

THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL
 A KINGDOM *established*
 GOD THE KING
The Downfall of Israel's First King

Saul, the first earthly king of Israel, came from the tribe of Benjamin. Benjamin was the second son of Rachel and younger brother of Joseph. However, the tribe of Benjamin was never designated by God to be the 'kingly' tribe. That honor was to go to the tribe of Judah. As we studied last week, the people 'jumped ahead' of God and demanded in *1 Samuel 8:6 (ESV)*⁶ ... "Give us a king to judge us."...



To ask for a king "like all the nations" suggests that the people wanted a big strong guy, like everybody else. Saul's physical description is found in *1 Samuel 9:2 (ESV)*² ... *a handsome young man. There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he. From his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people.* Looking at the outward appearance is never the best way to choose a king, a spouse, a church, etc.

Saul's words to Samuel when he was chosen appear to be humble. *1 Samuel 9:21 (ESV)*²¹ ... "Am I not a Benjaminite, from the least of the tribes of Israel? And is not my clan the humblest of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin? Why then have you spoken to me in this way?" But was he really humble?

We quickly see an indication that something is not right when Saul, like the nation he was leading, decided to move ahead of God. Saul was at Gilgal. Philistines were gathered around ready to fight. It was customary to never go against a foreign nation without seeking God through sacrifices. Samuel, the LORD's prophet had told Saul to wait for seven days. Over those few days, Saul's army began melting away. I can't help but think of Gideon's army that the LORD purposely diminished as He set up the stage for a miraculous victory. Was Saul going to be willing and ready to wait on the LORD? He was not.

Without faith and patience we miss the mark – missing the mark is a definition of sin. Saul may have been tall, dark and handsome and stronger than other men, but his actions reveal that he did not have a faithful and patient heart. It's one thing to be brave when you are king over an army of 300,000 men and quite another to be brave when your army is slinking away.

From Saul's experience we are reminded that it is dangerous to take matters into our own hands. Instead of waiting for Samuel, Saul rushed ahead and made his own sacrifices. He was a king – not a priest. Just

as he finished the sacrifice, Samuel appeared and Saul began making excuses. He thought he could disobey God and then talk himself out of being responsible for his disobedience. In **1 Samuel 13**, Samuel told Saul that his kingdom would not continue. However, Saul was given another chance to be obedient.

In the beginning of **1 Samuel 15**, God gave a clear command to King Saul to conquer the Amalekites and not spare anyone or anything and that included the animals. Why would the LORD do that? The Amalekites were among the nations who sought to exterminate God's chosen people. These godless descendents of Esau had attacked the Israelites from behind as they journeyed out of Egypt. That attack turned into an Israelite victory to remember. **Exodus 17:14 (ESV)** ¹⁴ *Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven."* But, Saul did not remember. His first disobedience was not killing the king of the Amalekites as commanded. His second disobedience was saving back some of the animals. His third disobedience was making the excuse of using the spared animals for sacrifice. God knew better and so did Samuel.

Our downfall is in our failure to obey God completely.

Read 1 Samuel 15:10-15 (ESV) ¹⁰ *The word of the LORD came to Samuel: ¹¹ "I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments." And Samuel was angry, and he cried to the LORD all night. ¹² And Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning. And it was told Samuel, "Saul came to Carmel, and behold, he set up a monument for himself and turned and passed on and went down to Gilgal." ¹³ And Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, "Blessed be you to the LORD. I have performed the commandment of the LORD." ¹⁴ And Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears and the lowing of the oxen that I hear?" ¹⁵ Saul said, "They have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen to sacrifice to the LORD your God, and the rest we have devoted to destruction."*

Some people might "get up tight" when they read that the LORD said: *I regret that I have made Saul king*. Don't get scared and make the mistake of thinking that there are limits to God's knowledge. The LORD's words to Samuel are meant to help us realize how deeply the LORD grieves over our sins. Way back in the days of Noah in **Genesis 6**, we are told how the LORD grieved over the wickedness of men. In the New Testament, another descendent of the tribe of Benjamin, Saul, said in **Ephesians 4:30 (ESV)** ³⁰ *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*

Our downfall is our rationalization of disobedience.

Read 1 Samuel 15:16-21 (ESV) ¹⁶ *Then Samuel said to Saul, "Stop! I will tell you what the LORD said to me this night." And he said to him, "Speak." ¹⁷ And Samuel said, "Though you are little in your own eyes, are you not the head of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel. ¹⁸ And the*

LORD sent you on a mission and said, 'Go, devote to destruction the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.' ¹⁹ *Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD? Why did you pounce on the spoil and do what was evil in the sight of the LORD?"* ²⁰ *And Saul said to Samuel, "I have obeyed the voice of the LORD. I have gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me. I have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and I have devoted the Amalekites to destruction."* ²¹ *But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the best of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal."*

When Achan during the battle of Jericho took some things that God had said to destroy, he hid what he stole. Saul's disobedience was so blatant that he did not even attempt to hide what he had done even though there was no legitimate justification. Sin is always sin no matter how you package it.

He was to annihilate a nation that for centuries had done evil, but he ended up doing evil himself. Confronted with this accusation, Saul began to argue with God's servant and deny that he had any done wrong. He lied. He blamed his army and he used the feeble excuse of dedicating the spared animals as sacrifices for the Lord. **Hebrews 4:13 (ESV)** ¹³ *And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.*

Our circumstances may be different from Saul's but we live in the great society of justifiers – justifiers of our own terms and our own beliefs ignoring what the Word of God says. It is amazing how vehemently someone will defend their unbelief because they want to come to God on their terms. They want God to be who THEY want Him to be, rather than what God has clearly revealed in His Word.

Our downfall is our desire for human approval.

Read 1 Samuel 15:22 (ESV) ²² *And Samuel said, "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.*

These words of Samuel have always been one of my favorite passages but it was some time before I realized that these words were spoken to the disobedient Saul. It is good to go back and look at favorite passages at times within their context. Instead of me commenting on this verse, the prophet Micah will do it! **Micah 6:6-8 (ESV)** ⁶ *"With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?"* ⁷ *Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"* ⁸ *He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*

Read 1 Samuel 15:23 (ESV) ²³ *For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has also rejected you from being king.*”

We like to categorize sins – this sin is worse than that one. God’s Word says that rebelling against God is as evil as witchcraft! Later, Saul would actually resort to witchcraft. To know God's will and deliberately disobey it is to put ourselves above God and therefore become our own god. This is the vilest form of idolatry.

Read 1 Samuel 15:24-26 (ESV) ²⁴ *Saul said to Samuel, “I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice.* ²⁵ *Now therefore, please pardon my sin and return with me that I may bow before the LORD.”* ²⁶ *And Samuel said to Saul, “I will not return with you. For you have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel.”*”

Confession without true repentance does not count with God. Notice the excuses: *I feared the people and obeyed their voice*. Saul was all about blaming someone else. John and I like to watch Food Network Star. Recently, there was a contestant who always made excuses for her failed dishes. Finally, Bobby Flay told her, “we don’t want your excuses. We just want you to listen to what we say and do it.” She went home last week! Saul lost more than Food Network Star, God rejected him as king!

Read 1 Samuel 15:27-31 (ESV) ²⁷ *As Samuel turned to go away, Saul seized the skirt of his robe, and it tore.* ²⁸ *And Samuel said to him, “The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you.* ²⁹ *And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret.”* ³⁰ *Then he said, “I have sinned; yet honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, that I may bow before the LORD your God.”* ³¹ *So Samuel turned back after Saul, and Saul bowed before the LORD.*”

In his disobedience of making his own sacrifices, Saul forfeited the dynasty, but now he lost his throne. Verse 30 makes it clear that Saul’s confession in verse 24 was not true repentance. He wanted Samuel to honor him before the people and that was the true reason he confessed. His confession had nothing to do with genuine repentance. The downfall of Israel’s first king came because he was more interested in substituting his will for God’s will.

Ron Mattoon asks, “How does a person today substitute his will for God's will?”

- Making decisions without praying about them first.
- Making decisions that violate God’s Word.
- Becoming hasty and impatient, getting ahead of the Lord.
- Delaying when God is leading us forward.

The Lord’s yoke never fits a stiff neck!