impose burdensome taxes and other requirements, and to do whatever they like. Over time, all of the things Samuel warns them about happen in Israel, and by the later years of Solomon's time, the kingship had become a 'heavy yoke' for Israel\*.

\* See 1 Kings 12 (note verse 4), and the resulting split of the kingdom.

The Israelites want to be like all the other nations, and to have a strong king who will look impressive and lead them into battle. This might be understandable from a worldly viewpoint, but it is mistaken from a spiritual perspective, for it is not what God desires for them, or for us. God wants us to be something very different (compare Exodus 19:5-6 and Revelation 5:9-10).

It may take a long time for them to realize their mistake, and many of them may never acknowledge this. God realizes that they don't have any idea what they're doing, so he decides not to engage in a battle of wills with them, and he tells Samuel that he will give them a king. Even when human faithfulness fails, God's compassion, patience, and wisdom remain.

Questions For Discussion Or Further Study: Why is God displeased with the Israelites' request for a king? In what way have they rejected God? What can we learn about our relationship with God from this? When God lets them have a king, what does this tell us about God and about his nature?

### ***Samuel Meets Saul (1 Samuel 9:1-10:8)***

God's arrangement for Saul and Samuel to meet might at first seem convoluted. Many of the various details in this account are not important in themselves, yet there are reasons why the narrative goes into such detail. Along the way, we shall see that God is giving Saul and the nation a lot of grace, and he does many things to give Saul every possible chance to understand God.

God has already chosen Israel's first king, yet before showing him to Samuel, we first see Saul's lengthy search for his father's donkeys (9:1-17). Israel's first king will be the Benjamite Saul, son of Kish. Outwardly, Saul looks impressive and physically imposing. God knows that these characteristics have little to do with being a good king, yet God in his grace gives them what they wish for, and he will let them see their mistakes for what they are.

Meanwhile, Saul has left home merely to find some lost donkeys, yet his search leads him to unfamiliar territory, and he eventually becomes concerned for his father. He and his companion decide that they should consult a 'man of God' they have heard of, and this leads him to meet Samuel. By this time, Saul has been taken out of any familiar places or routines, and after all this, Saul should have no doubt that the kingship was given him by grace, not because he had earned it.

Likewise, God has also made Samuel wait for the person whom God sends instead of revealing him right away (we'll see this again with David in chapter 16). Notice that God tells Samuel that, given the circumstances, he can at least use Saul to give the nation protection from the Philistines. God knows Saul's flaws, and will later replace him, yet he gives both Saul and the Israelites the chance to make this arrangement work.

How extraordinarily patient God is, and how persistent human nature can be with our self-will. God often allows us to follow human reasoning and methods, hoping we can learn from our mistakes. Once in a while we realize how much we really need God, how caring and forgiving he is, and we can see all the undeserved blessings he gives us. In these moments, we also have the chance to see how deep and wide God's love and mercy really are.

When Samuel and Saul finally encounter one another, Samuel reassures him about the donkeys and about his family, then gets ready to anoint him (9:18-10:8). Samuel introduces himself as the 'seer' (prophet) that Saul had been looking for, and asks Saul to join him for dinner with his other guests. When he implies that Saul will now be significant to Israel, Saul is surprised, and says that he and his family have little status. Samuel then begins to explain what will happen.

Questions For Discussion Or Further Study: What reasons might God have had in making Saul his choice as Israel's first king? Why might have God chosen such an elaborate way of introducing Saul and Samuel? What do these events and God's promises to Saul tell us about God and his nature?

### ***Saul Is Made King Of Israel (1 Samuel 10:9-27)***

Saul begins by handling all this well. He does as Samuel asks, he doesn't boast, and when he is presented to Israel as king, he seems almost shy. Most of the Israelites cheer him; and even when a faction of soreheads opposes him, he refrains from any threats or anger. Though we know how Saul's reign will end for him and Israel, we can see God's grace for them all.

When Samuel anointed Saul, he had also told the future king to join a group of prophets for a while (10:9-16). When he does, as Samuel had promised, the Spirit comes on Saul, changing him and enabling him to speak words of prophecy for a time. As a result, 'Is Saul also among the prophets?' became a common saying in Israel. As Saul's reputation is thereby enhanced, we see God's ongoing grace to him and to the nation.

Now Samuel is ready to show Israel the man the Lord has chosen to become king (10:17-27). He calls the people to assemble again at Mizpah\*, reminds them of their choice to reject God's wishes, and about God's mercy to them. Then he calls them to present themselves before the Lord by tribes and families. After the process of drawing lots, beginning with the tribes and down to individual families, Saul is shown to be Israel's king.

\* They had also assembled at Mizpah after the ark had returned to Israel (1 Samuel 7), when Samuel guided them as they returned to God. Mizpah was a town a few miles north of Jerusalem, and about 10 miles southwest of Shiloh, where the ark had stayed for many years.

For his part, whether out of anxiety or humility or for some other reason, Saul is hiding among the supplies. When he finally makes his appearance, the Israelites are well pleased with the sight of this man, 'a head taller than any of the others', and his apparent modesty. The people celebrate and bring gifts as Samuel explains the rights and duties of their king.

God continues to do everything possible to give Saul a good start, as he moves some courageous people to join the king. When a group of mean-spirited grumblers complain about their new king, Saul shows them mercy. Despite this good beginning, we shall soon see how things would begin to unravel in spite of all of God's kindness and mercy.

God makes those who follow Jesus a chosen people, called out of the darkness of worldly thinking and worldly ways (1 Peter 2:9-10). He has made us into a holy priesthood, a nation not like any of the world's nations, to be God's special possession. Once we were covered with sins we couldn't have washed away; now Jesus has cleansed us and sanctified us. Once we hadn't received mercy, but now we have received the mercy and understanding and compassion we needed.

Questions For Discussion Or Further Study: What reasons did God have for sending Saul to be with the prophets? Why does God have Samuel give another warning before showing them their king? When the Israelites see Saul, what does their response tell us about human nature? What can we learn from these events about God and our walk with

God?

- *Mark Garner, June 2019*

## THE LORD LOOKS AT THE HEART: STUDIES IN 1 SAMUEL

### Notes For Week Five: A Time Of Transition (1 Samuel 11:1-13:15)

*The anointing of a king was against the wishes of Samuel and of God himself. Yet the Lord and Samuel both support Israel's new ruler, and ensure that his reign is firmly established. If Saul succeeds, so much the better, since God's people would be blessed through him. If he fails, it won't be because God wanted him to fall, for God continues showing compassion to Saul and Israel.*

#### ***Saul, A Man Of Action (1 Samuel 11)***

Saul's first test comes from the Ammonites. One of Saul's strengths was his tendency to act decisively when needed, and this is what the Israelites had wanted when they asked for a king. In this case, it turns out to be what the situation calls for. Later, unfortunately, they will find that Saul also tends to take firm action when the situation calls for patience and faith instead.

The Ammonites besiege Jabesh Gilead\*, and instead of accepting the town's offer of a generous treaty, they bully Jabesh Gilead and make dire threats (11:1-5). This quickly leads to distress in Israel, as the messengers mournfully tell the people about the Ammonites' threats to mutilate the townspeople and to humiliate Israel.

\* Jabesh was an Israelite town in the region of Gilead, just east of the Jordan River. The area was vulnerable to attack because it was not far from Ammonite territory.

Right now, King Saul is the man for the job, and he defeats the Ammonites decisively (11:6-11). When the king hears the news, instead of becoming discouraged, the Spirit of God comes on Saul. The Spirit gives Saul courage, and he is determined to come to the threatened town's aid. He quickly assembles a rescue force, and as he does, the people are moved to come together as one, and they convincingly overcome the Ammonites.

Afterwards, Samuel leads Israel in a ceremony to renew and confirm Saul's kingship (11:12-15), and Saul is modest about the victory. Seeing how easily Saul defeated the Ammonites, many of the people remember the troublemakers who tried to undermine Saul when he was made king, and they want to kill these malcontents. Yet the king graciously forgives them, showing them mercy instead of spoiling a day of rejoicing. This whole sequence of events shows Saul at his best.

Questions For Discussion Or Further Study: What can we learn about God from these events? What do they show us about God's understanding of us? How can we see God's hand at work in them?

#### ***Samuel Says Good-Bye (1 Samuel 12)***

With Saul established on the throne of a new kingdom, Samuel realizes that it is time for him to leave the stage. He reminds the nation of the integrity and honesty he has shown, to remind everyone of the importance of these in our relationship with God. Then he teaches some things from Israel's history, and then gives them some spiritual reminders.

As Samuel says farewell, he also reminds them of some important lessons from their history (12:1-11). Samuel reminds them of his lifetime of service to God, for since his birth Hannah had pledged him to God. Samuel has guided the nation with honesty, faithfulness, and godliness. Then Samuel reminds them of God's faithful care and of Israel's forgetfulness, to help them see that God remains faithful (see also 2 Timothy 2:11-13).

When the Israelites have been faithful, God has always been there to give them what they needed, and much more just to show them his care. And when they have been faithless, God has still always been there to give them what they needed. Sometimes they needed protection, sometimes they needed discipline, sometimes they needed to be taught. God always gave them what they needed, whether they 'deserved' it or not. God does the same for us.

Samuel then gives them some spiritual reminders (12:12-25). God has given them the kind of king they desired, and he has also done everything possible to make the kingship work. Samuel tells them that if indeed they and the king will revere God and follow him, God will be pleased and things will be good for them. At the same time, God knows human nature, and he has Samuel give them a caution from heaven, a sudden thunderstorm, and urges them not to go astray again.

Finally, Samuel reminds them that their craving for an earthly king was foolish and ungodly, yet he tells them that they don't need to be afraid (compare with Ephesians 2:1-6). True to his own nature, God will give them the chance to use the situation in a positive manner; for when we are faithless, he remains faithful. So instead of panicking or exchanging recriminations, Samuel tells them simply to turn to God, and serve him with all their hearts.

Questions For Discussion Or Further Study: What can we learn from Samuel's summary of Israel's history? Why does Samuel again remind the Israelites that their request for a king displeased God? What does God hope they will learn from the thunderstorm? What can we learn about our relationship with God from Samuel's advice to the people?

### ***A Time Of Trouble (1 Samuel 13:1-15)***

Saul has passed his early tests as king without difficulty. He has defended the nation, and has dealt graciously with those who opposed him. These challenges allowed him to use his strengths, just as the people had hoped. When another problem arises with the Philistines, it seems again as if Saul will be able to deal with it. But this time it exposes a spiritual weakness in Israel's king.

The trouble with the Philistines proves more difficult than the Ammonites' attack (13:1-7). Saul organizes the nation militarily, dividing the generalship between himself and his son Jonathan, as the Israelites had wished for: a strong king and his heir apparent, ready to lead powerful armies into battle. This time, though, they will see that it is at best a mixed blessing.

Soon, Saul's son Jonathan impulsively attacks a Philistine outpost. This in turn provokes reprisals from the Philistines (who were probably looking for an excuse to fight anyway). Suddenly, the enthusiasm in Israel turns to fear, as the Israelites realize that they have incited a fierce foe to take action. The people begin to hide anywhere that offers the slightest protection.

At this tense moment, Saul commits a serious mistake (13:8-15). As he waits For Samuel to

come and offer an appropriate sacrifice before going into battle, Saul seems either to become impatient to start the battle, or desperate to demonstrate his leadership, or perhaps a combination of both. In any case, he takes action and presumes to offer the sacrifice himself, initiating a chain of events that will lose him the kingship and that will bring a time of disorder to Israel.

The same qualities that helped Saul win battles and friends now lead him into trouble. Saul is handling things he did not understand. He viewed the holy offering merely as one more task to be dealt with, and thus he acted as the man of action that he was. The situation may have been difficult, but in God's eyes this does not excuse Saul's error. The king seems to have thought of the sacrifice merely as a necessary task or a public relations function.

Thus God will replace Saul with a man after God's own heart. Saul was a man of action, and two kings later Solomon was a man of wisdom. But David was a man of God, someone who sought the Lord with all his heart. Despite his own many mistakes and flaws, David always revered and loved God.

When the Samaritan woman asked Jesus where the best place to worship was, Jesus responded that it is more important to worship God in truth and in the Spirit (John 4:19-24). Jesus knew this woman's heart, and he saw her desire to know God; so his response helps her and us see that the kind of worshipers God seeks are those who fix our eyes on him, open our hearts to him and keep them soft, so that he can teach us his truths and can fill us with his Spirit.

Questions For Discussion Or Further Study: Why might the Israelites be fearful again, after how they've seen Saul lead them? Why does God respond so firmly to Saul's mistake? How can we learn from all of these events in our walk with God? What do these events tell us about God and his nature?

- Mark Garner, June 2019

## **THE LORD LOOKS AT THE HEART: STUDIES IN 1 SAMUEL**

### **Notes For Week Six: A Time Of Confusion & Hope (1 Samuel 13:16-15:35)**

*After some early successes that allowed Saul to use his strengths, the new king has begun to reveal his spiritual flaws. In the long run, humility and genuine faithfulness are always more important to God than earthly successes or human abilities. For Israel, a tumultuous period has begun, in which confusing events are intertwined with the many ways we see God's care for the Israelites.*

#### ***Unexpected Things (1 Samuel 13:16-14:14)***

As tensions increase between Israel and the Philistines, the Israelites are distressed to realize that the Philistines will have a considerable advantage in weaponry. This is not what the Israelites had hoped when they wanted to be more like the other nations. With the situation at a standstill, Saul's impulsive yet faithful son Jonathan makes a decision that initiates a series of unexpected events.

Israel is in the uncomfortable situation of being dependent on the Philistines for iron-working (13:16-22). The Philistines were among the first in the region to develop the process\*, and Israel had chosen to adopt it slowly, using the Philistine blacksmiths as a resource. As the situation with Israel became tense, the Philistines had apparently captured or deported the few Israelite blacksmiths. As a result, the Israelites had a scarcity of iron swords and other iron weapons\*\*.

\*The Hittites are often believed to have been the first iron-workers in the general region, and the Philistines likely learned the process from them.

\*\* The Israelites would have had numerous bronze weapons, but these would have put them at a significant disadvantage against the Philistines in battle.

Jonathan's attack on a Philistine outpost comes during this demoralizing situation, as many of the Israelites are hiding, and Saul has few options (13:23-14:14). Like Saul, Jonathan wants to take action, yet here this is combined with a better awareness of God's presence and what it means. As Jonathan says, "Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few" (Matthew 19:25-26), just as Jesus has done what human effort couldn't have done in redeeming us.

Yet Jonathan does not act out of sheer restlessness, and in his plan we see his realization that he needs to make sure to wait for God. Jonathan's plan is simple, as he and his armor-bearer will make sure that the Philistines see them, and base their actions on what the Philistines say. Jonathan asks God to give them a sign to climb up the cliff if they say 'Come up'; otherwise, they will wait.

As it turns out, the disdainful Philistines taunt them and tell them to come up. Hearing this, Jonathan tells his armor-bearer to climb up the cliff with him, for he is now convinced that the Lord has given the Philistines into Israel's hands. The complacent Philistines are caught off-guard, and the two Israelites have astonishing success. God will use this to turn the situation around to show his care for Israel, as he continues to remind the people to put their hope in him.

Questions For Discussion Or Further Study: What could we learn from the Israelites' dependence on Philistine blacksmiths? Compare Jonathan's attack with Saul's ill-advised choice to make the sacrifice in 1 Samuel 13 - what are the differences? What led to God blessing Jonathan's decision?

### ***Victory & Unease (1 Samuel 14:15-46)***

God uses Jonathan's small-scale attack to throw the entire Philistine army into confusion and panic, as God gives them another decisive victory and re-unites the Israelites. Yet, what should have been a victory is turned into a distressing situation by another of Saul's acts of rashness. Afterwards, God continues giving grace to Israel, allowing Saul to continue defending the nation.

God now shakes the ground, as he uses Jonathan's actions to throw the entire Philistine army into confusion (14:15-23). Between the shock and the unexpected assault, panic strikes the Philistines, as God renders them practically helpless and completely vulnerable. As Hebrews reminds us, God will indeed shake the earth so that what is temporary will disappear and what is eternal will remain (Hebrews 12:26-27).

Meanwhile, Saul is puzzled at what he sees. At first, he wants to bring the ark, and then changes his mind. Soon, the king realizes that the Philistines are confused, as the Israelites come out of their hiding places to join the battle, which results in a decisive victory for Israel, and it is clear that indeed 'on that day the Lord saved Israel.'

Unfortunately, the victory is followed by a tense situation between Jonathan and Saul (14:24-52), for what should have been a time of rejoicing is turned into a distressing situation by one of Saul's acts of rashness. Saul had made an impulsive oath prohibiting his army from eating anything, on pain of death for those who don't observe it. There was no reason for him to make such an oath; it was just Saul's desperate attempt to grab control of the situation by 'doing something'.

When Jonathan quite sensibly eats some wild honey to strengthen himself, he unknowingly violates his father's oath. When he finds out, he realizes at once that Saul's oath was both unnecessary and ill-advised. Jonathan aptly observes how much better it would have been if Saul instead had allowed his men to have been better nourished and prepared for the day's events. Fortunately, the people realize this too, and they protect Jonathan from the king's threat.

Questions For Discussion Or Further Study: What can we learn from how God wins this battle for Israel? In what other ways does God hope to use it? Compare again Jonathan's decision with Saul's oath - what are the differences, and what can we learn from them? What do these events tell us about God and our walk with him?

### ***Earthly Success, Spiritual Failure (1 Samuel 15)***

With the Philistines temporarily subdued, God directs Saul's attention to the Amalekites, who had a long history of oppressing and harming the Israelites whenever the chance arose, all the way back to Israel's departure from Egypt\*. God is also giving Saul another chance to succeed and show himself faithful, yet again Saul makes some more mistakes.

\* See Exodus 17:8-15 for the events God refers to in 1 Samuel 15:2.

Again the Israelites win the battle with ease, yet it ends in a partial victory (15:1-9). The task at hand again calls for firm action, which should allow Saul to use his strengths. Moreover, the king starts with a good decision in showing grace to the Kenites (who had been helpful to the Israelites in the past\*), by warning them of the upcoming attack on Amalek. Yet after the battle, Saul disregards God's instructions.

\* Moses' father-in-law Jethro was a Kenite - see Judges 1:16.

Saul decides to retain the best of the Amalekites' possessions for himself (15:4-9), rather than destroying\* everything as God had instructed him to do. Saul even took their brutal king Agag alive, contrary to God's instructions. (In itself, this was a normal procedure in the ancient world, since a captured king could be ransomed for a high price.)

\* The word used here can also be translated as 'devoting' things irrevocably to God, often by destroying them.

God is displeased with Saul's decisions, yet Saul has an explanation (15:10-21). When Samuel looks for Saul, he learns that Saul has even set up a monument to himself, losing all awareness of God's presence. What Saul has done could be defended by human logic, since he claims that his intent was to make a sacrifice of the things he has taken.

Yet God's perspective is entirely different (15:15:22-35). From an earthly viewpoint, Saul has won a great victory, yet from a spiritual perspective, he is drifting even farther from God. Samuel explains that to heed God and to revere him is better than sacrifice. Under the Old Covenant, the Levitical sacrifices were necessary at appointed time, yet in themselves they were an imperfect way to know God, to be replaced by the ministry of Jesus (Hebrews 10:5-9).

God values humility and trust in our walk with him. Earthly minds may admire Saul's self-confidence and self-will, yet Samuel compares them to practices like idolatry and sorcery, since all of these things implicitly deny God's holiness and transcendence. Samuel now has the sad task of telling Saul that God has rejected him as king. Yet Saul's main concern is still for himself and for what others think of him.

Both the Lord and Samuel mourn over what has happened, yet God will use this turn of events to give the people hope by giving them David, someone who walked closely with God, and who would later become Israel's king.

The wisdom that comes from heaven is quite different from worldly wisdom (James 3:13-18). Despite its appearances, worldly wisdom can easily lead to envy, selfish ambition, disorder, and other spiritual ills. In contrast, wisdom from heaven is pure and peace-loving; it brings humility since it teaches us how little we know and how deep God's understanding really is.

Questions For Discussion Or Further Study: What reasons might God have had in asking Saul to deal with the Amalekites? Explain why God was displeased with Saul's actions after the battle, and why God decides to replace him with a different king. What can we learn from what Samuel tells Saul about God and our walk with him?

- Mark Garner, July 2019

## THE LORD LOOKS AT THE HEART: STUDIES IN 1 SAMUEL

### Notes For Week Seven: Someone After God's Own Heart (1 Samuel 16 & 17)

*Saul's poor spiritual judgment and perspective have moved God to find another king for Israel. God had given Saul every opportunity to make things work, and Saul had the attributes that worldly humans seek in their leaders, but he lacked spiritual understanding. The next king, whom Samuel is now sent to anoint, will have the qualities that God values most.*

#### ***Samuel & David (1 Samuel 16:1-13)***

Saul was such a disappointment as king that Samuel has become despondent and fearful. God encourages him with the news that he has chosen a replacement for Saul, and then exhorts Samuel not to fear Saul's anger. It is easy to sympathize with Samuel; and like Samuel, we must often simply trust God's guidance, and be ready to follow him wherever he leads us.

God directs Samuel to visit the home of Jesse in Bethlehem, where God will show him the future king (16:1-5). God himself grieved over Saul's mistakes, so he understands how Samuel feels, for Samuel has patiently endured the ingratitude of the Israelites yet he did everything possible to help Saul, yet things have worked out badly. Now God helps Samuel see that, just as there is a time to mourn, it is now a time to hope.

After Samuel watches Jesse's sons appear before him one by one, God finally tells him to anoint David, the youngest (16:6-13). When Samuel sees Jesse's oldest son, he at once thinks that this imposing person must be the next anointed king. In fact, all of Jesse's older sons seem outwardly impressive, but God emphatically tells the prophet, "Do not consider his appearance . . . the Lord looks at the heart."

David's youth, smaller size, and innocent appearance make him an afterthought even to his own father. God has chosen him because his heart is seeking the truth, and this far outweighs any qualities that the world values. A simple lesson, and yet how hard it is even for believers to accept it. Despite Saul's appearance and his apparent successes, he failed in God's eyes. As we'll see, David understood what it meant to seek God and to know him.

Once Samuel anoints him, God's Spirit comes on David. David will wait for a while for the complete fulfillment of God's promises, yet he will know that God is always with him. We too have received an anointing, and we too have received the gift of God's Spirit (see 1 John 2:26-28), to give us spiritual reassurance as we endure this world's empty ways, and as we anticipate being in God's spiritual realms forever. Though we are still in this world, we no longer belong to it.

Questions For Discussion Or Further Study: What reasons might have God had in having Samuel see all of Jesse's sons before he met David? What kinds of 'appearances' does God want us not to become pre-occupied with? What does 'anointing' mean for us? What can we learn about God's nature and what matters to him from these events?

### ***David & Saul (1 Samuel 16:14-23)***

God has chosen David to be the new king, and he now also provides an opportunity for him to see what is in store. As one of Saul's attendants, David will come to know Saul, and he will also become familiar with many of the matters and problems that affect the nation. Note too that David also administers God's grace to Saul, by playing the lyre (or harp) to ease Saul's inner torment.

God has irrevocably decided to remove Saul as king, but he still shows him mercy by providing solace for this troubled soul (16:14-23). Without God's Spirit, Saul is tormented, and he becomes desperate. His servants suggest that he send for someone who can play the lyre (or harp) well; and one of them has heard that one of Jesse's sons, David, is known for his skilled playing and for his godly reputation.

So Saul sends for David, who comforts the king with his playing. We again see how God operates on a number of levels at the same time. God still cares about Saul, and gives him some periods of peace to give him a chance at least to acknowledge God (see also Luke 13:34). We also see how carefully and patiently God works, for not only will David learn about the kingdom, it will also be natural for him to become involved in upcoming events.

Questions For Discussion Or Further Study: How can we see God's hand at work in these simple developments? What do these events show us about God's nature and about our walk with God?

### ***Facing A Giant (1 Samuel 17)***

God has anointed young David son of Jesse as Israel's next king, but it will be some time before he actually assumes this responsibility. In the meantime, plenty is going on. King Saul's poor spiritual condition isn't improving, and the Philistines - recovered from their earlier losses - are back for more trouble. Things don't look promising, but God will again turn things around.

Once more there is a tense stand-off between the Israelites and the Philistines (17:1-11). This time, the Philistines have a special weapon, the fearsome giant Goliath. This bully repeatedly dares Israel to choose its own man for a one-on-one, winner-take-all fight with the huge Philistine. Of course, no one can imagine anyone being able to overpower such a formidable warrior, while if no one accepts the challenge, Israel's morale will just get worse and worse.

The responses to Goliath's challenge are quite different (17:12-37). There is terror and dismay among the Israelites, and while Saul might once have perhaps been able to rise to the occasion, now he is paralyzed with fear, no longer trusting in God and possibly no longer trusting in himself. Indeed, all of us will face dangers at some point that truly are beyond our power to handle, when we can only prayerfully trust in God to carry us.

David, as he alternates responsibilities at home and his service to Saul, now visits the camp to bring food for his brothers, and he reacts much differently to Goliath's bluster. Where others saw

a threat and hoped it would just go away, David saw a mere human defying God himself. He knew the threat was serious, yet he also knew that God, not himself, could meet it. So he assures Saul, "Let no one lose heart" (2 Corinthians 4:16-18) since he knew that only God could take care of it.

David successfully deals with Goliath because he did not deal with the giant on Goliath's own level, instead he came at him "in the name of the Lord Almighty" (17:38-58). When Saul tries to get David to adopt the conventional sword and armor, David declines them, since he knew that fighting Goliath on his own terms would lead to certain defeat. Thus David's unconventional strategy arouses his opponent's scorn, right up to the moment when the Philistine falls.

When David succeeds, it is clear that "The battle is the Lord's". As David avoided the obvious methods of the world and trusted God, God does not want us to approach things with worldly methods or thinking; rather, he wants to help us overcome the world and its fears, through our faith and his grace. Facing the world's 'giants' on their own terms may sometimes led to earthly success, but God's ways are far higher than that. He doesn't want us to face them with the world's weapons.

As Paul says, we do not fight with the weapons of the world (2 Corinthians 10:3-5). Though we live in the world, we do not wage war as it does. We have been given divine 'weapons' by God, and he wants us to use them in a godly way for godly purposes. Instead of engaging in the world's false hopes and empty thinking, God asks us to let Jesus take our thoughts captive, so that he may use them to give us lasting peace and enduring hope.

Questions For Discussion Or Further Study: What kinds of 'giants' might we face, and how do these events tell us how God wants us to face them? What do these events tell us about how we can avoid losing heart as we face these difficult times? What do these events tell us about God and our walk with him?

*- Mark Garner, July 2019*

## **THE LORD LOOKS AT THE HEART: STUDIES IN 1 SAMUEL**

### **Notes For Week Eight: God, Human Nature, & The Heart (1 Samuel 18, 19, & 20)**

*After the striking victory over Goliath and the Philistines, King Saul still continues to drift even farther from God. As his spirit worsens, Saul makes David a scapegoat for his problems, and he begins to act violently and irrationally. David must deal with increasing danger, and Saul's misguided actions begin to affect others as well.*

#### ***Human Nature & Its Weaknesses (1 Samuel 18)***

After defeating the fearsome Goliath, David quickly becomes famous throughout Israel. With the Philistines humbled, Israel's joy and relief overflows, but it is not long before new problems arise. This time, the danger comes from within, starting with King Saul's jealousy of David's sudden popularity. It does not help matters any that Israel honors David for the wrong reasons.

In the relief and excitement following the defeat of Goliath and the Philistines, there is a short period of good feeling, yet the victory soon leads to division (18:1-5). On the surface, the nation seems to be unified, yet this apparent unity is quite fragile. King Saul generously rewards David, while Saul's impulsive but good-hearted son Jonathan becomes devoted to the new hero, and the nation rejoices in David's successes.

Trouble soon starts when the Israelites' undue praises of David's accomplishments arouse a bitter jealousy in Saul. The king's jealousy and growing hatred will eventually plunge the nation into division and violence. Yet it bears noting that the people's praises are not for God, who supplied them with the man to defeat Goliath, nor even for David's faith, which enabled him to overcome the giant.

Rather, they praise David for his human accomplishments, and for doing things that have benefitted them personally. They are also making comparisons between their leaders, evaluating them to see which one has done more for them, just as human nature often does (2 Corinthians 10:12). During the long, sad struggle that will soon divide Israel, most of the Israelites will often act out of self-interest, rather than by faith.

Saul's jealousy leads the desperate king to become violent, and to concoct schemes designed to produce David's fall (18:17-30). As David's successes continue, Saul becomes increasingly insecure, and he openly tries for the first time to kill David. For his part, David does nothing wrong, and his popularity remains high. When Saul cools off, he tries a more subtle means of destroying David.

Saul offers David in marriage first his older daughter, then his younger daughter, in exchange for David risking his life by going again into battle with the Philistines. After modestly declining the first offer, David agrees to marry Saul's second daughter, Michal, who on her part has become fond of David. All of Saul's efforts to undermine David have led to his own family to become even closer to the king's young servant.

Questions For Discussion Or Further Study: What does the response to the defeat of Goliath and the Philistines tell us about human nature? What response might God have

actually hoped for? Why does Saul go downhill so quickly? What can the contrast between Saul and David tell us about our walk with God?

### ***More Chances For Saul (1 Samuel 19)***

Israel's unrestrained praise of David's military achievements have provoked Saul to bitter envy, which will never be cured for the rest of the king's sad life. As Saul also causes problems for others, God continues to give Saul opportunities to humble himself. First, Saul's children do their best to make peace between Saul and David.

Saul's son Jonathan does succeed in patching things up temporarily (19:1-8). He reasons with his father, showing him that there is no cause to be resentful or jealous towards someone as loyal as David. His forthrightness and compassion leads to a fragile, temporary peace (compare with Ephesians 4:13-15), and it is not Jonathan's fault that trouble soon starts again.

When Saul's envy again flares into violence, it his daughter Michal, now David's wife, who protects David from the king's murderous rage (19:9-24). Like her brother, Michal is torn between her loyalty to her father (with her fear of him). and her love of David. Here, when David is caught by surprise, she deliberately deceives her father in order to give David time to escape. Here again we see how easily bad thoughts get into the hearts of those who have drifted away from God\*.

\* We see again the phrase that 'a harmful (or evil) spirit' came on Saul in verse 9, as well as in 18:10 and 16:14. Because the king has strayed and has turned away from God, now God will no longer protect Saul from them.

Saul's relentless pursuit of David continues, and sends some henchmen to capture him. Yet three times in a row, the Spirit of God comes on Saul's men, so they end up prophesying. Saul then goes himself to confront David, yet the Spirit comes on him too, and he too prophesies. God does this in part to protect David, and also in part to remind Saul of what he had once experienced\*, as another reminder to come back to him. Sadly, Saul remains more concerned about staying king.

\* See 1 Samuel 10:5-11, after Samuel had anointed Saul.

Questions For Discussion Or Further Study: What have Saul's life and his relationship with God told us about God and his nature? What can we learn from the ways this affects Jonathan and Michal, and the ways they respond? What can we learn from the ways that God continues protecting David? What do they tell us about our walk with God?

### ***Conflicting Loyalties (1 Samuel 20)***

Then it is again Jonathan's turn to deter Saul from harming David. Poor Jonathan first must endure an excruciating conversation with his father, and then must carry out an elaborate process to warn his friend of Saul's intentions. Reluctant to oppose his father openly, and unwilling to betray a valued friend, Jonathan faces increasingly conflicting loyalties.

David now is confused and anxious, so he and Jonathan make some arrangements to prepare for whatever happens (20:1-23). Saul knows about David's friendship with the king's son, so David fears that Jonathan might not realize Saul's determination to kill him. Jonathan reassures David,

and he promises to find out once for all what Saul's intentions might be.

At the upcoming New Moon feast, Jonathan will risk facing Saul's temper to learn what his attitude is, and he arranges a complicated signal with three arrows to let David know what to expect. This seems to be a precaution, since Jonathan knows that he will be accompanied, and he doesn't want his attendants to know what he is doing.

There is, unfortunately, trouble at dinner (20:24-42). When Jonathan merely explains David's absence, this is enough for Saul to unleash his fury on Jonathan. In doing so, it now becomes clear what Saul's intentions and motivations are, for he openly tells his son that he himself will never be king unless David is killed. This distressing realization leaves Jonathan full of sorrow.

So Jonathan now goes to act out the warning to David, so that he will know what lies ahead. David must now endure a period of danger, often hiding, often taking unusual measure to escape Saul's persecution. David has done nothing wrong at all, just as Paul cautions us that these things will happen too to those who walk by faith (2 Timothy 3:12-15).

Saul's family suffers heavily from his bitterness and rage, and his envy will soon harm many others.

Saul's troubles began when he got so caught up in being king that he started drifting away from seeking and knowing God, and he became more interested in his own privileges and accomplishments. Saul surely never expected to come to his present state, and God continues giving him chances to return to him.

Truly nothing is hidden from God's sight (Hebrews 4:12-16), God indeed sees the thoughts and attitudes of our hearts, and these matter to him more than any outward appearances. Jesus empathizes with our weaknesses, for he endured the same kinds of disappointments and hurts and sorrows that we do. He knows we are weak, and he calls us to approach God so that we may receive grace, mercy, and understanding from our Heavenly Father.

Questions For Discussion Or Further Study: What are some of the reasons that the situation has developed in this way, and what do they tell us about human nature? In these events, what can we see about God, his care, and his understanding? What can we learn from them about what it means to know God?

- Mark Garner, July 2019

## **THE LORD LOOKS AT THE HEART: STUDIES IN 1 SAMUEL**

### **Notes For Week Nine: Spiritual Survival In Dark Times (1 Samuel 21, 22, 23)**

*Ever since the people insisted on having a strong king 'such as the other nations have' - a mistake that was in large part the result of other spiritual weaknesses - the tension has grown, as the Israelites' expectations and Saul's motives continue to differ with God's desires, as well as with their own spiritual needs. Now, division and violence can no longer be avoided.*

#### ***David In Exile (1 Samuel 21)***

Realizing that Saul's anger and jealousy are unquenchable, David decides to flee. The first place he hopes to find trustworthy help is from the priest Ahimelech, and after that he will look for refuge in some strange places. As David faces physical threats, we'll also see how he faces spiritual dangers as he adjusts to these confused times.

David first seeks refuge in Nob\*, a town of priests near Jerusalem (21:1-9). Despite fearing for his own life, the faithful priest Ahimelech helps the runaway. He even allows David to eat the consecrated bread, an act of compassion that Jesus mentions in the gospels as an example of God's appreciation for this act of mercy (see also Matthew 12:1-4). We also see how God will take care of the faithful fugitive, for God has already anointed him as Israel's future king.

\* Nob was in Benjamite territory, just north of Jerusalem. It is thought that the tabernacle was in Nob for a while during Saul's kingship.

Since David had to flee unarmed, Ahimelech gives him Goliath's sword, which he had saved. Sadly, though, one of Saul's followers, Doeg the Edomite, observes these acts of kindness. He will soon report them to Saul and will carry out Saul's barbarous commands, when Saul's own officials are unwilling to harm the priests.

In desperation, David even seeks refuge in the Philistine town Gath (21:10-15). In his anxiety about remaining in Israel, at the time this is all that David can come up with. It does seem inappropriate for David to trust in these brutes instead of seeking godlier sources of help, and David may not have asked God what to do. Yet who of us has not acted hastily, in moments of anguish or fear? And soon, we'll see how David begins constantly asking God for guidance.

In any case, God in his grace allows David to see that he is in danger, and that the king of Gath could easily attack him. So David uses the ruse of being insane to escape Philistine territory safely. God knows his heart, and as David adjusts to these events and threats, and as he learns what it means to seek and trust God every moment, God will be with him.

Questions For Discussion Or Further Study: What can we learn from the ways God is protecting David? How can we see David's humanity, and God's grace to him? What does this tell us about God's nature?

### ***Hard Times (1 Samuel 22)***

Events continue to be strange, and then they get worse. After fleeing Gath, David hides in a cave, where he soon finds himself the commander of a large group of assorted outcasts and malcontents. Meanwhile Saul, frustrated by David's elusiveness, begins to take out his rage on faithful believers and on innocent bystanders. This will be one of the sadder periods in Israel's history.

As David looks for safety in a limestone cave near the town of Adullam\* (22:1-5), his brothers come to him, and David has also aroused sympathy from debtors, troubled people, and other outcasts who now gather around him, ready to be guided by him, and looking to him for hope (compare with Matthew 9:10-13). He finds his parents a home in Moab, another nation filled with idols, thinking it safer for them there than in Israel.

\* Adullam was an Israelite town, though at the time it was on the border between Judah and Philistia. Later, Judean kings would fortify the town. There are numerous limestone caves in this area.

God finally sends a prophet to remind David that he belongs in Judah, and David promptly responds, and heads further into Judah. Soon we'll see how these events have brought David even closer with God, and we'll see how devoted he becomes to prayer. We also know that God has made promises to David, and we'll see how he keeps them.

Sadly, Saul's and Doeg's actions now show that David's fears for his family and friends are well-founded (22:6-23). As Saul sinks even lower, he threatens and harshly reprimands his officials for not having delivered David to him. Then, the informer Doeg tells Saul about the help that the priest Ahimelech had given to David.

Saul then confronts Ahimelech, and orders the deaths of him and everyone in his family. When Saul's own guards refuse to carry out this barbaric request, the Doeg is happy to oblige and to carry out this pointless act of rage, even to the point of destroying the whole town. Only one of the priest's sons, Abiathar, escapes, and he joins David. For his part, David is distressed not only by his own peril, but even more so by the way that those close to him are suffering.

This sad period comes as the result of many mistakes: Israel's desire for a king, Saul's spiritual weakness, the mistakes made long ago by Eli's sons, the Israelites' worldly adulation of David and Saul for the wrong reasons. Yet there is good news, for God still reigns, still cares about his people, and fully intends to keep his promises. Sometimes we too have nothing except God to hope in. Yet as David will get through these problems, God will be with us even in the worst of times.

Questions For Discussion Or Further Study: In these events, how can we see David growing closer with God? What cautions could we learn from Saul's behavior? What can we learn from these events about our walk with God?

### ***Mercy In The Midst Of Peril (1 Samuel 23)***

David is on the run, and Saul will not hesitate to inflict violence and injustice on anyone who

protects his intended victim. For his part, David is learning to depend even more completely on God, and we shall now see the side of David that led God to call him "a man after my own heart". Not only is David concerned about an oppressed village, he is also careful to seek God's will.

David's willingness to answer the cry for help from the besieged town of Keilah\* shows that even in distress he also cared about others in need (23:1-6). When he hears that bullies from Philistia are looting the helpless settlement, his immediate desire is to go to their aid. Yet his concern for the helpless is combined with the desire to do as God asks, so he prays for guidance first.

\* A town in Judah, a few miles from Hebron, where David is now staying.

This may seem like a simple thing, yet we can see how David has drawn even closer with God. Moreover, it was precisely Saul's casual disregard for God's guidance that sent him spiraling downwards spiritually. Over the course of his life, David made some mistakes that he deeply regretted. Yet he responded much differently when he realized what he had done, and he continues to turn to God himself for understanding, mercy, help, and guidance.

Unfortunately, David's act of mercy tips off Saul, yet David continues to trust in God for direction and protection (23:7-14). Saul's perspective is quite different, and when he finds out where David is now, he assumes that God has delivered him into his hands. It is another symptom of how far Saul has drifted away from God.

When David again faithfully seeks God's guidance (see also Ephesians 6:18), God warns him that the ungrateful citizens of Keilah are planning to turn him over to Saul, in order to protect themselves. This must have been another discouraging and hurtful turn of events for David, yet instead of accusing them or blaming them, he simply again heads elsewhere.

David then lives in the Desert of Ziph\* for a while (23:15-29). Here, he receives help and encouragement again from Jonathan. Once more, Saul learns of his whereabouts from a group eager to win favor with the powerful but ungodly king. This time, God provides a distraction to protect David, without David needing to do anything. Not only have Saul's attacks on David been unsuccessful, but more importantly, David has let God use them to draw him even closer to him.

\* Farther south in Judah, closer to the border with Edom.

We too have Jesus' reassurance that no one can snatch God's sheep from his hand (John 10:27-30). Jesus calls us to listen to his voice instead of to the world's voices, and follow him wherever he guides us. Indeed, our Father in heaven is greater than all, and he gives eternal life to those who walk by faith in Jesus.

Questions For Discussion Or Further Study: What can we learn from how David responds to these events? How can we see him walking even more closely with God? What do these events tell us about God and about our relationship with him?

*- Mark Garner, July 2019*

## THE LORD LOOKS AT THE HEART: STUDIES IN 1 SAMUEL

### Notes For Week Ten: David's Exile Continues (1 Samuel 24 & 25)

*Faced with Saul's fury, it took David a while to restore his own spiritual stability, and for a time he sought help in some inappropriate places. Yet it didn't take David long to resume faithfully praying to God about everything. God is now keeping him safe without as much risk to others, while David's treatment of Saul again shows us why God calls him someone after his own heart.*

#### ***David's Mercy To Saul (1 Samuel 24)***

David's renewed closeness with God now shows in his actions towards Saul. In his blind rage, Saul is even more careless and impulsive than usual; and his negligence provides David an easy opportunity to kill Saul and end the threat. Yet he has never harbored any malice towards the hateful king, and his remarkable graciousness temporarily calms Saul.

In this unexpected encounter in the cave\*, we can see the contrast between David and Saul, and the contrast between godly wisdom and worldly wisdom (24:1-7). Saul enters the cave seemingly alone and unarmed, and doesn't notice David and his men. David's own loyal men urge him to kill Saul, seeing the opportunity as a blessing from God. Echoing Saul's erroneous perspective when he had thought he had trapped David, David's men say, 'God has given him into your hands'.

\* David is now in the Desert of En Gedi (or Ein Gedi), near the west shoreline of the Dead Sea. It contains an oasis that is now a nature reserve.

How easy it would have been for David to rationalize capturing Saul, or even killing this cruel persecutor. Saul would have done so without thinking, but David is far too gracious even to consider such an action, and he reminds his men that Saul was once God's anointed. Indeed, when he snips off a corner of Saul's robe to show to the deranged king, David regrets even that. Besides feeling pity for the troubled king, David is more interested in looking at things the way God does.

We see all this in David's message to Saul (24:8-22). David's appeal to Saul to come back to his senses, we can also see traces of the same gracious compassion that Jesus would show to his persecutors many years later (see Luke 23:33-34). David continues to acknowledge Saul as king, and he continues to hope for a reconciliation. At the same time, God is also giving Saul another chance to turn to him again.

David also reaffirms his intention not to harm Saul, and by quoting a saying, 'from evildoers come evil deeds' (see also Matthew 7:17-18), he pledges again not to harm the king. This time, Saul is temporary humbled, struck by David's care and humility, and he only requests that David won't harm his descendants. For a brief time, Saul has a few moments of peace that have come from God's mercy and David's godly behavior.

Questions For Discussion Or Further Study: How does God use this situation? What can we learn about God and our walk with him? What can we learn from David's actions and from his message to Saul? How can we see God's protection and care in these events?

### ***David, Abigail, & Nabal (1 Samuel 25)***

As David's period of exile and peril continues, we see him experiencing further spiritual ups and downs, and his interactions with Nabal and Abigail shows us the ways things have affected him. When he encounters Nabal's loutish behavior, David's initial harshness is unexpected and seems out of proportion, yet then we see his humility and appreciation in his response to Abigail.

This series of events begins when David and his tired group of refugees ask for help from a wealthy shepherd\* (25:1-13). Meanwhile, Samuel has passed away, adding to David's sadness. The Israelites take the time to mourn and bury Samuel, though it seems that it was likely overshadowed by other current events. David and his men have been kind to Nabal's servants and even protected them, so David sends a message reasonably asking for some food and water.

\* David has now moved farther south to the Desert of Paran.

Nabal is preoccupied with his business, and he begrudges David anything at all. In his rudeness, Nabal even mocks David and his men. Yet he has caught David at a bad time, and David becomes furious. He tells his men to pick up their swords and get ready to attack. While his frustration is understandable with all that he has dealt with, his intentions still seem extreme. Fortunately, God is looking out for him.

Meanwhile, Nabal's servants have gone to Nabal's wife Abigail, and have told her about how David's men helped them and about Nabal's brutish behavior, so she carefully intervenes (25:14-44). Abigail now prevents David from doing something he would have regretted; she acts wisely and quickly, sending large amounts of food ahead of her, and then goes to see David personally.

As Abigail arrives, David has just made dire threats to Nabal and all of his servants. So Abigail reasons with David, sympathizing with the ways he's been mistreated, and humbly asks him to spare her foolish husband, instead of taking vengeance on him. Some of her thoughts are also similar to how Jesus tells us to treat even those who are unkind to us (see Matthew 5:43-48).

David quickly realizes the truth of Abigail's calming words, and his anger subsides. Again God has sent someone to caution him, and again David responds with humility. We also see another contrast with Saul, as David does not fulfill his misguided 'promise' to deal harshly with Nabal and his servants. When Nabal finds out about his wife's generosity, he is physically affected, and soon dies. As a result of all this, David marries Abigail.

As Jesus prayed before he went to the cross, we are not of this world, just as Jesus was not of it; so God calls us to live by faith in him (John 17:13-19). For a while, we are still living in this fallen world, full of good things that God made, yet also full of dangers and snares; so God calls us to trust in him to protect us from the deceiver. Jesus has sanctified us, God's words are eternal truths, and he will guide us each step when we walk humbly in the light of Jesus.

Questions For Discussion Or Further Study: How can we see God protecting David spiritually in these events? What can we learn from how Abigail calms David? What can we learn from David's response? What can we learn from these events about God

and our relationship with him?

- *Mark Garner, August 2019*

## THE LORD LOOKS AT THE HEART: STUDIES IN 1 SAMUEL

### Notes For Week Eleven: Mercy, Faith, & Unusual Times (1 Samuel 26, 27, & 28)

*As David's exile continues, we see how the trials and discouragements he has endured have affected him spiritually. Again we see his godliness in his interactions with Saul, and again we see him making some strange decisions. The cycle that David is now in can help us learn some things about our own walk with God as we too must face difficulties and sorrows.*

#### ***David's Mercy To Saul (1 Samuel 26)***

Again, an Israelite town tips off Saul and gives away David's current location. Again, Saul acts hastily and incautiously. Again, David has the chance to do away with Saul and his threats once for all, and again David has mercy on him. Whenever David has the opportunity to strike Saul down, he never even considers harming him.

Saul's hunt for David continues, and the king's envy and rage have flared up again (26:1-12). Some Ziphites\* have told the king where he can find David, yet in his blind pursuit, Saul again is caught in a defenseless position. This time, David finds Saul and the whole camp sleeping, so David's men again tell him to strike down this relentless pursuer, for they say again that God has delivered Saul into his hands.

\* In the south part of Judah, near the border with Edom.

Yet David declines this new opportunity to kill the helpless Saul. Again he reminds his men that Saul was once the Lord's anointed, and he also reassures them that the Lord himself will act against Saul if and when the time comes (see also Romans 12:17-19). David has also thought about the last time the same situation arose, when he cut off a piece of Saul's robe and then felt guilty about even that. This time, instead he takes Saul's spear, and a nearby water jug, to show Saul.

When David slips away from a safe distance he converses with Saul and with Abner, the commander of Saul's army (26:13-25). David reproves the commander for his carelessness in being unaware of the king's vulnerability, and as Abner and Saul both realize what has happened, Saul again has a few moments of humility and lucidity.

David again reasons with Saul, and again for a short while the king realizes the folly of what he has done. David sends back the objects he had taken from the camp, and again he assures Saul that he has no intention of harming him at any time. As David has valued Saul's life and didn't harm him, he trusts in the Lord to deliver him (see also 2 Corinthians 1:9-10).

Questions For Discussion Or Further Study: Are there any significant differences between this encounter and the one in chapter 24? If so, what can we learn from them? What can we learn from David's message to Saul?

### ***Back To Philistia (1 Samuel 27)***

The strain on David shows once more in his strange relations with the Philistines. After trusting in God to withstand Saul's attacks, and showing Saul mercy, David again wavers. He may have been safer physically for a while with the Philistines, but by staying there he gets into a pattern of living by violence and raiding, while deceiving the Philistine rulers about his activities.

After the relief of seeing Saul turn back, later David becomes fearful, thinking that 'one of these days' one of Saul's schemes will finally kill him (27:1-5). As a result, he goes back to Gath again, apparently hoping to find physical safety. From an earthly perspective, he has seen repeatedly the Israelites betray him, while Saul's periods of rationality never last long. Yet David has also seen God's hand protecting him over and over again, so this decision is still questionable.

Given what had happened the last time in Gath (see 1 Samuel 21:10-15), David has a new approach this time. Instead of staying with King Achish, David asks for a place in a different town, and the king gives him a home in Ziklag\*. This gives him physical safety for a while, though it will later put him in spiritual danger.

\* Ziklag had originally been part of Israel, but the Philistines had since taken it over. In Joshua's time, Ziklag was given to the tribe of Judah, and then was transferred to the tribe of Simeon (see Joshua 19:1-9 for the explanation). After David's time, Ziklag remained part of Judah until Judah fell to Babylon.

While in Ziklag, David indulges in a series of raids against the Amalekites and other Canaanite tribes that remained in the area (27:6-12). To convince Achish of his loyalty, David's men leave no survivors, and he tells Achish that he was raiding Judean settlements or others not allied to the Philistines. This leads Achish to believe that David is now on 'his side'.

Most of David's mistakes so far have come from fears or provocation, while when he trusts God completely, his faith allows God to lift him above fleshly nature and fleshly desires. Both sides of David can help us understand what God desires in our own walk with him, and they help us see God's patience and his compassion with those who seek him with our hearts.

Questions For Discussion Or Further Study: How might we have felt in David's situation, and how can this help us learn from these events? During David's time with the Philistines, what can we learn about human nature and about our deepest needs? What can we learn about our relationship with God?

### ***Strange Days Indeed (1 Samuel 28)***

Matters start to come to a head when the Philistines decide to attack Israel again. With Saul deteriorating steadily, and David himself driven to desperation by Saul's relentless hounding, it is no surprise that some odd, confusing, and even unsettling events take place. The Scripture records them faithfully and truthfully, so that we will have no illusions about living in this world.

The new attack is led by Achish, the Philistine ruler with whom David has taken refuge (28:1-2).

We can't know with certainty what David had in mind when he promised to serve Achish loyally in battle. It would be surprising, even shocking, if he was ready to fight and kill Israelites in service to an idolatrous ruler, so it seems more likely that he may have planned to deceive the Philistines as soon as he had the opportunity, or perhaps he simply hoped for God to give him a way out.

Either way, David's earlier decisions have put him in a difficult position, and in part this shows us the spiritual difficulties that can arise whenever we depend on something other than God himself, or when we make decisions by worldly reasoning. As it turns out (in chapter 29), the decision will be made for David when the Philistines send him back.

Meanwhile, the same imminent attack moves Saul to dread what might happen (28:3-25). He makes numerous efforts to ask God for an answer, yet the Lord doesn't answer him. This leads Saul to take desperate, even bizarre, measures, for he disguises himself and consults with a 'medium' - an activity he himself had banned - and asks her to 'bring up' Samuel.

In Saul's abject state, he desperately wants to hear from the dead prophet who had given him such faithful guidance in better times. The Scriptures don't make it completely clear whether this vision was real or whether it was a clever illusion by the medium, though in either case, the answer clearly gives Saul no comfort. And in any case, it is a reminder not to rely on worldly means to meet our spiritual needs. Moreover, the message echoes what Samuel himself had said already to Saul.

Whether we are confused or are fearful or are in despair, God calls us simply to humble ourselves under his mighty hand, to trust in him, and let him guide us (1 Peter 5:6-11), because he cares for us and he knows what we really need. Peter reminds us to be alert and sober-minded, which in turn can help us understand our need for God and to appreciate all the ways he shows us his care. As Peter says, when we trust in God as we endure the world's trials, God himself will restore us.

Questions For Discussion Or Further Study: What do these events tell us about human nature and about our need for God? Considering these three chapters, what can we learn about God and his nature and our walk with him?

*- Mark Garner, August 2019*

## THE LORD LOOKS AT THE HEART: STUDIES IN 1 SAMUEL

### Notes For Week Twelve: A Tumultuous Transition (1 Samuel 29, 30, & 31)

*The confusion and tension in Israel has been accumulating for a good while, and this now leads to a tumultuous time of transition. In 1 Samuel, we've seen both Saul and David make mistakes, yet when they are pointed out, David handles this humbly and turns to God. We've also seen both Saul and David face adversity, yet again David handles it much differently.*

#### ***David's Dilemma (1 Samuel 29)***

David had verbally committed to going with the Philistine king to fight the Israelites, putting himself in a difficult situation. Now the Philistines themselves decide that they don't want David with them in battle, after all. While we do not know with certainty whether this was God's way of delivering David from a difficult choice, this provides him with a way out.

As David and his men begin marching to battle with King Achish, it becomes clear that the rest of the Philistines are reluctant allies (29:1-5). Although David has gained Achish's confidence by a combination of bravery, friendship, and deceit, the other Philistines are uncomfortable with the idea of the person who had defeated Goliath now fighting on their side against his own nation.

Achish tries to persuade the Philistines to let David come, and he reminds them of David's military successes. Yet the other Philistines insist that, 'He must not go with us'. They still remember Israel's chant about the many Philistines that David has subdued, so the matter is settled.

Thus David and Achish part ways, and the king sends David back to Ziklag, the city Achish had given him to make his home in (29:6-11). David protests briefly, perhaps out of politeness (since he has seen the firm resistance of the Philistines to him coming), and then makes use of this 'escape hatch'. The New Testament tells us as well that God will provide a way out when we face dilemmas or temptations (see 1 Corinthians 10:12-13); it may or may not be easy, yet God will provide one.

Questions For Discussion Or Further Study: What can we learn from this difficult situation that David's decisions have led him into? What can we learn from how things work out? What do these events tell us about human nature, and about our walk with God?

#### ***Back To Ziklag (1 Samuel 30)***

While Israel and the Philistines engage in a decisive battle, David and his men are involved in adventures of a more personal nature. David's mindfulness in seeking God's will in a difficult time reminds us of his faithfulness, while his battle with the Amalekites\*, along with his distribution of the spoils, show us David's courage and generosity.

\* The Amalekites had a long history of oppressing and harming the Israelites whenever the chance arose, all the way back to Israel's departure from Egypt. See, for example, Exodus 17:8-15.

As David and his men return to Ziklag, they have a distressing homecoming (30:1-8). When they arrive, they find that the Amalekites have raided the town. The raiders have burned the town and have taken captive all of the women and children, including David's wives. To add to David's distress, his own men are so bitter and furious that they are ready to take out their anger on David, and are even considering stoning him to death.

Yet David handles all this in a godly way. First he finds strength in God and in knowing that, even when everyone else turns against him, God will be with him whatever may happen (see also 2 Timothy 4:16-18). Then once more we see David ask God for help and guidance with the situation. Then God encourages David to pursue the raiders, and tells David that he will rescue the captives.

So David and six hundred men pursue the Amalekite raiders (30:9-31). It is an exhausting chase, and two hundred of them cannot go on any longer. As the rest of them continue, they happen upon an Egyptian who proves helpful, for he had been a slave of one of the Amalekites. The Egyptian takes them to the raiders, where David finds them reveling in their spoils. In the resulting fighting, David and his men defeat them decisively.

He recovers everything, including the families of his men along with their flocks and herds. Yet again he faces resistance from his own men, who refuse to share the plunder with the two hundred men who had been too tired to fight with them. This kind of up-and-down activity is what life in this world is like, yet David handles it well.

David reminds the troublemakers that it is the Lord God who has won this battle, not him and not them. In his generosity, David shares everything with all of his men, and even sends part of it to some of his friends in Judah, as God generously gives us grace when we call on him (see also Matthew 20:9-15). When we learn to view things from God's perspective, it can help us to grow in our love for our Heavenly Father and in our anticipation of our eternal home with him.

Questions For Discussion Or Further Study: What can we learn about human nature from these events? What can we learn from how David handles them? What can we learn about God from them, and about our walk with God?

### ***The End Of An Era (1 Samuel 31)***

When Saul became king, the people of Israel thought that their dreams had come true. Now they had their own big, strong king to lead them in war and in peace. But their worldly expectations combined with Saul's spiritual flaws to produce a painful period of violence and disorder. Saul's death ends an era of transition and confusion, and his reign will affect the future as well.

The battle on Mount Gilboa is a crushing loss for Israel, and it brings Saul's reign to a sad end (31:1-10). It is made even sadder when David's faithful friend Jonathan dies in the battle. With his army routed and three of his own sons killed in battle, Saul kills himself to avoid capture and humiliation. Saul's spiritual flaws were exposed by the power and privilege that came with being

king, and this bleak end is a result.

The Israelites now also see the results of their reliance on a human ruler. They panic, and to make their defeat even worse, they abandon large portions of fertile territory to the victorious Philistines. The Philistines, for their part, show by their barbarous behavior with Saul's remains that their victory had nothing to do with their own goodness or merit.

One small positive note comes from an act of remembrance by the town of Jabesh Gilead (31:11-13). Years ago, in better times for Saul and for Israel, Saul had rescued this helpless settlement from the Ammonites\*. Now, at considerable risk to themselves, they retrieve Saul's remains from the Philistines, and dispose of them respectfully. With nothing to gain for themselves, they provide a glimmer of light and grace at a time when almost everyone else is seeking their own interests.

\* See 1 Samuel 11, which takes place shortly after Saul had become king.

The reign of Saul was a transition era for Israel, often a chaotic time, with some good times yet with many sorrows. One era has ended, and with it some unhappy events. Another era will begin, with some new victories but also with some new problems. Yet throughout everything, we see God's unchanging nature, for no matter how inconstant people are, he is always the same holy, wise, caring, gracious God.

We have much more to learn, and some of it may be hard to bear, yet Jesus has overcome the world with his unfailing compassion and his overflowing grace (John 16:12-15, 16:31-33). He also gives us his Spirit to help us understand God's words and what our Father in heaven has done for us. We will indeed face trouble in this world, yet just as Jesus knew that God was with him, he will be with us too, to give us peace even as we face the world's sorrows and problems.

Questions For Discussion Or Further Study: What does Saul's reign teach us about human nature, and how can we learn from the contrast between him and David? What can we learn from the ways they each respond to their own mistakes? What can we learn from how they each face difficulties and trouble? What does all this tell us about God and his nature and what matters most to him?

- *Mark Garner, August 2019*