

**Grace Presbyterian Church  
Bible Studies**

**I Samuel**

## Welcome to our on-line Bible study for 2013

### **David, Jesus' Ancestor**

*"I am the root and the descendent of David, the bright morning star." – Revelation 22:16*

The figure of David is essential to understanding Jesus Christ. The fact that Jesus is the "son of David" is repeated many times throughout the New Testament. The story of David actually begins with the important prophet Samuel. Samuel has a special birth and calling which we find in First Samuel, chapters 1-3.

#### **I. The Call of Samuel – I Samuel chapters 1-3**

##### **I. The birth of Samuel – I Sam. 1:1-2:10**

The context of the birth of Samuel is Israel in the time of the judges when there was no king. All the people did what was right in their own eyes (sound familiar?) (Judges 21:25). Unfortunately, given the sinfulness of humanity, the "people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). This corruption extended even to the priests. However the narrative does not begin with this dire situation in Israel. It begins with a specific woman, Hannah.

Hannah is one of two wives of Elkanah (we see how the original standard of marriage was seldom observed even in ancient Israel, Matthew 19:3-6). Hannah has no children but Peninnah, the other wife, had several. This is not a healthy household. Clearly there is jealousy between the two wives (surprise, surprise). Peninnah provokes and irritates Hannah severely (I Samuel 1:6). Her husband seeks to avoid the problem in his own family. Rather than confront Peninnah with her abusive behavior (bullying?) he tries to compensate by giving Hannah a double portion of the yearly sacrifice which they would make at the temple. One doesn't have to be a marriage counselor to figure out that this doesn't work. Peninnah continues to be abusive and Hannah becomes progressively more depressed. Finally Elkanah says to Hannah, "Why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?" This qualifies him as one of the all time clueless husbands.

Caught between the rock and the hard place of an abusive rival and an inactive husband, Hannah has no recourse but to go the Lord by herself. After they had eaten at the temple as was apparently the custom (we can imagine that Hannah ate very little) Hannah goes into the central part of the temple. She is deeply distressed and weeps bitterly. She prays to the Lord for a son. She promises that she will dedicate the boy to the Lord's service. In the midst of her praying she is observed by the priest Eli who, seeing her intense silent prayer with her lips moving, thinks she is drunk. He

accuses her of making a “drunken spectacle” of herself which stamps him as another clueless male in this story. When Hannah reveals the fact that she was praying intently he fortunately changes his perspective and tells her to go in peace. Hannah’s mood changes and she goes back to her husband and eats possibly for the first time in a long while (cf. I Samuel 1:7-8). The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, adds that she also drank which may be their euphemistic interpretation of her new found joy. This scene ends with them worshipping before the Lord and then returning home. We read then that Elkanah “knew his wife Hannah” and in due time she conceived and gave birth to a son. Hannah then waits until her son is weaned and then brings him to the temple to dedicate him to the Lord. She states, “as long as he lives he is given to the Lord” (I Samuel 1:28).

The birth of Samuel fits a continuing Biblical pattern of miraculous births. This begins with Abraham and Sarah who conceive Isaac after they are past the age of child bearing. It culminates of course with the most miraculous birth, Jesus born of the virgin Mary. To underscore this identification Hannah prays a prayer which clearly foreshadows the hymn of praise of Mary in Luke 1:46-55. A key theme of both hymns or prayers is God’s defense of the poor and rejection of the rich. This is a theme which is clearly emphasized in Scripture that we often overlook. Those who are kind to the poor lend to their Maker (Proverbs 19:17). The rich are sent away empty handed (Luke 1:53).

## II. God Calls a Prophet – I Samuel 2:11-3:21

Since Samuel has been dedicated to the Lord it is understandable that he is left with the priest Eli who also plays the role of a judge in Israel (I Samuel 4:18). While this is understandable it is also very ironic. Eli’s household had become corrupt. His two sons were also priests but they were “scoundrels” (I Samuel 2:12). They took the sacrifices intended for the Lord for themselves. Basically they treated the offerings of the Lord with contempt (I Samuel 2:17). They apparently used their leadership role to take advantage of the women who served in the temple, having sex with them. Their abusive behavior essentially was blasphemous to God. Eli knew what his sons were doing but he takes no action to control them. He complains to them about their behavior but not surprisingly they ignore them. The Lord intends to punish them with death for all their abuses.

At this point we have seen two men in positions of responsibility who fail to stop abusive behavior, Elkanah with his wife, Peninnah, and Eli with his two sons. These two examples already present us with a leaderless situation in Israel. God will not ignore this state of affairs. He is taking action.

The abusive behavior of Eli’s two sons is contrasted with the development of Samuel who grows “both in stature and in favor with the Lord and with the people” (I Samuel 2:26). A “man of God” comes to Eli and tells him in effect that his priesthood is about to end. Both of his sons will die on the same day. God will raise up a new, faithful

priest who will serve the Lord. This priest will serve God's "anointed one" forever. This is a dual prophecy. The faithful priest will be Samuel. More than a priest, Samuel will be a prophet who will faithfully proclaim God's word. God's anointed one will certainly be David. God will not allow Israel to degenerate any further. The same applies to the church of Jesus Christ. Peter may be the rock on whom the church is built but he can also be the voice of Satan. It is Jesus alone who builds the church. Whatever problems the church faces will not endure forever. The gates of hell will not prevail against it (Matthew 16:23-33).

We now come to the most famous part of the story. We are told that the word of the Lord was rare in those days. The Bible seems to be a closed book (in this case we could think of the Torah, the five books of Moses). In spite of this, God acts (In the 1960's the Bible was officially banned in Communist China. Yet the church grew by the hundreds of thousands). God calls out to Samuel. Samuel thinks he is being called by Eli and runs to him. This happens three times after which Eli realizes that it is the Lord who is calling Samuel. He tells Samuel to respond by saying "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." We need to know when God may be calling us. Often we don't recognize God's voice ourselves. Someone else needs to alert us to the fact that God is speaking to us. Our response needs to be the same as Samuel's: "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening."

God's word to Samuel is actually one of judgment. God reveals to Samuel that he is about to judge Eli's household for its faithlessness. Eli asks Samuel to tell him all that the Lord has revealed to him. Rather than respond with repentance to the message of judgment Eli in effect shrugs and says, "It is the Lord; let him do what seems good to him." Eli remains passive to the end. At this point Eli has become indifferent to the sins of his sons.

Samuel stands in sharp contrast to Eli's family. He grows up and the Lord is with him. All Israel knows that he is a "trustworthy prophet." Samuel responds to the word of the Lord. He is neither passive nor inactive. God is on the march. Stay tuned.

## Questions for Discussion –

1. How do we deal with insensitive comments when we are going through a time of struggle (like Hannah)? What kind of things should we say to encourage someone going through difficult times?
2. Why do you think overt sinful behavior is so often found among religious leaders?
3. In what ways can we experience the call of God? Are we prepared to say with Samuel, "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening?"

# I Samuel 4-6 David, Jesus' Ancestor

*"I am the root and the descendent of David, the bright morning star." – Revelation 22:16*

We continue with the context of Israel before the rise of David, Israel's greatest king. The story of the capture of the Ark of the Covenant may appear strange to us, but it conveys a number of important themes which we need to consider.

## II. The Capture of the Ark – The Basic Story

We need to begin by summarizing the basic narrative. Israel is fighting against the Philistines to whom they have been enslaved (I Samuel 4:9). God has used the Philistines to judge Israel for its faithlessness in worshipping false gods (Judges 10:6-7). As we see in chapter 4, Israel is fighting a losing war against the Philistines. God is not with them. Israel thinks they can bring in God's support by taking the ark of the Covenant with them into battle. The ark of the Covenant was Israel's most sacred symbol in this period. It represented the presence of God among his people. Essentially, it was a chest or rectangular box made of wood measuring 45 inches by 27 inches by 27 inches. It was overlaid with gold inside and out (Exodus 25:10-16). It contained the two tablets of the Ten Commandments written by the hand of God, a rod of Moses' brother, Aaron, warning Israel against complaining against the Lord, and a sample of the manna which sustained Israel in the wilderness (Numbers 17:1-10; Exodus 16:32-34).

Israel believes that bringing the ark with them into battle will give them victory. They are very wrong. While the ark is welcomed into Israel's camp with great enthusiasm to the point of causing fear among the Philistines who hear the shouting in Israel's camp, it is of no use to them in battle. In fact, Israel suffers an ever greater defeat with the ark than they had without it. Worse, the ark is captured by the Philistines. Among those who die are Eli's corrupt sons. A messenger brings the news to the ninety-eight-year-old Eli. When he hears it, he falls over backward in his chair, breaks his neck, and dies (I Samuel 4:12-18).

The wife of one of his sons, Phineas, is about to give birth. When she hears the news of the death of her husband and father-in-law, she too dies. She names her son Ichabod, which means "The glory of the Lord has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured" (I Samuel 4:19-22).

Having captured the ark and no doubt feeling very confident about their victory over Israel, the Philistines bring the ark into the temple of their god, Dagon, as an offering. The next morning they find the statue of Dagon fallen on its face before the ark. They put the statue back up, but the next morning they find it not only fallen but the head and the hands have been cut off. This takes place in the Philistine city of Ashdod (I Samuel 5:1-5). Following this, the inhabitants are struck with a plague which most commentators think was the

bubonic, since it appears to have been carried by mice (or rats) and resulted in “tumors” or swelling on the body. They send the ark over to the city of Gath, and the plague strikes there. The ark is then sent on to Ekron with the same result.

The leaders of the Philistines then hold a conference on what to do with the ark. The religious leaders, the priests, and “diviners” or prophets counsel the Philistines not only to send the ark back but to include a guilt offering and “give glory to the God of Israel” (I Samuel 6:5). The priests remind the Philistines of the example of the Egyptians. God made fools of them (I Samuel 6:6). As a final guarantee of their understanding, they establish an elaborate plan of letting two cows who have never borne a yoke carry the ark and its guilt offering. If the cart heads back to Israel, it means that God has indeed been judging them. If not, it is simply a matter of chance (I Samuel 6:7-9).

The ark does indeed head back to Israel. It arrives at the town of Beth-shemesh where it is received with rejoicing. The Levites remove the ark from the Philistine cart with its offerings and set them upon a large stone. However, all is not well. The descendents of the previously unmentioned Jeconiah slaughter seventy of the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh. The people see the hand of the Lord in this destructive event (I Samuel 6:19-19). They ask, “Who is able to stand before the Lord, this holy God?” (Samuel 6:20)? Then they in turn pass the ark on to the city of Kiriath-jearim (Samuel 6:21).

### III. The Meaning of the Story

So what is this story trying to tell us? And why is it important in leading up to God calling David his “anointed?” There are two important themes here. We will attempt to highlight them.

#### I. **Surface Religion is not enough.**

We know from the Book of Judges that Israel was worshipping many false gods. These included the “gods of the Philistines” (Judges 10:6). This means that Dagon, the false god of the Philistines, had worshippers in Israel. Throughout its history Israel had turned its back on the one true God to follow false gods. This began in the Exodus with the worship of the golden calf. It’s important to remember that at this point in the story, Israel is in the time of the Judges. There are two central characteristics of this period:

- 1 All the people did what was right in their own eyes (Judges 21:25).
- 2 Israel worshipped the gods of the nations they encountered in Canaan. God had specifically warned them against this, but they didn’t listen (Deuteronomy 7:16)

God’s judgment on the inhabitants of Canaan sounds harsh to us, but we need to remember how corrupt these people had become, to the point of sacrificing their children to the dread god Molech (Leviticus 20:2-5). However, Israel followed after these same gods (Leviticus 18:21; Jeremiah 32:35). The Philistines prayed to Dagon for victory. But Israel also prayed to Dagon to give them victory. Israel thinks that by bringing in the ark of the covenant, God will give them victory in spite of their faithlessness. They could not be more wrong. The symbols of faith have no validity apart from a heart of faith (Acts 19:13-

16).

God does not expect his people to be perfect (a revived heresy in our time). That is why forgiveness is so necessary. Nonetheless, he expects us to be faithful in our basic belief. The first commandment is, "You will have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3). When the Bible speaks of false gods, it doesn't mean these gods are nonexistent. It means they are not the true God (Psalm 82). In our terms they are evil spirits or demons.

What this means for us is that the surface realities of faith -attending church, reading the Bible, praying, listening to Christian music, etc. -are of no benefit if we are worshipping other gods. The false gods of our time are obvious – pride, money, sex, power. Paul twice calls greed idolatry (Ephesians 5:5; Colossians 3:5). Humans look on the outward appearance. We can even fool ourselves. God, however, looks on the heart (I Samuel 16:7). We cannot avoid being sinners in this life (Romans 7:14-21; Galatians 5:17; I John 1:8-10). However, we can refrain from worshipping idols (I John 5:21). Whatever we value the most is what we worship. We need to keep making the Lord our first priority (Matthew 6:33).

**II. God is not dependent on us** In most ancient religions there was a belief that if a people were defeated, their gods were defeated too. This idea is also reflected in the Bible (Exodus 12:12). Israel brings the ark of the covenant into battle, but they are also serving false gods at the same time. God removes his hand from them, and they suffer great defeat. As a token of their victory, the Philistines take the ark and present it as an offering to their god, Dagon. They believe that because the people of God have been defeated that therefore God himself has also been defeated. Nothing could be further from the truth. The first night Dagon's statue falls before the ark. The next night it is literally dismembered.

We can never confuse the people of God with God. We can't identify Christians with Christ. The tragedy is that people who have been disillusioned with believers often turn away from God. But we are not God. Our failings and hypocrisy cannot be blamed on him. God is not limited by our limitations. We are called to serve the Lord, to proclaim his word, and to witness to Jesus Christ. However, if we fail to do this, it is we who suffer, not God. God's Word cannot be silenced (Isaiah 55:10-11). When the Pharisees tell Jesus to silence his disciples on Palm Sunday, he responds that if they were to be quiet, the very stones themselves would cry out (Luke 19:39-40).

We have seen the church grow and thrive in countries where it was illegal to even have a Bible. In our country the Word of God has increasingly been abandoned and rejected. In a recent episode of the television show *Jeopardy* a group of highly intelligent high school students were asked to identify basic quotes from the Bible ("Consider the lilies of the field. . ."). They were unable to do so. People know less and care less about the Word of God. Many churches are struggling. Christians may be ineffective because so many of us have turned to the false gods of our world. But in the words of Jesus, "the scripture cannot be annulled" (John 10:35).

The power of God is not our power. Thankfully, the grace of God is not our grace. The

point of this story is that the people can be defeated and often are. However, God is never defeated. It is God alone who wields the two-edged sword of his Word (Hebrews 4:12). We can be confident that whatever else happens in the world around us, God's Word cannot and will not fail.

## Questions for Discussion –

- 1 What are some of the ways that we mix the worship of false gods in with the worship of the one true God?
- 2 What can we say to someone who has turned away from God because of the perceived failures of Christians?
- 3 What encouragement can we take from the story of the ark of the covenant and the statue of Dagon?

# I Samuel, Chapters 7-9 – “We Want a King!”

Samuel has become a judge in Israel. He is faithful and calls the people to abandon their idols and serve the true God. As he becomes elderly, there is no one to replace him. His sons are corrupt. The people then cry out for a king.

## I. Samuel the Judge –

We begin continuing the story of the lost ark. The ark is taken to the town of Kiriath-jearim where it remains for “some twenty years” (I Samuel 7:2). The ark will feature again in our story once we encounter David. In the meantime Samuel is serving as the judge of Israel. This is a faithless period (which seems to be the case throughout Israel's history). Israel is worshipping the fertility gods of Canaan. These included Astarte also known as Asherah. She was essentially the same deity as Ishtar of the Babylonians. In an earlier form she had been the lover of Tammuz who spent half the year with her and guaranteed the coming of spring (Ezekiel 8:14). In her present form she was both a fertility figure and a warlike goddess. The later Greek goddess, Aphrodite, had some affinity with her though Aphrodite was not strictly speaking a fertility deity. For the Canaanites she was the consort of the storm god Baal, who was similar to the Babylonian god Marduk or Bel (Jeremiah 51:44).

These fertility gods were important to ancient people who feared famine more than any other catastrophe. If the crops failed, the people faced starvation. As a goddess of fertility, Astarte or Ishtar was worshipped through sexual acts often with temple prostitutes to insure the reproduction of the whole earth, humans and animals as well as plants (Numbers 25:1-3; Genesis 38:12-21). The fact that Samuel refers to her in the plural, “Astartes,” suggests that there was more than one goddess. Her mention here is important for two reasons. First, her worship shows that Israel was not worshipping God with their whole heart (Matthew 22:37). This fact is critical for what comes later. Second, she is the primary spiritual enemy of Israel in this period, more so than Satan at this point. She remains a major enemy of the people of God as we saw in the picture of the Great Whore in Revelation (Revelation 17-18). She had already corrupted the sons of Eli (I Samuel 2:22). She will threaten David's reign and bring about the spiritual collapse of Solomon. She will lead an unrelenting attack on the servants of God from Elijah to the apostle Paul (I Kings 18:17-19; 19:1-3; Acts 19:23-31).

Samuel calls the people to turn from her worship to the true God (I Samuel 7:36). For a brief period Israel turns away from the false gods (but see I Sam. 8:8). Samuel prays for the people (I Samuel 7:7-11). God does in fact give the Israelites a great victory. Samuel celebrates by setting up a stone which he names “Ebenezer,” which means “Thus far the Lord has helped us” (this is referred to in the familiar hymn, “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing”) (I Samuel 7:12). Chapter 7 ends with a summary of

Samuel's career as a judge. He travels throughout the country administering justice and building an altar to the Lord in his home town of Ramah (I Samuel 7:15-17).

## II. From Judge to King –

In his advanced years Samuel makes his sons judges in Israel. But the sons are corrupt. One of the great tragedies in the household of faith is that children do not always follow the faith that was taught to them by their parents. The people, seeing the failure of Samuel's sons, come to him and ask for a king. Why do they want a king? Their answer is they want to be like other nations (I Samuel 8:20). But this is exactly the problem. They are not like other nations. They are God's chosen people. They are called to follow the way of the Lord, not the way of the idolatrous nations surrounding them. Yet they can't resist the siren song of the false gods and the neighboring nations. We need to ask ourselves, in what ways are we, perhaps unintentionally, following the idols of this world instead of serving the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. We cannot escape the world (John 17:15). Jesus is the savior of the world (John 12:47). Yet we are not to follow the sinful pattern of the world (I John 5:21).

God advises Samuel to listen to the people, adding however, that the people in their asking for a king have rejected the Lord God as their king. They did not need an earthly king but asked for one anyway. It is easy for us to ask for things we don't really need simply because we see these things in the world around us. God promises to supply our needs, but we need to make God our priority first (Matthew 6:33). God then proceeds to warn the people through Samuel of what having a king will mean. God, who knows the human heart better than we ever could, sees that with power will come privilege and ultimately oppression. A king will take the people's children, their property, and finally their freedom (I Samuel 8:9-17).

When all this happens, the people will cry out to God for deliverance, but God will not answer them. God will let them have their own way, but they will also have to endure its consequences. NOTE: We can never say that God answers every prayer we make. God is sovereign and may choose not to answer us because of our faithlessness. This is one of many passages that affirms this truth. God is even more blunt in speaking to Isaiah:

“When you stretch out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; Even though you make many prayers, I will not listen.” (Isaiah 1:15)

The people don't listen to Samuel. They have made up their minds (their response to God is “No!”). Sometimes God's greatest judgment is to give us what we want (rather than what we need). Again, they want to be like other nations. This, however, has been their continuing failing. They're choosing to follow the idolatrous nations around them rather than following the Lord God.

God will nonetheless give them a king. The great majority of these kings, including David, will bring turmoil and tragedy on the people of Israel (in Karl Barth's famous quote, "Hell is having your own way and being stuck with it."). The king God chooses comes from the tribe of Benjamin. He is Saul, more handsome and taller than anyone else (I Samuel 9:2). However, we will soon learn that his character does not match his outward appearance. The people, however, are impressed by him because of how he looks.

Saul's initiation into the monarchy is not very dramatic. His father's donkeys have strayed, and he is sent with a servant boy to find them. After traveling through several towns and not finding the donkeys, Saul is ready to turn back. Yet the boy says to him while they are in the land of Zuph that there is a "man of God" there who could perhaps help them. Saul is still hesitant. "What can we bring the man?" he asks. The boy responds that he has some money which they can use for a gift. In this initial scene we are already seeing that Saul seems to lack both initiative and leadership. This will become even more evident once he becomes king.

The man of God, of course, is Samuel. The Lord informs Samuel that Saul is coming and that he is to be anointed king. There will be some benefits. Saul will save Israel from the domination of the Philistines (I Samuel 9:16). Samuel tells Saul where his missing donkeys are. More importantly, he tells him of his anointed role as Israel's first king. He is the one on whom all Israel's desire is fixed (I Samuel 9:20). Saul's response appropriately, like all of God's anointed, is that he is not worthy of this honor. Saul replies that his family is the humblest of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin (I Samuel 9:21).

Samuel invites Saul into his home for a special dinner. Saul spends the night (sleeping on the roof!). The next day Samuel escorts Saul to the outskirts of the town. Samuel tells Saul to send the boy servant on his way. Samuel is about to make known to Saul the word of God. This is the essential training for any servant of the Lord. As long as Saul follows God's word he will do well. Unfortunately ...

Questions for Us –

- 1 What would be examples of the role of "foreign gods and Astartes" (I Samuel 7:3) in our world today?
- 2 Is it easier for us to pray for what we want rather than what we need? Why?
- 3 Why do you think it is often the case that children of Christian leaders don't follow the example of their parents (the example of both Eli and Samuel)?

# I Samuel Chapters 10-12 – “The Lord Will Not Cast Away His People”

Samuel continues with his orders from God to provide a king for the nation of Israel. Saul will be that king. Even though the people have sinned by asking for a king, God will not abandon them. Saul in fact will rescue them from their enemies. Samuel urges the people, in spite of their failings, to continue to serve the Lord insisting that the Lord will not forsake them “for his great name’s sake” (I Samuel 12:22). The lesson here is that we should never be discouraged when we fail because the Lord remains faithful in spite of what we do.

## I. Saul’s Transformation – I Sam. 10:1-16

Samuel anoints Saul as king and tells him what to expect in his new calling. Saul will rule over the people of the Lord. This makes an important point. Even though Saul will be king, the people will not belong to him. They are not Saul’s people, not even the people of the nation of Israel. They are in fact “*his people*,” the Lord’s people. This is to remind us that everything we have comes from the Lord. In reality we own nothing. God owns everything, “the cattle on a thousand hills” (Ps. 50:10). We are the stewards of his goodness. At the same time we should not be anxious about possessions and worldly responsibilities. Everything is in God’s hand and is to be used for his will. As the apostle Paul asks rhetorically, “What do you have that you did not receive?” (I Cor. 4:7). We should not be consumed by our possessions nor should we worry about them (Matt. 6:25-34).

The second point that Samuel makes to Saul is that he will save Israel from the hand of their enemies (I Sam. 10:1). God’s purpose is always to save his people. Even as in this case they reject him, he continues to find ways to save them. The oldest symbolic hero in history is the redeemer hero who saves his people from danger and destruction. The ultimate redeemer hero is God himself. Saul will be God’s delegate in this role.

Samuel’s anointing Saul is a symbolic action. What is really required is that Saul be anointed with the Holy Spirit. Samuel tells Saul where to find his father’s missing donkeys. Saul, following Samuel’s instructions, will meet “a band of prophets” playing musical instruments. Samuel then states, “Then the spirit of the Lord will possess you, and you will be in a prophetic frenzy along with them *and be turned into a different person (italics mine)*” (I Sam. 10:5-6). Saul’s real anointing then is from the Holy Spirit. When the Spirit comes upon us (as it came upon the disciples on the Day of Pentecost), we are turned into different people. The Spirit transforms us. It is not that we cease to exist as our former selves or that we are free from sin (see Peter in Galatians 2:11-14). We nonetheless have become something new. More than that, we have a power which we did not

possess before. Moses experienced this on Mount Sinai. Paul describes this as becoming “a new creation” (II Cor. 5:17). The Lord doesn’t call us without both changing us and empowering us.

Other people witness this transformation of Saul. This gives rise to the saying, “Is Saul also among the prophets?” (I Sam. 10:12). Interestingly enough, when Saul returns home, he doesn’t tell what happened to his uncle, who asks him what Samuel had said to him (I Sam. 10:15). It is often not easy to share intense spiritual experiences.

## **II. Saul Becomes King – I Sam. 10:17-11:15**

Samuel now calls the people of Israel together. He confronts them with the fact that they have rejected God as their king. Incredibly, the people’s response to the Lord is, “No!” (I Sam. 10:19). While we are taken aback by their blunt response, we have to ask ourselves how many times do we say no to God, perhaps not as directly but effectively with the same message when we ignore God’s will or his Word.

Samuel then calls all the tribes of Israel to come before him. They cast lots, and the tribe of Benjamin is chosen and within that, Saul, the son of Kish. This, of course, is the Lord’s will. The idea of casting lots sounds like gambling to us, but it was a common way in the ancient world of discerning the divine will [when the early disciples want to replace Judas among the twelve, they pray and cast lots to select the candidate (Acts 1:15-26)]. Saul is missing when his name is called. He is hiding in the baggage. This presumably is a hopeful sign initially suggesting Saul’s humility. Samuel makes clear that the Lord has chosen Saul as king (I Sam. 10:23-24). It is not a matter of chance. We have here the scene of God answering the prayer of a disobedient people, a people that in reality has rejected him (I Sam. 10:19). This is a striking example of God’s grace and judgment which, in fact, often do go together. God is giving them what they want, which will be a judgment bringing distress and suffering on them. At the same time, God is being gracious in answering the people’s request in spite of their disobedience. Even David, the man after God’s own heart, will bring calamity and ultimately civil war on Israel in his role as king [yet David’s heart, if not his behavior, was always faithful to God (I Kings 15:5)].

The people basically welcome Saul as their king (I Sam. 10:24). However, not everyone is pleased with him. There are some, in fact, who despise him. Yet they are described as “worthless fellows” (I Sam. 10:27). This is in contrast to the warriors “whose hearts God had touched” (I Sam. 10:26). God continues to lead and guide Israel even when they are not following his will.

Saul’s first test comes from Nahash, the king of the Ammonites. He has been waging war against the tribes of Israel. As a sign of his domination, he gouges

out the right eye of those he conquered (does this include women and children?). The inhabitants of the town of Jabesh-gilead are the next victims of Nahash. They try to make a treaty with him, but he insists on the same gruesome condition that all of them have their right eye gouged out. In despair the people ask for a respite of seven days to see if there is anyone in Israel who could save them. Nahash is confident they will have no help.

Saul, however, hears of their plight. The Spirit of God comes upon him in power. He recruits followers throughout Israel by sending cut up pieces of a yoke of oxen with the none-too-subtle threat that this will be the fate of any who do not join him and Samuel (I Sam. 11:7). Saul sends word to Jabesh-gilead that they will be delivered. He leads an attack on the Ammonites totally defeating them. Saul then confirms his call as king. There is a reaction among the people to want to put to death those who opposed Saul as king (I Sam. 11:12). Saul, however, is magnanimous. He doesn't want revenge. Saul then is officially installed as king. Sacrifices are offered to the Lord, and then everyone rejoices.

The people have what they want. Saul plays the role of the Redeemer Hero celebrated by all the surrounding nations whose kings were personifications of ancient, semi-divine heroes (Genesis 6:4). God has allowed them to follow this course and has even sent the Holy Spirit upon Saul. Everything seems fine. For the moment.

### III. Samuel's Farewell Address – I Samuel 12

Samuel now acknowledges that his role as both judge and prophet is over. The people have a new leader, King Saul. Samuel is "old and gray" (I Sam. 12:2). He states that his sons are still with Israel, though this is hardly a benefit, given the description of them earlier (I Sam. 8:3). As we will see in the coming chapters, Samuel is not about to retire. The Lord has a lot more for him to do, and that will focus on Israel's greatest king, David. Samuel stresses his own integrity. He has been faithful to the Lord, unlike many of his predecessors and even unlike his own sons. The people agree that this is the case (I Sam. 12:7).

Samuel then reviews Israel's history leading up to their present situation. From the time of Moses and Aaron, God has delivered his people. He brought them out of slavery in Egypt and has continued to deliver them from their enemies, right up to the most recent threat of King Nahash of the Ammonites. Yet the people have consistently been unfaithful. They have not only been guilty of common ordinary sins, which are bad enough, but they have repeatedly served false gods, the Baals and the Astartes. Astarte, the vengeful fertility goddess in particular, will continue to assault them. Yet rather than resist her, they will continue to follow her. Her deadly legacy needs to be realized much more than it has been (as we noted in a previous study). The dark cloud that Samuel paints for Israel, reminding them of their faithlessness in wanting a king in the first place, will be

tragically fulfilled when the armor from Saul's dead body will be sacrificed to this goddess. Eventually the image of Astarte (or Asherah) will be set up in the temple in Jerusalem, a horrific example of blasphemy (II Kings 21:7).

To emphasize this point, Samuel calls down a thunderstorm on the wheat harvest. This symbolizes God's wrath against Astarte, since as the goddess of fertility, she would presumably guarantee a successful harvest. The people are afraid. They plead with Samuel to pray to the Lord that they not be put to death for the sin of demanding a king (I Sam. 12:19). Samuel assures them that it is not too late. Yet they need to serve the Lord with all their heart and not go after the "useless things" (false gods) that they have followed (I Sam. 12:21). He assures them that the Lord will not cast them away. God will be faithful because he has sworn by himself to be their God (Heb. 6:13-14). Samuel then adds his own promise that he will continue to pray for them and will continue to instruct them in God's way (I Sam. 12:23). He gives them a final challenge to serve the Lord with their whole heart (I Sam. 12:24). He ends by warning them of the consequences of turning away from the one true God. If they are unfaithful, they and their king will be swept away (I Sam. 12:25).

The full tragedy of Saul is about to unfold.

#### Questions for Us –

1. What are some of the ways we have experienced God's power in our lives?
2. Have you become "a different person" through knowing and following Christ? Can we say with the apostle Paul, "it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20)?
3. What hope can we take from the fact that God will not cast off his people even when they're being disobedient? Can you think of some examples of God being gracious even in the face of our not following him?

# 1 Samuel Chapters 13, 14, 15

## **Philistines: That new King of Israel is trouble (I Samuel 13:1-7)**

First we saw Saul's successful organization of troops and rebellion against the Philistines at Jabesh-gilead back in I Samuel 11. Then in this passage we see Saul's son (Jonathan) attacks them at Geba. They've had enough; **the Philistines decide to bring their overwhelming forces against Israel to put this uprising down once and for all - 30,000 chariots, 6,000 men on horses and innumerable foot soldiers.** Well, many of the Israeli soldiers run and hide in the caves at the sight of this awesome Philistine force, and some of them run away across the Jordan.

We then understand that in the second year of Saul's reign he appointed a permanent army of three thousand men. Everyone else who fought did so as reservists. Then we see in verse 2 a fast forward through Saul's reign down to the appearance of his son Jonathan; he is an adult leading his own troops at this point in time. We obviously have been spared the details of two or three decades of Saul's reign between chapters 12 and 13. Then, in chapter 13, we see the turning point in Saul's reign.

## **Saul gets on Samuel's wrong side (I Samuel 13:8-14)**

Saul's getting mentally prepared for battle with the Philistines; he's checking items off his battle checklist. **Oh yeah...then there's the pre-battle burnt sacrifice; Samuel is supposed to come take care of that, but seven days have passed and he's not here.** "No problem; I'll do it myself," Saul decides. Samuel emerges just as Saul's finishing up with the sacrifice, and **Samuel is fumed. What exactly was Saul's sin here?** Notice verse 13, "thou hast not kept the commandment of the LORD thy God, which he commanded thee:" **The passage makes it clear that Saul had a commandment from the Lord himself that he violated.** Samuel then declares that Saul's reign as king will end with Saul - **no descendant kings.** Whoops! That's **too bad for Jonathan.** Pay close attention to verse 13. **Samuel says that had it not been for this act by Saul, it would be Saul's throne (and not subsequently David's) that is to be established forever.**

**So...what's God looking for in a king's resume anyway?** There it is in verse 14, "But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart..." It is interesting to note that King David, Saul's successor, was noted for that trait.

### Notice the following verses regarding David's heart:

- Solomon compared to David: I Kings 11:4, "For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and **his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father.**"
- Jeroboam compared to David: I Kings 14:8, "...thou hast not been as my servant David, who kept my commandments, and who followed me with all his heart, to do that only which was right in mine eyes."
- Abijah compared to David: I Kings 15:3, "And he walked in all the sins of his father, which he had done before him: and **his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father.**"
- The Apostle Paul's words concerning David: Acts 13:22 , "And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, **a man after mine own heart**, which shall fulfill all my will."

**David would end up being that "man after his [God's] own heart."** This incident marks the point at which it was declared that Saul's descendants would not occupy the throne of Israel. Later, in I Samuel 15:10-23, Samuel would decree that Saul's actual kingship would be prematurely cut short.

### How are we going to fight without weapons? (I Samuel 13:15-23)

Saul organizes his army as the Philistines are surrounding his forces. Saul and his meager army of 600 weaponless foot soldiers are encamped at Gibeah, 3 miles north of Jerusalem. Just 4 miles northeast of Gibeah, that massive, well-equipped army of Philistine soldiers is prepared for battle. Then the Philistine forces spilt into four divisions and surround the Israeli rag-tag army. **Hey! We have a big problem here - no weapons!** The Philistines had confiscated them and made blacksmithing a forbidden trade among Israelites (I Samuel 13:19). In the whole army, **only Saul and Jonathan had swords**; the rest of the makeshift Israeli army carried garden and woodworking implements. **Let's do a quick, rough calculation of the odds: 30,000 chariots, 6,000 horsemen and innumerable foot soldiers with real weapons VERSUS 600 men with two swords and garden tools.** Oh, well...just fight with what you have, and let God do the rest.

This would appear to be a regional conflict with the Philistines. Enemy people were still firmly entrenched throughout Israel all the way into the reign of David after King Saul. As a matter of fact, King Saul was a battle king. He didn't sit up in a palace and rule his kingdom; he fought. Apparently there was insufficient time to gather a larger army from the fighting-capable men of Israel for this battle. The fact that these folks in Gibeah

(located within Benjamin's territory) were so dominated by the Philistines that they were not even allowed to have their own blacksmiths verifies that they had been totally victimized by these Philistines up to this point.

### **Jonathan gets a crazy idea...and it works! (I Samuel 14:1-15)**

The man representing the priesthood is on the scene with Saul here. His name is Ahiah; most believe that this is Ahimelech, great grandson of Eli. You will recall that Eli was the one who raised Samuel. Ahiah is present for the purpose of representing God's will. We see in verse 3 (I Samuel 14:3) that he was "wearing an ephod." The ephod was the vest worn by the high priest as specified in Exodus 28-29. In the Ephod was contained the Urim and Thummim, special stones that provided the priest with a special knowledge from God regarding the correct course of action. Anyway, the priest was apparently present for the purpose of assisting in the formulation battle plans as God's representative.

Jonathan leaves the camp with his armor bearer...without consulting his dad or the high priest. **He decides to toss out his own fleece before God.** He'll just walk up to the Philistines and see what they say. If they say, "Just wait - we're coming after you," then we'll do nothing. But, if they say, "Bring it on; let's see what you got!" then we'll (just the two of us) wade right in and let them have it. What a crazy idea! But it works; **they slay about 20 of the Philistines** - just the two of them. Then they have some significant supernatural help from God when **God sends an earthquake** at the moment Jonathan and his armor bearer finish their attack. Look at those Philistines panic! They turn on themselves, and the Israelites hiding in the caves come out to fight. Sweet victory!

### **Meanwhile...the earthquake is heard by Saul's troops (I Samuel 14:16-23)**

Saul discovers that Jonathan and his armor bearer are not there while he's listening to the commotion from the earthquake. Saul is talking to Ahiah, the high priest, about the situation. Saul decides he'd like to have the Ark of the Covenant present for this battle. However, before anything can be arranged, the commotion among the Philistines increases and Saul dismisses the high priest from his mission.

The Philistine army is in disarray; in their flight, they turn on each other with their weapons. It also turns out that the Hebrew soldiers the Philistines had incorporated into their army were less than loyal; they switch sides and begin fighting for the Israeli army. But wait...there's more. Those Israelites who had hidden themselves to avoid fighting decide to come out and fight as well. **The Israelites prevail - on to Bethaven!**

## **A little honey stops the campaign (I Samuel 14:24-46)**

Saul's army is on a roll. **He gets excited and issues a curse on anybody who eats before they finish off the enemy.** One big problem though: his son Jonathan didn't get the word; he tastes a little honey and it perks him right up. However, upon being informed concerning Saul's decree, he even questions the wisdom of Saul's oath in verse 29-30 (I Samuel 14:29-30). Though faint from hunger, Saul's army thoroughly thrashes these Philistines "from Michmash to Aijalon."

After the victorious outcome of the battle against the Philistines, Saul has to straighten out a little bit of deviation on his army's part in that they partook of the Philistine cattle in violation of Levitical guidelines i.e. draining the blood. He establishes an altar to set this issue straight. You will recall from verse 3 (I Samuel 14:3) , that the high priest is present wearing the ephod containing the Urim and Thummim. These items were commonly used to determine God's will through the process of casting lots. **However, when Saul could not get a clearance from Jehovah to proceed further in pursuit of the Philistines, he decides there must be sin in the camp.**

Here we go with the casting of lots again. **The lot falls on Jonathan identifying him as the snack culprit.** Saul decides that Jonathan must die; after all, an oath is an oath. Hebrews were very serious about fulfilling their oaths regardless of how ill conceived. Jonathan even agrees that he himself must die, but the people talk Saul out of it. So, after a great day at battle, everybody goes home to live to fight another day. The campaign against the Philistines stops...over a little bit of honey.

## **Meet Saul's family (I Samuel 14:47-52)**

It's finally time for introductions. Remember these people; we'll be coming back to many of them as we read on. Notice verse 52 (I Samuel 14:52). **Saul understood the value of a strong defense, "And there was sore war against the Philistines all the days of Saul: and when Saul saw any strong man, or any valiant man, he took him unto him."** There was no peace for Saul; he was a warring king with a carefully chosen army. In addition, we see in verse 47 ((I Samuel 14:47) that Saul also fought against Moab, Ammon, Edom, and against the kings of Zobah (north of Israel). In verse 48 (I Samuel 14:48), toss in the Amalekites to round out Saul's battles against the enemies of Israel. However, without question, Saul's main war was with the Philistines.

## **1 Samuel 15 God Rejects Saul as King**

It is one of the saddest stories of the Old Testament: God raises up a man, Saul, from the least of the clans of the smallest tribe of Israel (Benjamin) and makes him the first king of Israel. (See I Samuel 9:21) Saul becomes powerful and respected and God

uses him to do great things for Israel. Six chapters later the Lord rejects him as king because of his disobedience and another (David), is chosen in his place.

His disobedience was clear, no question about it. He was ordered to have all the Amalekites killed (see I Samuel 15:3), yet he spared the life of King of Agag. He was ordered to kill all over the Amalekites' livestock (cattle, sheep, camels, and donkeys), yet he allowed his army to spare the best of the sheep and cattle. (See I Samuel 15:9)

Samuel confronts Saul, and Saul does eventually admit his guilt and ask for forgiveness. Look at how contrite he sounds here in I Samuel 15:24: "I have sinned. I violated the Lord's command and your instructions. I was afraid of the people and so I gave in to them. Now I beg you, forgive my sin and come back with me, so that I may worship the Lord." And then later in I Samuel 15:30: "I have sinned."

**Saul admitted his guilt. He asked for forgiveness. Why wasn't that good enough?**

For it clearly *wasn't* good enough. Samuel let Saul know right then and there that the Lord had rejected him as king and that it was a completely and utterly done deal, as we say in modern vernacular. "You have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you as king over Israel!" (see I Samuel 15:23, 26) and "The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to one of your neighbors -- to one better than you. He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind." At the end of this chapter we see that Samuel never, ever again attempted to see Saul, though he mourned greatly for him. (See I Samuel 15:11, 35)

I think this complete and utter separation of the righteous Samuel from Saul gives us great insight into Saul's character and true spirit, perhaps even as much as Saul's actual words. In I Samuel 15 we have one of the most fascinating and insightful conversations between a king and a prophet recorded in the Bible. If we study Saul's words and actions, I think we can understand why saying "I've sinned" and asking for forgiveness in this case wasn't good enough. God sees beyond the words and into the person's heart. Words are just words if one's character is corrupt.

**Firstly, Saul greets the prophet with a blessing and a lie.** "The Lord bless you! I have carried out the Lord's instructions." (See I Samuel 15:13) This attempt to cover evil with good must have seemed a stench in the Lord's, and Samuel's, nostrils.

**When confronted for the first time, Saul blames his soldiers and tries to deflect from his disobedience by appearing religious.** "The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the Lord your God, but we totally destroyed the rest." (See I Samuel 15:15) Saul expected God to be

like man, content with "almost" obedience and with being "bribed" with plunder. After all, Saul "almost" did everything the Lord asked of Him. It must have seemed grossly unfair to Saul to be punished for such a "minor" transgression, especially since he was going to be participating in the religious rituals of sacrifice.

**When confronted for the second time, Saul lies again, mixing his lies with the truth.** "But I did obey the Lord. I went on the mission the Lord assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their king. The soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, in order to sacrifice them to the Lord your God at Gilgal." (See I Samuel 15:20-21) Saul continues to refuse to repent and acknowledge his guilt. His own words condemn him, as he mixes a lie "completely destroyed the Amalekites" with a true statement "brought back Agag their king." The second statement negates and nullifies the first. Saul is a liar and a deceiver.

The Lord, through Samuel, nails Saul sin to the wall and makes sure there is no way the king can misunderstand why he is being confronted and judged. "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry." (See I Samuel 15:22-23)

**Even when apparently admitting guilt, Saul continues to blame others.** "I have sinned. I violated the Lord's command and your instructions. I was afraid of the people and so I gave in to them." (See I Samuel 15:24) This is not the speech of a repentant heart. The blaming of other people negates the apparent remorse of "I have sinned." Also, it is very possible Saul was continuing to lie here about why he did not see that all the animals were butchered. He might not have necessarily been afraid of his soldiers, so much as enjoying basking in their attention and gratitude for letting them keep the plunder. We can see evidence that he was a glory-hound in that he had "set up a monument in his own honor." (see I Samuel 15:12)

**Saul further shows his arrogance by daring to lay a hand on the Lord's prophet.** "As Samuel turned to leave, Saul caught hold of the hem of his robe, and it tore." (See I Samuel 15:27) The king, for all his mealy-mouthed words, did not really respect Samuel's authority. If he had, he never would have dared to touch him physically.

**Even after being told the Lord has rejected him, Saul only cares about appearances.** "I have sinned. But please honor me before the elders of my people and before Israel; come back with me, so that I may worship the Lord your God." (See I Samuel 15:30) Saul has been rejected by the Lord because of his sin, and yet all he cares about is that if Samuel leaves before the sacrifice, the king will look bad before his people. His heart is clearly hard; there is no repentance here.

**Even after being told exactly what his sin was, Saul makes no attempt to correct it.** Saul knows that his disobedience before the Lord was two-fold, that he let Agag live and that he did not have all of the Amalekites' animals killed. Because he cared more about appearances, he went to do the religious sacrifices with Samuel (completely disregarding the prophet's rebuke about how obedience is better than sacrifice), rather than doing what he should have done immediately after their conversation was over: kill Agag. Instead Samuel has to step in on the Lord's behalf and do Saul's work for him. (See I Samuel 15:33)

In case you are possibly still harboring some sympathy for Saul and thinking the Lord harsh to do this apparent "one strike you're out" in regards to Saul's disobedience and unrepentance, back up a few chapters and read I Samuel 13:1-14. Here you will find the earlier story of how Saul disobeyed Samuel by doing a sacrifice without him and was justly rebuked and warned about the consequences of his not obeying the Lord's command. Saul was given ample time to learn his lesson and repent, but instead he chose rebellion, arrogance, and fear of man over obedience to God and in time it cost him his sanity, his life, and his sons the throne.

# I Samuel chapters 16-18 – “The Call of David – Friends and Enemies”

We now encounter David for the first time. David is specifically chosen by God following the disobedience of Saul. David is one of the most critical figures in all of Scripture. He is a type of Christ and Jesus will be known as the Son of David (Mark 10:47-48). Nonetheless, as we will see, David's being anointed by God does not free him from conflict, struggle and even his own sin.

## I. David is anointed King – I Samuel 16:1-13

Not surprisingly, Samuel is still grieving over Saul. Samuel had not only anointed Saul, he had been Saul's mentor and guide. The failure of leaders in the Lord's service is always a tragedy. While Saul appears to repent (I Samuel 15:24-26), he is not restored. We will soon see the explanation for this.

God tells Samuel to stop grieving over Saul and sends him out to Bethlehem to anoint a new king. Saul's repentance immediately becomes suspect when we hear that Samuel is afraid for his life if Saul learns of his mission. How repentant could Saul have really been if he was prepared to kill Samuel (I Samuel 16:2)? Samuel comes to the family of Jesse in peace. He then asks to see the sons of Jesse to determine which one is God's anointed. The first one he sees is Eliab who clearly has an imposing appearance. Samuel, the prophet of God, thinks, “Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the Lord” (I Samuel 16:6). God responds in one of the most famous verses in Scripture. Mortals look on the outward part but God looks on the heart (I Samuel 16:7). None of Jesse's older sons is the one chosen by God. Samuel then asks if Jesse has other sons. He replies that he does but the youngest, David, only takes care of sheep and Jesse seems dismissive of him because of his age (I Samuel 16:11). Jesse sends for David and, of course, he is the Lord's choice. Samuel anoints him

“. . .and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward (I Samuel 16:13).”

There are several critical lessons here. The first certainly is that God is not impressed with outward appearances. Saul, for that matter, was very handsome and taller than anyone else (I Samuel 9:2). Yet he failed to obey the Lord. He was too easily swayed by the opinion of the people (I Samuel 15:24). God looks on the heart. The other lesson is that God works through young people. We have already seen that in the case of Samuel as a young person and this is confirmed again in the case of David.

## II. Two Versions of Saul Meeting David – I Samuel 16:14-17:58

In this next section we have two versions of Saul encountering David. There may have been two independent traditions here which were melded together. It's possible that the narrator of the account of David playing his lyre for Saul did not know the story of David and Goliath and vice versa. The human authors of the Scriptures are not infallible, only the Word of God is. As Peter says, “men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (II Peter 1:21). These “men and women” did not have exhaustive and complete knowledge because they were human. They wrote what the Holy Spirit revealed to them. We must always remember that the scriptures are the Word of God as revealed to fallible human beings. Infallible is not the same as inerrant. The fact that Jesus does not know everything doesn't deny his infallibility as the Son of God (cf.

Mark 5:27-30). The Gospel of John gives a different date for Jesus' crucifixion than that found in the other three gospels. It is the message of Scripture that is infallible not the specific details.

From chapter I Samuel 16:14 we are to conclude that Saul's heart is not turned toward God (this is the essential difference between Saul and David who was a man after God's own heart (I Samuel 13:13-14)). The Holy Spirit has departed from Saul and then he is tormented by an evil spirit "from the Lord" (I Samuel 16:14). How can God send an evil spirit? We have to acknowledge that God is ultimately in charge of all things (Ephesians 1:11). This does not mean that God actively does all things. God allows evil spirits to test us and even, in this case, an evil spirit may be a sign of God's judgment. It is the Holy Spirit that sends Jesus into the wilderness so that he can be tempted by the devil (Matthew 4:1). God allows a "messenger of Satan" to torment the apostle Paul to keep him from being too proud (II Corinthians 12:7).

It is in this context, that Saul first hears of David (according to this version). Saul's servants suggest he call for someone who can play the lyre and whose music then can dispel the evil spirit. David is recommended and Saul sends for him. When David plays his music the evil spirit departs and he feels better. This is a great testament to the ministry of music. It is not just music that praises God that has this effect but music in general. The lyre was a favored instrument in the ancient world. In Greek myth both Apollo and his son, Orpheus, play it.

We now have a second version of Saul's meeting with David in which David triumphs over another form of evil. The Israelites are fighting against the Philistines. They have a champion, Goliath, who is beyond human. He is ten feet tall and covered in heavy metal. Giants are mentioned several times in the Bible. They are the offspring of mortal women and the "sons of God" mentioned in Genesis 6:4. They also inhabit the land of Canaan when the Israel spies first go there (Numbers 13:25-33). Greek myth describes both Titans and one-eyed Cyclops who are giants. The roots of all this are found in the enigmatic "sons of God" who are celestial beings (not angels), some of whom at least rebelled against God and are in league with Satan (Genesis 6:1-4; Job 1:6). They are among the "principalities and powers" mentioned in the New Testament (Romans 8:38; Ephesians 6:12). All this is to suggest that there is something supernatural about Goliath. While he is not specifically referred to as one of the "nephilim," or ancient giants, he fits the category of "the heroes that were of old" (Genesis 6:4). Suffice to say, he's not just a big guy.

Needless to say, the Israelite soldiers are terrified of him. In one of the most familiar stories in Scripture, David appears in the role of a young servant bringing food to his soldier brothers. He is appalled that Goliath's taunts go unchallenged and volunteers himself to fight the giant. In this account this is Saul's first meeting with David (cf. I Samuel 17:55-56). Saul protests that David is just a boy (I Samuel 17:33). David responds however that he has rescued his sheep from lions and bears (I Samuel 17:36). Saul outfits David with heavy armor which weighs him down. David cannot even move (17:39). David takes the armor off and, as we all know, goes into the field of battle where he is mocked by Goliath. David takes out his sling and kills Goliath with a single shot (I Samuel 17:49).

Despite the familiarity of this story we should note it contains important spiritual lessons. The parallel text in the New Testament actually is Ephesians 6:10-17. The lessons of this famous story can be summarized as follows:

1. Our enemies are not "flesh and blood" but spiritual forces of "this present darkness" (Ephesians 6:12). These include giants, i.e. huge obstacles in our path of serving God.
2. We cannot fight with human weapons, "armor" (II Corinthians 10:3).

3. We may appear weak but we aren't when we're in the Lord's service (I Samuel 17:42-43).
4. God gives us the victory in such a way that it is never *our* victory (I Samuel 17:45-47).

### **III. Saul's Jealousy of David – I Samuel 18:1-30**

David becomes instantly famous after his defeat of Goliath. To make matters worse for Saul David forms a close bond with Saul's son, Jonathan. They form a covenant together (I Samuel 18:3). This is one of the most famous terms in Scripture. God makes a covenant with Israel. In the critical passage in Genesis 15 God makes a covenant with himself for the salvation of Israel and ultimately the world (Hebrews 6:13-14).

David becomes Israel's champion acting on Saul's behalf. Yet popular reaction celebrates David's achievements over those of Saul's ("Saul has killed his thousands, and David his ten thousands," I Samuel 18:7). Saul becomes insanely jealous and even tries to kill David (I Samuel 18:10-11). The tragic reality is that the Lord had left Saul and was now guiding David so that he had "success in all his undertakings" (I Samuel 18:14).

Saul comes up with a nefarious scheme to do away with David. He will marry David to his daughter. An attempt at a marriage with his first daughter, Merab, fails because David does not feel worthy to marry into the king's family (I Samuel 18:18). Saul's other daughter, Michal, is in love with David. Saul pursues this relationship with the idea he can destroy David (I Samuel 18:21). He requires a marriage present of a hundred foreskins of the Philistines (this is not the Sunday School version!). Saul is convinced that David will be killed by the Philistines in this effort. However, the Lord is with David and gives him the victory. David returns with the foreskins. Saul realizes that the "Lord was with David" (I Samuel 18:28). He is now afraid of David. He consents to David's marriage with his daughter but from this moment on he is David's enemy (I Samuel 18:29). God continues to give David victory (I Samuel 18:30).

#### **Questions for Us –**

1. How can we apply the lessons of David's story to ourselves, especially the point that God does not look on the outward appearance but on the heart (I Samuel 16:7)?
2. What are examples of giants for us? How can we avoid the trap of trying to overcome them by purely human means?
3. How are we vulnerable to the kind of jealousy that Saul has of David?

# I Samuel Chapters 19-21 – “David’s Special Friend”

This next section is full of intrigue and drama. Saul has developed a murderous fixation on David. Saul’s son, Jonathan, however is a close friend of David’s. This is not to mention Saul’s daughter, David’s wife, who also tries to protect him. David has to flee from Saul for his life. Being God’s anointed is no guarantee of an easy or safe life.

## I. Saul’s Evil Spirit – 19:1-24

Since God rejected Saul he has been tormented by “an evil spirit from the Lord” (16:14; 19:9). From this we can conclude that Saul has not really repented of his earlier sins (15:17-25). Nor is his heart turned toward the Lord. Following David’s defeat of Goliath and his other victories, Saul has become insanely jealous of David as we saw earlier (18:6-9). In the opening of this chapter he clearly is intending to kill David. Jonathan is aware of his father’s plans and alerts David. He also intervenes with his father regarding David. However Saul is too far gone. He only gets worse.

David continues his successful campaign against the Philistines. This only makes Saul madder. David’s playing his music earlier protected Saul from the evil spirit. That is no longer the case. As David is playing, Saul throws a spear at him. David flees into the night. He escapes to Ramah, the place where Samuel is (19:8-10, 18). Saul sends men to David’s house. Michal, Saul’s daughter and David’s wife, covers up for David by claiming he is sick in bed and constructs a dummy to give the impression of a figure in the bed (the dummy interestingly enough is partly made from a household idol) (19:11-17). Realizing that David has escaped Saul becomes more incensed and we could even say paranoid.

Saul sends messengers after David. Samuel is presiding over a tremendous outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Saul’s messengers fall into “a prophetic frenzy” (19:20). Saul himself finally goes and he too is possessed of the Holy Spirit (19:22-24). This was the second time that Saul received a gift of the Spirit (10:10-12). What this demonstrates graphically is that the evil spirit in Saul is no match for the Holy Spirit. We need to always remember this fact especially when we see the presence of evil as we have recently in the Boston bombings. God’s word to Zechariah the prophet is “not by might, nor by power but by my spirit” (Zech. 4:6).

## II. Jonathan Loved David – 20:1-42

Saul’s attempts to kill David are doomed to futility because Saul’s son is an intimate friend of David and keeps warning him about Saul. David and Jonathan meet secretly (20:1ff). Jonathan assures David that his father will keep him informed of his plans and Jonathan can then get word to David. David is not so sure. He’s afraid that Saul

will figure out that Jonathan is on his side and will cease confiding in him. In a grim comment David says, “there is but a step between me and death” (20:3).

Jonathan works out an elaborate scheme to warn David. It is based on the position of arrows that Jonathan will shoot. The odd thing is that David remains a member of Saul’s household by virtue of being Saul’s son-in-law. At this point both David and Jonathan realize that David cannot return to the palace. It is in this context that they form “a sacred covenant” (20:8). They pledge to not only support each other but their families as well (20:15). We read that Jonathan and David swear their love for each other (20:17).

David is absent from the household. Saul becomes suspicious. When Jonathan offers an excuse saying that David has gone back to his father’s house to offer a special sacrifice, Saul realizes he is being deceived. He denounces Jonathan for supporting David (20:30-31). Saul remains fixated on killing David. Jonathan protests, “What has he done?” (20:32). In response Saul hurls his spear at Jonathan just as he had done to David earlier. We see here the full impact of Saul’s paranoia. Jonathan now realizes that David’s only hope is to flee. The next day he shoots the warning arrows and meets with David for a final farewell. When Jonathan’s young servant picks up the arrows and leaves, David comes out from hiding and prostrates himself before Jonathan.

“He bowed three times, and they kissed each other, and wept with each other; David wept the more.” (20:41).

David then leaves. They swear their commitment to each other, saying “The Lord shall be between me and you, and between my descendents and your descendants, forever” (20:42).

There are two critical themes in this chapter. The first is the fact that a faithful servant of the Lord is under constant attack. David is the Lord’s anointed but he is forced to spend his time hiding and ultimately has to escape from what is now his home. To be chosen by God is not to be privileged in the things of this world. The apostle Paul says to Timothy, “all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (II Timothy 2:12). This is not something we like to hear but Jesus said it just as emphatically, “in the world you face persecution.” However Jesus goes on to say, “but take courage; I have conquered the world” (John 16:33). Too often we are not prepared for the persecution that comes in one form or another in a world where “the cosmic powers of this present darkness” (Eph. 6:12) are still very active. In these times we need to remember the example of David.

There is another theme we need to reflect on here especially in the light of what has been the most divisive issue in the church in the past generation. That issue clearly is homosexuality. The recent “coming out” of Pro Basketball player Jason Collins indicates how much our society has changed on this issue. Does the account of

Jonathan and David's love for each other say anything about this subject (and we must admit we're clearly uncomfortable reading a text like 20:41 which says, "they kissed each other")? We need to be clear about several things here. First, nothing in the text states or even implies that Jonathan and David had a sexual relationship. Their relationship actually is described as "a sacred covenant" (20:8). Second, on the other hand, we do have an account here of two men who love each other (18:1; 20:17, 41).

The story of Jonathan and David then at least brings up the larger subject of same-gender love. Scripture calls homosexual behavior a sin (Rom. 1:26-27; I Cor. 6:9-10; Jude 1:7). Yet we can ask, is homosexuality itself a sin similar to the fact that all sickness is a sign of sin. Sickness can be a judgment for a particular sin as when Moses' sister Miriam is struck with leprosy (Num. 12:1-10) or when Paul pronounces a judgment of blindness on a false prophet (Acts 13:4-11). However in most situations this is not the case. Job is struck with sickness from Satan through no fault of his own. Peter's mother-in-law is just plain sick. She is not being judged for anything (Mark 1:30-31). Jesus' disciples ask of a blind person, "who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?" (John 9:1-2). Jesus responds, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned" (John 9:3).

This raises the point that a homosexual orientation may, like sickness, be the result of sin in a general sense but not necessarily the result of the actions of a person (or their parents). To tell a person who is sick that they're suffering for their sins not only seems unjust but downright cruel. Lepers were shunned as though it were their fault that they were sick (Lev. 13:45-46). Yet Jesus responds to lepers with pity and compassion (Mark 1:40-42). We do not judge people who are suffering from illness nor should we be judgmental of gay, lesbian or transgender persons.

We often speak of the "Biblical standard of marriage" which Jesus states clearly as a life long commitment between one man and one woman (Matt. 19:1-12; Mark 10:1-12). Yet very few examples of this kind of marriage are found in Scripture, certainly not among the Old Testament saints from Abraham to David. God even instructs the prophet Hosea to marry a prostitute (to teach Israel a lesson, Hosea 1:2). Jesus also states emphatically that to be divorced and marry another person is to commit adultery. Matthew's version of this teaching gives the sole exception of "unchastity" (Matt. 19:9). Yet many Christians today have been divorced and remarried with the full support of their pastors and churches. It will be argued that in these cases repentance has been called for and presumably lived out. However what does this mean for a person who through no choice of their own is a homosexual?

This matter calls us to further prayer and reflection. The key theme we always have to remember is that for the whole New Testament, love is the fulfillment of the law (Rom. 13:9-10). Jonathan in trying to protect David is technically both dishonoring his father and lying to him (two of the Ten Commandments). Yet we would clearly say this is

justified by his love for David. Love is always “a still more excellent way” (I Cor. 12:31-13:13) and “covers a multitude of sins” (I Peter 4:8).

### III. David on the Run – chapter 21:1-15

David escapes to Nob and there meets the priest Ahimelech. He lies to him that he is on a special, secret mission for the king (21:2). Claiming to be meeting a group of young men, he asks for some food. The priest replies that he has none except for the holy bread, “the bread of the Presence” (21:6). David can have it providing that the young men he is meeting “have kept themselves from women” (21:4). Since the men David is speaking about don’t exist, that’s no problem. So the priest gives David the bread (21:6).

Jesus will later quote this text when the Pharisees criticize him and his disciples for plucking grain on the Sabbath. Jesus speaks of David “and his companions,” whereas according to this chapter David is alone (21:1). His companions are apparently fictitious. Jesus may have quoted David’s mention of the “young men” he was allegedly to meet in order to include his own disciples. Jesus’ reference to David does not fit his situation too closely. David is on the run for his life. Jesus and the disciples are apparently just strolling through a grain field on the Sabbath. Jesus’ point is the famous phrase, “The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath” (Mark 2:23-28). Jesus is about freedom (John 8:36).. He is not bound by the letter of the law. Jesus as we have seen repeatedly is opposed to any kind of legalism (Mark 2:24; Luke 14:3; 20:22).

David sees that a servant of Saul is present. He asks Ahimelech if he has a spear or sword. Fittingly he is given the sword of Goliath. Unlike mythical figures there is nothing magical about the sword (21:7-9). David then flees to Gath. The king there has heard of his reputation. This makes David fearful (21:12). We are not told why. Did he think that the king would communicate with Saul about his presence? To safeguard himself David pretends to be mad. Of course then he is not perceived as a threat. We don’t know if this story influenced William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* where Hamlet tries to protect himself by pretending to be insane.

So at the end of this chapter we have David alone and fearful, pretending to be mad. Is this the benefit of being the anointed of the Lord? His situation reminds us of Paul’s experiences in the Lord’s service (II Cor. 11:23-30). To boast in the Lord is to boast of one’s weakness. Jesus himself is the supreme example. The Lord says to all of us, “my power is made perfect in weakness” (II Cor. 12:9). It takes us all our lives to learn this lesson.

Questions for Discussion –

1. Why do you think Saul degenerates so quickly? What lessons can we learn from his falling away from the Lord?
2. Do you think we can apply the relationship of David and Jonathan to same-gender covenants in our time (20:8)? Why or why not?
3. What can we learn from David's trials and struggles?

## I Samuel Chapters 22-24 – “Saul vs. David”

In these chapters David is on the run for his life. Saul is pursuing him ruthlessly and murdering anyone who gives David aid. David has few allies. He has to constantly depend on the Lord. He has a perfect opportunity to kill Saul and makes himself king. Yet David, the man after God’s own heart (I Samuel 13:14) responds with compassion rather than anger. David emerges here as one of the great models of faith in Scripture.

### I. David On the Run – Chapters 22-23

When we last saw David he was pretending to be insane to avoid capture in the kingdom of Achish of Gath. He leaves Gath and hides in a cave. His father and brothers hear of where he is and come to him. More significantly we read that “everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt and everyone who was discontented gathered to him” (I Samuel 22:2). David emerges here as a precursor of a type of Robin Hood, an outlaw rebelling against a tyrannical king (or prince) supported by those who have in effect become outlaws because of their difficulties. David now has an army of about four hundred (I Samuel 22:2). This will become an army of the Lord. David entrusts his family to the king of Moab until he knows what the Lord’s will for him is (I Samuel 22:3). The prophet tells David to go into the land of Judah and David goes (I Samuel 22:5).

David is living solely dependent upon the Lord at this point. He has been given a promise that he will be king of Israel. Yet that promise seems to have nothing to do with his present reality. David here is an example of two fundamental themes in Scripture. The first comes from the familiar passage in Zechariah 4:6:

“Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord of hosts.”

The second comes from the apostle Paul:

“for we walk by faith and not by sight” (II Corinthians 5:7).

The reality of these two passages is crucial if we wish to grow in faith as David did. David was no idealist. He cried out in the face of diversity and difficulty. Yet he always held onto faith in God even when nothing positive was happening in his life. It may have been during this time that David wrote the 13<sup>th</sup> Psalm:

“How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?  
How long will you hide your face from me?  
How long must I bear pain in my soul,  
and have sorrow in my heart all day long?  
Consider and answer me, O Lord my God!  
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death,  
And my enemy will say, ‘I have prevailed’;  
My foes will rejoice because I am shaken.

But I trusted in your steadfast love;  
my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.  
I will sing to the Lord,  
because he has dealt bountifully with me.”

The example of David and psalms like this are our encouragement in the dark times of life. We can never forget that the concept of spiritual warfare is at the foundation of the Biblical view of salvation. Jesus comes to forgive us our sins but his ultimate purpose is to “destroy the works of the Devil” (I John 3:8; Hebrews 2:14-15). Jesus comes to destroy the power of evil in all its forms – sickness, death, injustice and cruelty. From the cross he is driving out “the ruler of this world (Satan) (John 12:31).” This is why Paul says that we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against “the cosmic power of this present darkness” (Ephesians 6:12). We should not become disheartened when we face tragedy and problems in this life. Nor should we seek to turn away from tragedy. We need to be examples of the love of Jesus Christ in the face of the suffering and heartaches, the super storms and terrorist attacks of our world. We are not called to condemn (John 3:17). We are to be the messengers of healing and hope. David is a model of all this.

In contrast to David we see Saul becoming a murderous tyrant. Knowing that David sought refuge with the priest Ahimelech in the town of Nob (I Samuel 21:1), Saul sends for Ahimelech and accuses him of conspiring against him by aiding David (I Samuel 22:11-13). Ahimelech confronts Saul, asking him, “Who among all your servants is so faithful as David? (I Samuel 22:14).” Saul is not deterred. He orders the death of Ahimelech and all his “father’s house” (I Samuel 22:16). To their credit Saul’s soldiers will not obey. However Doeg the Edomite carries out Saul’s orders and kills eighty five priests and then proceeds to kill all the inhabitants of the city of Nob including “oxen, donkeys and sheep” (I Samuel 22:19). One of the sons of Ahimelech escapes to David. David tells him to stay with him and repeats the most familiar command in all of scripture, “do not be afraid” (I Samuel 22:23).

David then hears that the Philistines are attacking the city of Keilah. David inquires of the Lord whether he and his men should go to their aid. The Lord tells him to do so. However the men are afraid (go back to I Samuel 22:23). David then asks a second time. The Lord gives the same answer and assures David of his victory. David and his men under the power of the Lord then rescue the inhabitants of Keilah (I Samuel 23:5). Saul however hears that David is in Keilah and hopes to trap him there. David

asks the Lord if the men of Keilah will turn him over to Saul and he is told they will. So much for gratitude! Once again David's faithfulness is not rewarded in any earthly terms (I Samuel 23:9-12).

David and his six hundred men then escape into the wilderness (was it here that David wrote Psalm 13?). Saul sought to kill him every day but the Lord protected David. Like so many before him and who will also follow him David's faithfulness leads him into the wilderness. This is of course true of Jesus as well (Matthew 4:1). We should not be surprised that we find ourselves symbolically in the wilderness since this is often where God chooses to reveal himself. In the wilderness David is reunited with Jonathan and they reaffirm their covenant to each other (I Samuel 23:15-18). Saul continues to pursue David and David and his men have to flee for their lives. David is delivered when Saul gets word that the Philistines again are attacking. Saul goes out to confront the Philistines and David is left in peace temporarily in a place he calls the Rock of Escape. He is still in the wilderness (I Samuel 23:24-29).

## II. David Spares Saul's Life – Chapter 24

After his battle with the Philistines Saul comes chasing after David again. David at this point is reduced to hiding in a cave in an area known as "the Rocks of the Wild Goats" (I Samuel 24:2). These are probably not luxury accommodations. Saul goes into the cave 'to relieve himself.' David's men see this as an ideal moment for David to kill Saul. David however only cuts off a corner of Saul's cloak. Yet even this David thinks is too daring. He is actually "stricken to the heart" to think that he raised his hand in any sense against the Lord's anointed (I Samuel 24:5-6). The issue here is not the very questionable character of Saul. Rather the focus is on the Lord who anointed Saul. When we lay hands on someone to ordain them to church office we are testifying to the fact that they are "the Lord's anointed." This does not mean that they are above criticism, much less that they are somehow flawless. It does mean however that they have been set apart by the Lord for a special service and we are to take that fact seriously and respect them as they serve the Lord and even when they fail.

David then reveals his presence to Saul and tells him exactly what happened and shows him the corner of his cloak that was cut off. Saul then in a very real sense comes to himself and realizes that David is not his enemy. Saul says to him, "You are more righteous than I; for you have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil" (I Samuel 24:17). Saul then acknowledges David's rightful claim to the throne. He simply asks David to not wipe out his name or the name of his father's house (I Samuel 24:21-22). Saul's threat to David's life has come to an end. However more challenges loom for David in the future.

### **Questions for Discussion -**

1. How is David a model of encouragement in the face of adversity and conflict? How does Psalm 13 help us in our own struggles?

2. David rescues the town of Keilah from the Philistines. Yet the inhabitants are prepared to turn him over to Saul (I Samuel 23:11-12). How do we deal with disappointment and even betrayal when trying to do the Lord's will?

3. What implications do we take from David's strong point about not touching the Lord's anointed (I Samuel 24:6)? What practical lessons does this teach us about leadership in the community of faith, especially when we witness instances of scandal and failure? Compare Paul's confrontation with Peter in Galatians 2:11-14.

## I Samuel Chapter 25 – “David’s New Love Story”

This chapter presents us with some remarkable events in David’s life. David encounters a “clever and beautiful” woman whom he later marries along with another woman while essentially being divorced from his first wife. We see in this chapter that the life of faith is invariably dynamic and cannot be reduced to a formula.

### IV. David’s Request and Nabal’s Response – I Samuel Chapter 25:1-13

We begin this section with a brief mention of Samuel’s death (this will be repeated in chapter I Samuel 28, verse 3). No eulogy or even summary of his life and ministry is given. This perhaps is to remind us that the life of anyone is defined by service to the Lord and that the Lord alone receives the glory (Isaiah 42:8). This is important to remember in our society which seems to be endlessly fascinated by celebrities. There are no celebrities in the household of faith (Paul referred to himself as the first among sinners, I Timothy 1:15).

The narrative quickly brings us back to David who, as mentioned in our last study, seems to have become a Robin Hood like figure, an outlaw but one who pursues justice and, in this case, the Lord. During the course of their time in the wilderness of Paran, David and his men provided protection to the shepherds of a very rich man named Nabal. David and his men are in need, and they send a messenger to Nabal asking him for any assistance, i.e. food, that he might give them. Nabal’s servants affirm that David not only did them no harm, but clearly protected them from the dangers in the wilderness of thieves or wild animals (“they were a wall to us both by night and by day,” I Samuel 25:16). Nabal however turns down the request in no uncertain terms. He clearly has heard of David. He knows that he is the son of Jesse but he is not impressed, describing him and his men as coming from, “I do not know where” (I Samuel 25:11).

Already in this scene we encounter several major Biblical themes. The first is the theme of the wilderness, one of the most essential in all of Scripture. Time and again we are told that spiritual strength and maturity are the result of having to spend time in the wilderness. This is true of Moses and the Israelites, of Elijah, Isaiah, John the Baptist and also of Jesus himself. David too is being tested and tried by this time in the wilderness. It is in the wilderness that Satan’s power is evident. The wilderness is a haunt of demons, false gods, and temptations (Isaiah 34:13-14; Psalm 106:24-29; Mark 1:12-13). None of us relishes time in the wilderness, the place of isolation and temptation. Yet passing through the wilderness is essential to spiritual growth. If even Jesus himself had to pass through the wilderness before beginning his public ministry, how much more do we need that same experience. David’s temptation in the

wilderness will be to lash out at Nabal and seek revenge (“Every man strap on his sword!” I Samuel 25:13).

The second major theme is the obstacle of riches. Jesus says in no uncertain terms, “Truly I tell you, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 19:23). As the richest Christians in history we need to hear this warning. The examples in Scripture of rich people rejecting God are many. They include the rich man who ignores Lazarus, the rich young ruler, the rich fool whose soul is demanded of him in a single night and King Herod who offers his stepdaughter half his kingdom and then is trapped into giving her the head of John the Baptist (Luke 16:19-31; Matthew 19:16-26; Luke 12:13-21; Matthew 14:1-12). It needs to be added also that wealth is not inherently evil (it is the “love of money” that is “a root of all kinds of evil,” I Timothy 6:10). Throughout history there have also been those who are rich in good works and generous (I Timothy 6:17-18). Yet Paul warns, consistent with all Scripture, that “those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction” (I Timothy 6:9). So much for wanting to win the lottery!

David’s wilderness temptation is to act out a merciless vengeance on Nabal leaving none of his men alive. David here shows the pride that will lead him into sin later in his life. In a fit of anger at Nabal’s ill-treatment his initial reaction is to strap on his sword (I Samuel 25:13). So often this is our first reaction when we have been mistreated in some way. Nabal is at fault for showing no appreciation, much less generosity, to David. David’s reaction however is nothing less than to slaughter Nabal and all his men. Is this how David shows he is the man after God’s own heart? When we are tempted to be overly aggressive, especially when we feel personally slighted, we need to remember Jesus’ words, “for all who take the sword will perish by the sword” (Matthew 27:52).

## II. Abigail Takes the Initiative

Abigail learns of her husband’s ungrateful response to David’s request. One of her husband’s servants underlines two facts. David and his men had been “very good” to them and, secondly, Nabal, who we have already been told was “surly and mean” (I Samuel 25:3) is, in the words of the servant, “so ill-natured that no one can speak to him” (I Samuel 25:17). Given the reality of her husband and his attitude, Abigail makes no effort to try and change his mind. Knowing that David and his men are heading toward them to take their vengeance, Abigail goes into action. She takes what sounds like a huge assortment of supplies and gifts (“two hundred loaves, two skins of wine, five sheep ready dressed, etc.) and goes out to meet David before he enacts what can only be called a bloodthirsty revenge (“God do so to David and more also, if by morning I leave so much as one male of all who belong to him,” I Samuel 25:22).

When Abigail sees David she gets off her donkey and runs to him prostrating herself at his feet. She asks that the guilt of her husband be placed on her head! (I Samuel 25:24). She also gives a prophecy of David’s future. Calling him a “prince of Israel” (I

Samuel 25:30), she acknowledges that David is fighting “the battles of the Lord” and the Lord will protect him from all his enemies (I Samuel 25:28-31). Yet she skillfully states that her husband is not worth the effort. She asks for forgiveness and that the gifts she brings be given to the young men of David’s army who watched over her husband’s shepherds (I Samuel 25:27-28). She also points out that her husband’s name, Nabal, literally means fool and she adds that he certainly lives up (or down) to that description (I Samuel 25:25).

To say that David is impressed would be putting it mildly. He blesses the Lord who he says sent her to him. He acknowledges that he was intending to wipe out Nabal and all his servants. He blesses Abigail for keeping him “from bloodguilt and from avenging myself by my own hand” (I Samuel 25:33). David had apparently forgotten God’s word that “Vengeance is mine.” (Deuteronomy 32:35). We see here an example of David’s rash and impetuous nature which will create tragic consequences later in his affair with Bathsheba and counting his fighting men (against God’s instructions). Abigail has kept him from acting out his own vengeance (which has nothing to do with his fighting “the battles of the Lord”). He accepts her gifts and sends her back to her house in peace (I Samuel 25:35).

Abigail comes home to find her husband Nabal drunk (Was this an arranged marriage?). Therefore she says nothing to him about her meeting with David. The next morning however she tells him about her encounter with David. Instead of being relieved or even grateful, we read that Nabal’s heart “died within him; he became like a stone” (I Samuel 25:37). The inference would seem to be that he had a heart attack. Then ten days later the Lord strikes him and he dies (I Samuel 25:38). We can only surmise that God judged him for his ungrateful and hostile attitude to someone who, in fact, was a servant of the Lord.

Needless to say, we have to conclude that Abigail and Nabal’s marriage was not one made in heaven. Following the death of Nabal, David woos Abigail and she becomes his wife (I Samuel 25:39-42). David also takes a second wife, Ahinoam of Jezreel about whom we know very little. Saul had in effect divorced David from his daughter Michal having given her to a Palti, son of Laish (I Samuel 25:43). We are given no details about all this. David’s marital situation is certainly less than ideal but the Lord is clearly directing all this. We therefore can have confidence as we seek to deal with the often difficult marriage situations we encounter in our own day. On the other hand, Abigail would appear to be a perfect match for David.

We will resume our study of the life of David on Wednesday, September 18, looking at chapters I Samuel 26-28, “Joining the Enemy.”

## Questions for Discussion –

1. Why do you think it is so important for God’s servants to spend time in the wilderness? Have you had a wilderness experience (more than one?).

2. What can we learn from David's outburst of anger? What happens to us when we seek to "strap on our sword" in times of conflict?

3. It seems that God takes a direct hand in eliminating Nabal so David can marry his wife. Is God therefore breaking his own marriage commandment (Matt. 19:1-9)? What does this story tell us about the will of God?

# I Samuel Chapters 26-28 – “Saul: Anointed and Rejected”

The fate of Saul presents us with a sharp dilemma. Saul is both the anointed of the Lord and, at the same time, rejected by the Lord. The great twentieth century theologian, Karl Barth, uses the stories of Saul and David as examples of his reexamination of the doctrine of election or predestination. For Barth, along with others, election is not ultimately a division of two identifiable groups, the “sheep” and the “goats.” It is rather two ways we relate to God. Jesus is the model of our election (Ephesians 1:4; I Peter 1:20). He is both rejected by God and chosen by him (Acts 2:22-24). To be in Christ is to be anointed, or chosen, by him. Yet we can also represent God’s rejected, the “vessels of wrath.” It is in God (or Christ) alone that we have hope. In these chapters we see Saul both as chosen by God and rejected by him.

## V. “Who Can Raise his Hand Against the Lord’s Anointed?” – chapter 26:1-25

Chapter 26 begins with an account that echoes an earlier incident between Saul and David in chapter 24. On this occasion Saul is again searching for David. David is hiding in the wilderness. The wilderness is an essential theme in Scripture. God encounters his faithful in the wilderness and tests them. This is true of Moses and the Israelites, Elijah and even Jesus. David sends out spies to find Saul’s exact location. He then asks, “Who will go down with me into the camp to Saul?” (I Samuel 26:6). Abishai, the son of Zerah, volunteers to accompany David on what would have to be seen as a dangerous mission.

They come down by night and find Saul surrounded by his general, Abner, and all of his soldiers fast asleep. As in the previous encounter in a cave (I Samuel 24:4), David has a perfect opportunity to kill Saul and thereby claim the throne of Israel outright. Abishai is ready to kill Saul with one thrust of his spear (I Samuel 26:8). David however prevents him with the rhetorical question, “Who can raise his hand against the Lord’s anointed and be guiltless?” (I Samuel 26:9).

This poses the issue of Saul’s election as Barth discusses. The doctrine of election has been a controversial and troubling one for centuries. At the same time it cannot be avoided because it is at the heart of the message of salvation. The problem for the Western Christian Church, since the time of Augustine, has been the fact that it has been presented in a way that looks more like the doctrine of fate in Greek mythology and philosophy than what is in fact found in Scripture. In its classic formulation in the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) we read,

“By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others fore-ordained to everlasting death.” (Westminster Confession III/3).

In this formulation everyone's eternal destiny is established "before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4). Christ, rather than being the central focus of the doctrine (as in Ephesians 1) becomes simply the agent who carries out God's eternal plan. Augustine came to this formulation in his debate with the theologian Pelagius who essentially made salvation dependent on the will of the individual person who hears the gospel. Augustine was right to oppose Pelagius, but his defense and the subsequent history of the doctrine looks too much like Greek mythology in which the fates determine each person's destiny before their birth (Oedipus is destined to marry his mother and murder his father no matter his actual choices in his lifetime).

Yet is this what Scripture teaches? On the contrary, Scripture speaks of election always in Christ. It is not an "eternal decree" but the will of the Father who has revealed himself in Christ. God has chosen Jesus as the "lamb slain from before the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). Yet God's plan is fulfilled in time, space and history. Jesus is no Oedipus with a prescribed fate. Yes the "Son of Man goes as it was written," (Mark 14:21) but it is his decision, repeated throughout his life, to do the will of the Father, to make the very real choice of "not my will, but thine be done" (Matthew 26:39).

There are many universal passages in Scripture. Jesus is the light which enlightens every person (John 1:9). On the cross he draws all people to himself (John 12:32). As in Adam all die so in Christ will all be made alive (I Corinthians 15:22; Romans 5:12-21). God will have mercy on all (Romans 11:32). Yet the Scripture, even the apostle Paul, speaks of the sober warning of works and in particular works of the "flesh" ("those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God"). Yet "those things" include things that even the most faithful believer falls into, "strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy . . . ." (Galatians 5:19-20). We see a division in the judgment of works between the faithful and the faithless. Yet we know we are not saved by our works (Ephesians 2:1-10). It is not the case apparently that only the "elect" or the "chosen" have their names written in the Book of Life. It appears that some are warned that their name could be blotted out if they turn away from God (Exodus 32:32; Psalms 9:5; 69:28). Others never had their name written there (Revelations 17:8). There are sober warnings for those who turn away from Christ ("They went out from us because they were not part of us," I John 2:19).

So where does this leave us? The classic doctrine was right in saying that God chooses whom he wills. He does choose people to accomplish his will and this choice is not based on the merits or achievements of the one chosen. God is certainly free to choose whom he will because no one, certainly not any (all) of us who are sinners has any claim on God. Christ chooses whom he will. We do not choose him (John 15:16). Yet God's choice does not predetermine all of our lives even though God often has a plan for us (Psalm 139:16). We are free to respond and free to reject God. God's choice of us is made solely in grace (Ephesians 2:4-5). Yet we are responsible to live out that grace. To say that we are chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world does not rule out the fact that this choice is actualized in time and space. God chooses in Christ. Yet we also receive Christ by choice (John 1:12-13). God rules

and overrules in time and space (Genesis 50:20). Our lives matter and our choices matter. What the doctrine of election (or predestination) most clearly teaches is that we are not saved by what we ourselves do. Our hope is in the Lord who made heaven and earth (Psalm 121:2). We focus on Christ knowing that nothing in life or death can separate us from his love (Romans 8:38-39).

The story of Saul and David illustrates this teaching. Saul has been chosen by God. He is the Lord's anointed. The fact that the people asked for a king doesn't change that. The fact that Saul disobeys God doesn't change that. The fact that David will inherit the kingdom doesn't change that either. We see the reality of election in the darkness of Saul's camp. Abishai makes the obvious point that this is the perfect opportunity to do away with Saul and confirm the promise that David will be king. Yet David, understanding God's election, makes the stronger point. Saul is God's anointed. He remains the chosen of God ("for the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable," (Romans 11:29). Saul, as God's chosen, is in God's hands. No one, including David, can dare raise his hand against God's anointed (I Samuel 26:11). Does Saul deserve to be God's anointed? Absolutely not. But then only Jesus deserved that title. That is why election is never an eternal decree but rather a choice "in Christ."

David takes Saul's spear and his water jar. He later calls to Saul's general, Abner, and criticizes him for not protecting the Lord's anointed! He even says that Abner deserves death for not defending the Lord's anointed better (I Samuel 26:16). This story makes no sense apart from the mystery and promise of God's election ("I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy," Romans 9:15; Exodus 33:19). When Saul realizes that he was in David's power and was yet unharmed by him (I Samuel 26:21), he repents of his attacks on David. He calls himself a fool and acknowledges that he has made a great mistake in opposing David. The chapter ends with Saul blessing David (I Samuel 26:25).

## VI. Enemies and Witches – chapters. 27-28

The next section is puzzling. In spite of the apparent reconciliation David still doesn't trust Saul. He still thinks that Saul will try and kill him (I Samuel 27:1). David then makes a bold move. He goes to Gath with his two wives and pledges himself to one of the the Philistine chiefs, King Achish of Gath. David's decision seems verified when we read that Saul no longer sought for him (I Samuel 27:4). David appears to be deceiving Achish. He and his men make raids on "the Geshurites, the Girizites and the Amalekites" (I Samuel 27:8). Yet David deceives Achish by claiming to have led raids against Judah and its allies (I Samuel 27:10). David leaves no survivors of his raids so no one can dispute his account (this is, to put it mildly, a brutal age). David's ruse is effective. King Achish thinks David has turned against his own people and so will have to remain in the king's service (I Samuel 27:12). As the war between Israel and the Philistines intensifies, Achish is so confident that David has switched sides that he makes David his bodyguard (I Samuel 28:2).

Meanwhile we are told something further about Saul. The writer makes it clear (for reasons which will soon be obvious) that Samuel has died and also that Saul had expelled from Israel all the mediums and wizards. This was in accord with God's law (Leviticus 19:31; 20:6). Saul now inquires of the Lord as he is facing the challenge of the Philistines. God however does not answer him. Like Israel in the wilderness turning to the golden calf, Saul becomes impatient and decides he must have an answer even if it is not from the Lord. He asks his servants for the location of a medium still in the land and they refer him to a witch at Endor. Saul goes in disguise to the medium who initially resists him (not knowing that he is the king) citing the prohibition against mediums and wizard (I Samuel 28:8-9). Saul however promises that no harm will come to her. She agrees and asks whom Saul wants her to bring up. Saul answers that he wants to consult Samuel. Samuel does in fact appear and at this point the woman realizes who Saul is (I Samuel 28:10-12). Saul tells her not to fear (I Samuel 28:13). Samuel then emerges fully. There is no reason to doubt that the figure really is Samuel.

Saul pours out his heart saying that the Lord has not answered any of his prayers (I Samuel 28:15). Samuel says, in effect, what do you expect me to do about it? Samuel then repeats what the Lord had told him, that Saul has been rejected and his kingdom given over to David because of Saul's disobedience (I Samuel chapter 15). Furthermore Saul is being told that he will die the next day. Later the writer of the Book of Chronicles will have this to say about Saul,

“So Saul died for his unfaithfulness; he was unfaithful to the Lord in that he did not keep the command of the Lord; moreover, he had consulted a medium, seeking guidance, and did not seek guidance from the Lord. Therefore the Lord put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David son of Jesse” (I Chronicles 10:13-14).

Not to jump too far ahead but we know something of the story of David. Is there a difference between Saul and David? They were both unfaithful. They both did not keep the command or word of the Lord. Karl Barth points out that David's sins were actually more serious than those of Saul. Knowing something of what is to come we can say there is a difference. When Saul doesn't hear from the Lord he turns to a witch just as Israel turned to the golden calf when they hadn't heard from the Lord. Following the birth and subsequent sickness of David and Bathsheba's baby, David prays to the Lord for a week that the baby be spared. God does not answer his petition. The baby dies. Yet David never turns for guidance to a source other than God, much less to an idol or a witch.

So is David an example of the chosen (or anointed) and Saul an example of the rejected (or reprobate)? That would be too easy. God is prepared to cut off Israel after the golden calf episode but Moses intercedes to save the people in spite of their sin (Exodus 32:7-13). “And the Lord changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people” (Exodus 32:14). So much for God acting out a fixed decree from all eternity.

Even as Samuel is warning Saul he tells him that he and his sons after their death will be *with him, Samuel*. But certainly Samuel is in God's presence, in what is called Abraham's bosom and not hell (Hades). We will see in our next study that even after all this, Saul remains God's anointed. How can this be unless God's steadfast love endures forever (Psalm 136)?

#### Questions for Discussion –

1. What do you think of the idea that God's election is not so much an either/or as a both/and? Do you think this interpretation is closer to what Scripture teaches us? What are the implications of such a view?
2. How does the example of Saul show us both God's election and human responsibility?
3. How does David's refusal to touch the Lord's anointed show his dependence on God in spite of human failing? What lessons can we take from David's example?

## I Samuel Chapters 29 -II Samuel 1 – “The King is Dead. Long Live the King!”

In our last study we saw how the doctrine of God’s election played out in the life of Saul. Saul is anointed of the Lord, but is also rejected by God because of his disobedience and ultimate faithlessness in consulting a witch. Yet to be anointed by God is to be chosen by him. This is the great truth of election (II Corinthians 1:21; I John 2:20). Even in the ignominy of death David insists that Saul is the anointed of the Lord. Saul then is a concrete example of God’s election which can never be set aside (Romans 11: 29). This section also includes the struggles of David, not against Saul, but against the enemies of Israel, the Philistines and the Amalekites.

### I. David – Israel’s Champion – I Samuel Chapters 29-30

Incredibly, David has maintained his relationship with King Achish of the Philistines. Achish is totally convinced of David’s loyalty to the point where he has made him his bodyguard (I Samuel 28:2). However the other Philistine commanders are not persuaded at all. They recognize David and know his reputation too well. They ask,

“Is this not David, of whom they sing to one another in dances,

‘Saul has killed his thousands, And David his ten thousands’?”

Achish maintains his support of David but the Philistine commanders want nothing to do with him (I Samuel 29:6). It’s possible that some of them remember what David did to Goliath, the Philistines’ great champion. Achish, however, makes sure that David and his men are able to leave safely (I Samuel 29:10-11).

The next event concerns a raid on the Israelite city of Ziklag where it seems many of David’s men had family. The Amalekites have attacked the city, burned it down, and taken captive all the women and children including David’s two wives. David and his men are devastated. They weep “until they had no more strength to weep” (I Samuel 30:4). David finds himself in a dangerous position because apparently his men and the people who were with him (whose identity is not made clear) hold him responsible for the fate of the city. Indeed they are on the point of stoning David! (I Samuel 30:6). However, we read that “David strengthened himself in the Lord his God” (I Samuel 30:6). There are several important spiritual lessons here.

## A. Watch Out for the Amalekites

We are puzzled by the striking story of Saul's disobedience in I Samuel 15. God had commanded Saul to "utterly destroy" the Amalekites, men, women, children and all their livestock (I Samuel 15:3). This seems awfully brutal to us and conjures up the image so many people have of the wrathful God of the Old Testament. What Saul does appears to make sense (it certainly seems less than the later sins of David). Saul spares the king, Agag, as well as the best of the livestock (I Samuel 15:9). Samuel however is outraged at what he sees as flagrant disobedience to God's command, and it is at this point that he announces that God is taking Saul's kingdom away from him (I Samuel 15:28). Finally, Samuel himself literally hacks King Agag to pieces (I Samuel 15:33). We as modern (or post-modern) readers can easily find ourselves repulsed by the extreme violence of this story. God however makes strong points through his prophets that we dare not miss.

We are also repulsed by the example of Hosea having to marry a prostitute (Hosea 1:2). Even people who basically want to take the Bible literally seem ready to take this as a symbolic account that could not have actually happened. This reaction however does nothing less than tone down the Bible and replaces its stark message of God's judgment and grace with comfortable platitudes. This is not the God whose ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8-9), not the God who is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29).

The Amalekites represent the enemies of God. They opposed Israel in the exodus (I Samuel 15:2). They further symbolize all the forces that can trap or even destroy the people of God. Saul in tolerating their leader or even their possessions is holding on to things that seek to oppose God and threaten his people. Would that Saul had been more diligent in destroying every trace of them! The destruction of Ziklag might have been avoided. It is not the case that their sheep and cattle were without value. They were the best of what they possessed (I Samuel 15:9). Yet they were part of a system opposed to God and his people.

The Amalekites are like the sin in our lives. God wants to remove it totally but we often want to hold on to part of it. Sin is not an isolated act. It is a way of life, a pattern that turns us away from the Lord. Within that way of life there may be good and admirable things (like the sheep and the cattle of the Amalekites). Yet, even the good things of God's creation can be misused and abused and thereby lead us into sin. All of us have traces of the Amalekites in our lives, sinful elements that we do not want to give up or whose practice we rationalize. These elements may be different things for different people as Paul points out in his discussion of the traces of idolatry (Romans 14; I Corinthians 8-10). Meat is good, but meat offered to an idol could be an obstacle for some Christians (I Corinthians 8:7-11). We express shock at the image of the prophet Samuel hacking King Agag to death. The symbolic lesson here is that this is how we should deal with our sin. We are of course to confess it (I John 1:9), but more than that we are to repent and, in effect, cut it out of lives (I Corinthians 6:9-11). The Christian certainly lives in freedom. Truly, "all things are lawful" (I Corinthians 9:12). But anything that dominates us, no matter how good or indifferent it might be in and of itself, brings us under the power of sin. Christ has set us free from the power of sin including even the so-called good things we can find among the Amalekites (Romans 8:2-17; Galatians 5:13).

## B. Do You Really Want to be a Leader?

What is remarkable in this story is how quickly the people turn on David. David himself has lost two wives in the raid on Ziklag. Nonetheless the people are ready to stone him (I Samuel 30:6). This is David, the Lord's anointed, the future king of Israel! What are they thinking of? Yet this is hardly a unique episode. The people of Israel grumbled and complained against Moses for years and even his own brother and sister turned on him (Exodus 16:2; Numbers 14:2; 12:1-16). The apostle Paul was the object of criticism among the Corinthians and was forced to defend himself (II Corinthians 10:7-18).

None of this should be surprising when we look at the example of Jesus. Peter gives him Satanic advice, the mother of James and John want special privileges, Judas betrays him and all the disciples desert him in his hour of trial (Matthew 16:23; Mark 10:35-40; Luke 22:3; Mark 14:50). Jesus expresses his frustration with the disciples (Matthew 17:16-17).

David finds himself in danger after the raid on Ziklag. It's easy to blame him because he's the leader. In the face of fierce criticism and even the threat of stoning we read that "David strengthened himself in the Lord his God" (I Samuel 30:6). God then grants him a victory over the Amalekites aided by an Egyptian servant that the Amalekites left behind. Following the victory a number of those in David's army do not want to share the spoil from the victory with two hundred men who had been too exhausted to follow David on the raid (I Samuel 30:21-22). It's interesting that the narrator describes those who followed David, and therefore didn't want to share with those who hadn't as "corrupt and worthless fellows." It would seem they had a point in not wanting to share the benefits with those who hadn't been in the battle. David however will have none of this. He demonstrates his leadership and his mercy in sharing equally with all, those who fought and those who didn't. For David the unity of his followers was the most critical point. This is an important lesson for us also. There are no first and second class citizens in the church. Everyone should benefit equally. It's easy for one group to say "we're doing all the work so we should get special status." Yet in Christ we are all one (Galatians 3:28). David introduces this standard here.

## II. Saul – Still the Anointed of the Lord – I Samuel 31-II Samuel 1

In chapter 31 we see Saul, his sons and the army of Israel being attacked by the Philistines. The battle goes badly for them just as Samuel had prophesied (I Samuel 28:19). Saul's three sons, Jonathan, Abinadab and Malcishua, all perish. Saul is fatally wounded. He asks his armor-bearer to finish him off with a sword. The armor-bearer however is terrified at the thought and can't do it. Saul then attempts to kill himself by falling on his own sword. The armor-bearer follows suit and also falls on his sword. The men of Israel seeing this devastating loss then flee the battlefield.

The situation gets worse. The next day the Philistines find the bodies. They cut off the head of Saul, remove his armor and hang it in the temple of the ancient goddess here going by the name of Astarte (she is also known as Ishtar, Inanna and Isis). Saul's beheaded body is strung up at the city wall. The

Philistines celebrate their great victory. However the valiant Israelite men of Jabesh-gilead carry out a night raid and recapture the bodies of Saul and his sons. They burn them and then bury the remains. So ends the life of Saul.

Or does it?

In the first chapter of II Samuel we have a fuller account of the death of Saul. Apparently falling on his sword did not finally kill him. Saul in desperation cries out to an Amalekite who agrees to finally kill him. This Amalekite brings the news to David's camp along with Saul's crown and his armlet. In the mind of this Amalekite soldier he was performing a mercy killing. David sees things very differently. He tears his clothes and begins a fast. He says to the Amalekite, "Were you not afraid to lift your hand to destroy the Lord's anointed" (II Samuel 1:14). David then commands one of his soldiers to kill the man. His final comment is "Your blood be on your head; for your own mouth has testified against you, saying, 'I have killed the Lord's anointed'" (1 II Samuel:16).

After all that has happened is Saul still the Lord's anointed? David insists that he is. There is no possibility of interpreting his words as Saul *was* The Lord's anointed. With Saul as an example we can now summarize the basic themes of the doctrine of election and predestination:

- 1 God chooses whom he will. "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy" (Romans 9:15).
- 2 Election (or being anointed by God) is in no way dependent on any human characteristic, merit or achievement.
- 3 Election guarantees no special privileges.
- 4 To be chosen is also to be rejected as Christ himself was (Mark 15:34).
- 5 Yet God's election can never be nullified by sin or human failure (Jeremiah 51:5; Romans 11:29).
- 6 To be elected means that one can never fall away completely (Romans 8:38-39). Does this include Judas (John 6:70-71)? We don't know (Romans 11:32).
- 7 We can never judge God's election by outward appearances. Some who appear to believe may not really and others who appear to reject Christ may embrace him (I John 2:18-19; I Tim. 1:15).

The great value of this doctrine is its guarantee of complete assurance. We are in God's hands and NOTHING can ever take us out of his hands (John 10: 29).

This passage ends with David's lament over Saul and Jonathan. This is the origin of the famous line, "How the mighty have fallen." David reaffirms both Saul's status as the anointed of the Lord and his love for Jonathan (1:26). There is now seemingly no obstacle to David's assuming the throne of Israel. However as we will see in the succeeding chapters this is not the case.

## Questions for Us –

- 1 What are some of the ways we rationalize the presence of sin in our lives as Saul wanted to keep the spoil of the Amalekites. What does the raid on Ziklag tell us about tolerating that which is opposed to God?
- 2 Why do you think those with David blame him for the raid? What does that tell us about leadership in general?
- 3 Why do you think the doctrine of election is so often misunderstood?