

PROMISED LAND 2: Lesson One,
Saul's Disobedience and Rejection
1 Samuel 13 - 15

Subject: Saul disobeyed God twice and God rejected him as Israel's king.

Main Idea: When we shift our gaze from God to ourselves, disobedience will follow.

Principles:

1. *Obedience is a matter of trust.*
2. *When God's glory is our primary motivation, we find ourselves healthier and more eager to obey Him.*

Introduction

I would bet that any of you who drive have at least one vivid memory of learning to do so. When I was an older teenager, my parents owned a small vehicle with the stick shift up on the steering wheel. I still remember the agonizing sounds the car would make as I shifted from one gear to the next. In retrospect, I'm surprised I wasn't killed driving along the busy highway between our house and the school I attended, but the memory still brings a smile to my face.

The concept of shifting has significant value for our personal lives. Those who work hard physically discover their stamina renewed by periods of physical rest. Those who sit at a desk or look at a computer screen all day understand the importance of standing up from time to time and regularly shifting their eyes to something more distant. If we have been grieving or carry some emotional burden, we discover we cannot hold up indefinitely without eventually shifting our focus to something in life that is more hopeful. The point is that if we don't learn to make these shifts, we can ruin our health (our physical health, our emotional health, and our spiritual health) just as easily as we can ruin a vehicle's transmission by failing to shift.

1 Samuel 13-15 warns against the health hazard of failing to shift. More specifically, Saul's life warns against the failure to shift our focus from self to God. In the introduction, I mentioned that our study would challenge us to avoid the icy pathways on which the Israelites became stuck. One of the greatest hindrances to maturity in the Christian life is self-focus. Conversely, show me a person whose eyes are consistently on God and I'll show you a wise, obedient, joyful, and mature Christian! Saul's failure to make this shift left him spiritually unhealthy. Like most of us at some time in our lives, he was preoccupied with what others thought of him and how to bring situations to his own advantage. Each of Saul's failed opportunities to shift his focus to God left him all the more unfit to serve as Israel's king. As his story demonstrates, self-focus and disobedience are always linked, and they became Saul's undoing.

I. **Saul's Disobedience and Battle with the Philistines** – 1 Samuel 13-14

A. **Saul's Disobedience at Gilgal** – 1 Samuel 13

i. The Philistine Threat – 13:1-7

1. *Translation of 13:1*

a. Throughout the ages, scholars have attempted to understand the Hebrew text of verse 1. Taken as it is, the Hebrew says that Saul was one year old when he became king and he reigned 2 years over Israel. Some have explained the apparent error by concluding that two numbers existed in the original text that somehow dropped out in transmission.

i. One translation combines the ideas of the previous verses and the one immediately following: "Saul lived for one year [presumably the time between his anointing and assuming the throne] and then became king, and when he had reigned for two years over Israel Saul chose three thousand men of Israel."ⁱ

ii. Others believe numbers were inadvertently dropped in transmission and have attempted to supply them: "Saul was *thirty* years old when he became king, and he reigned over Israel *forty*-two years."ⁱⁱ The first number is merely a speculation and the second is based on Paul's statement in Acts 13:21 that Saul reigned forty years (assuming Paul gave a round figure).

b. Since these kinds of issues are found several places in the books of Samuel, we should remember that allowing some margin for human error in transmission does nothing to diminish the fact that the original texts were "God-breathed" (2 Timothy 3:16) and without error. Like many ancient documents, the originals are no longer in existence but when compared to other literature of antiquity, "the accuracy of the Hebrew copyists is astonishing."ⁱⁱⁱ Most importantly, none of the verses, phrases, or words that have (or may have) suffered in transmission (like those in 13:1) have any bearing whatsoever on the essential truths and message of God's word.

2. *Saul's Army*

a. The Ammonites and Philistines were Israel's primary enemies at the time when Saul became king (Judges 10:7-8; 13:1). One of the reasons the Israelites wanted a king was to lead them in battle (1 Samuel 8:20), and deliverance from the Philistines was a specific purpose for which God had said He chose Saul (1 Samuel 9:16).

b. At the time of Saul's anointing, Samuel instructed him (by implication) to attack the Philistine outpost at Gibeah (10:5-7) and then (specifically) to wait at Gilgal for Samuel's further instructions (10:8). From among all Israel's fighting men, Saul chose an army of 3000. Of these, 2000 remained with him at Mikdash and 1000 were placed under the leadership of Saul's son Jonathan at Gibeah¹, which was Israel's capital at the time and also Saul's hometown (10:26). Based on these numbers, it seems that Saul was not expecting an all-out war with the Philistines this early in his reign and hoped (for the time being) to simply remove the Philistine outpost (13:3).

3. *Jonathan's Attack on the Philistine Outpost*

a. Interestingly, it was not Saul but his son Jonathan who initiated the attack on the outpost. We are not told whether or not Saul may have ordered him to do so. Regardless, the scriptures credit Jonathan for carrying it out, even though the Israelites somehow came to believe that the credit belonged to Saul: "So all Israel heard the news: 'Saul has attacked the Philistine outpost...'" (13:4).

b. Apparently, Jonathan was successful enough that the Philistines planned a counterattack. Although Saul surely anticipated this as a possible outcome of any aggression, he was certainly unprepared for the magnitude of the Philistine response. The Philistines gathered an army as vast as the "sand on the seashore." Additionally, they had the advantage of possessing chariots (something the Israelites did not have until Solomon's time).

c. Saul summoned the Israelites to join him about ten miles to the east at Gilgal, the place he was to await Samuel's instructions (10:8). However, when his men saw the size of the Philistine army, many of them deserted. Saul remained, with the few troops who were left trembling behind him.

ii. Saul's Decision – 13:8-10

1. Samuel's earlier instruction to Saul had been to wait for him at Gilgal for seven days. When Samuel arrived, he would sacrifice burnt offerings and fellowship offerings and give Saul further instructions. Although Saul was desperate, he waited the seven days without taking action. Meanwhile, his men continued to scatter.

¹ Some distinction may exist between "Geba," "Gibeah of Benjamin," "Gibeah of Saul," and "Gibeah of God" (*Gibeah* simply means "hill") but all of these "hills" were within the same small region in Benjamin.

2. When Samuel did not appear, Saul decided to take action and he began offering the sacrifices. Although the text is not clear on this point, it may have been at the very end of the seventh day, for some time between Saul's sacrifice of the burnt offering and the fellowship offering, Samuel arrived.

iii. Samuel's Rebuke – 13:11-15

1. Samuel asked Saul, "What have you done?" (13:11). Saul excused his action by pointing out the scattering of his men, the size of the Philistine army, and Samuel's failure to arrive when he expected. (As we later discover, Saul developed a habit of giving excuses.) Samuel said that Saul had acted foolishly and had not kept the command the Lord gave him.
 - a. It is difficult not to feel some sympathy for Saul as he waited for Samuel's arrival. Some Bible students believe that Saul's sin was unlawfully taking on himself the priestly responsibility of offering sacrifices.^{iv} However, we cannot rule out the possibility that the use of a priest is assumed since we are later told that Kings David and Solomon also "offered sacrifices" (2 Samuel 24:25; 1 Kings 3:4, 8:63), without any hint of wrongdoing on their part.
 - b. Regardless of whether or not Saul used a priest, the more plausible reason for his disobedience is evident in the context of Israel's government. Those who have read the earlier chapters of 1 Samuel will recognize that the instructions Saul had been given about waiting in Gilgal were set in the larger context of Saul's submission to the order into which he had been crowned king. This order had been clearly communicated to Saul and all the people at Saul's installations (not only verbally but apparently also in writing, 1 Samuel 10:25). Israel's kings were not absolute rulers. They were subordinate to *God's* authority (12:14-15). This type of government, in which God alone is acknowledged as the sovereign ruler (whether or not he has a human representative) is called a "theocracy." Furthermore, Saul and the Israelites knew that God communicated to the king through His prophets. In this sense, the prophet's role was functionally superior to the king's. Therefore, Saul's orders were not simply a matter of waiting out a specific length of time but of recognizing that he was under the authority of God and his prophet Samuel. His disobedience seems not so much to have been a matter of assuming the role of the priest but of assuming the authority granted to Samuel, the prophet.

He believed he could act independently of Samuel and still earn God's blessing.

2. Without question, Saul was sorely tried by his circumstances. Ultimately, he had to decide whether he would trust God with his life and the lives of his men and continue to wait or act independently. Perhaps the reason we sympathize with Saul is that we are so much like him, so quick to panic, forget Who is really in control, and act independently! Our need is the same as his: we need to shift our eyes from our circumstances and ourselves to God. When we don't, we end up in disobedience.
3. Samuel told Saul that if he had obeyed, the Lord would have established his kingdom for all time. Since he did not, his kingdom would not endure. The statement that the Lord would have established Saul's kingdom for all time is not in conflict with the idea that God had planned all along to establish David's dynasty. Perhaps, Saul's descendants would have maintained the northern ten tribes while David's descendants ruled in the south. In God's omniscience, He knew that this would never occur yet stated what could have been barring Saul's fatal flaw.^v
- iv. The Philistines' Advantage – 13:16-22: After Samuel departed, Saul took a head count and saw that only 600 of his army of 3,000 remained. In the meantime, the Philistines began sending out raiding parties from their camp, possibly to further intimidate the people. A further cause for intimidation was that the Philistines had prevented the Israelites from practicing (or learning the art of) metallurgy. They were dependent on the Philistines to sharpen their farming instruments and had almost no metal weapons. Only Saul and Jonathan possessed a sword or spear. This rest of the Israelites were left to fight with inferior stone or wooden weapons.

B. Jonathan's Faith and Saul's Vow – 1 Samuel 14: Chapter 14 opens by contrasting the actions of Jonathan and Saul. Later in 1 Samuel, David's faith and leadership will appear in stark contrast to Saul's. First, Saul's disobedience is contrasted with the faith and leadership of his own son Jonathan.

i. Jonathan's Initiative – 14:1-16

1. While Jonathan was planning a covert attack, Saul was sitting under a tree. Most likely, Saul was holding court (Deborah had also held court under a tree, Judges 4:5). With him were his 600 men and the high priest Ahijah, grandson of the judge and high priest Eli. We have our first clue that the relationship between Jonathan and his father was not all it could be in that Jonathan chose not to tell his father of his plan.

2. Jonathan took only his armor-bearer with him. In a strong statement of faith, he said to him, “Come, let’s go over to the outpost of those uncircumcised men. Perhaps the Lord will act in our behalf. Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few” (14:6). From this, we learn two things about Jonathan: he was willing to risk his life for Israel and he was a man who trusted God. Ephesians 3:20 tells us that God is able to do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine. Jonathan knew the risks: God was able but might not be willing. Yet because God had repeatedly told the Israelites to remove their enemies from the land (Joshua 23:4-10; 13:1-5) and had specifically tasked his father with removing the Philistines (1 Samuel 9:16), Jonathan understood that this was holy war and knew he could trust God with the outcome. This trust was the very quality Saul lacked.
 3. Jonathan and his armor-bearer showed themselves to the Philistines in order to gauge their response. When the Philistines dared them to approach, they understood it as a sign that God was with them in their plan. After climbing hand and foot up a cliff to reach them, Jonathan and his armor-bearer slew twenty Philistines.
 4. The Lord multiplied the effect of Jonathan’s courageous action. The Philistines undoubtedly interpreted Jonathan’s success as a sign that their god was not with them and, just as this idea was settling upon them, the Lord sent a perfectly timed earthquake to finish unnerving them.
- ii. Saul’s Response – 14:16-23
1. Saul could not see what Jonathan had done, but his lookouts noticed the Philistines fleeing in all directions. Assuming some possible initiative from his own men, Saul took a quick headcount and discovered Jonathan was the one missing. Perhaps he knew his son well enough to suspect he might have been involved.
 2. Saul’s first response was to seek guidance from the Lord (probably through the ephod worn by the priest) and he ordered the Ark of the Lord to be brought to him. However, as the tumult in the Philistine camp increased, he ordered Ahijah the priest to withdraw from the process, further evidence that Saul’s eyes were not on God. Nevertheless, “the Lord saved Israel” (14:23) from the vast Philistine army. Those who had previously deserted rejoined the Israelite forces and they pursued the terrified Philistines all day long.

- iii. Saul's Foolish Curse – 14:24-46: Saul not only lacked faith, he also lacked wisdom and put his men under a foolish curse. Although they needed all the energy they could muster, he forbid them from eating until the day of fighting ended. The rash curse had several serious outcomes.
1. Unaware of his father's curse, Jonathan ate some honey. Later, Saul assumed the Lord's unwillingness to answer him resulted from someone's guilt and vowed to kill that man, even if it was his own son. Yet, not a man present betrayed Jonathan. They cast their loyalty with the man who had provided them courageous and faith-filled leadership rather than one who had made their job more difficult. When Jonathan's guilt was finally exposed, the other soldiers sided against Saul and again protected him.
 2. A second outcome of Saul's foolish curse was that, at the day's end, his famished men began eating animals from the plunder without taking the time to drain the blood, as the Law required (Leviticus 3:17; 7:26). When Saul learned of it, he provided an elevated surface on which the men could slaughter the animals and allow the blood to drain. Verse 35 states that Saul built an altar (it seems, the same stone on which the animals were being slaughtered) and that this was the first time he had done so. Perhaps, he was attempting to make propitiation for the guilt of his men. Nevertheless, the fact that Saul had never built an altar previously certainly seems to indicate a lack of concern with spiritual matters.
 3. The third outcome was that the Israelites' victory was not as great as it could have been (14:30). Not only had his men lacked the energy they needed during the day, Saul's aspirations of pursuing the Philistines throughout the night ended after his men sided against him with Jonathan.
- iv. The Kind of King Israel Wanted – 14:47-52: The last few verses of chapter 14 summarize Saul's accomplishments and tell us of his family. They also show that God gave the Israelites the kind of king for which they asked.
1. The Israelites asked for a king who would lead them in their battles (8:20). Militarily, Saul was successful. Yet, because of the ongoing, bitter war with the Philistines, he instituted a system of forced enlistment. His conscription was in direct fulfillment of Samuel's prophecy and reminds us that God had issued warnings about having the kind of king they wanted (8:11).

2. Secondly, the Israelites wanted a king to provide them with a natural succession of leaders and the listing of Saul's sons tells us that their desire was again satisfied. Little did they know at the time that none of Saul's sons would ever become king.
3. Finally, and most tellingly, Saul proved he was the kind of king for which Israel asked when he failed to wait for Samuel at Gilgal and acted independently. The kings of other nations had absolute power in their lands (or so they and their people assumed). Although God never granted Saul final authority (indeed, He *could* never grant to another what belongs to Him alone), like the kings of other nations, Saul acted as though he had that right.

Summary Statement: Saul's willingness to serve under God's authority was tested when Samuel's arrival was delayed. The crisis revealed what was in Saul's heart: *he trusted himself more than he trusted God*. Without shifting his eyes Godward, he would continually fail to submit to God's authority.

Principle: *Obedience is a matter of trust.*

Saul was instructed to wait for Samuel. He was not authorized to act independently of him (even after 7 days), but he feared the results of submitting to that order. The question was, "Could Saul wait beyond the time Samuel said to expect him and trust God with the results? What if Saul's obedience meant that the Philistines overran him and his few men? Did he *really* trust God, even if that happened, or did he prefer to trust in himself?" The questions Saul faced are the same ones we face regularly: Will we obey God and trust Him with the results? Or do we think we are better off relying on ourselves?

Illustration: As we will discover in our next lesson, the consequences of obedience to God's Law were very serious for David. Saul sought his life yet, even when the circumstances seemed to favor it and his closest allies approved it, David refused to take Saul's life. He trusted that God would transfer the kingdom to him at the right time, even though the consequences of the delay were life threatening for him.

Application: Submitting to God's authority (and the authority of those under whom He places us) is a matter of trust. If our eyes are focused on ourselves and our circumstances, we are certain to disobey. But when we shift our eyes to God, we see His power, His wisdom, His eternal perspective, His glory – we see One who is *able* to take care of our concerns and can be *trusted* to do what is best.

Transition: If we have had any doubt about how self-focused Saul really was in the earlier chapters, chapter 15 will settle them.

II. Saul's Disobedience and Battle with the Amalekites – 1 Samuel 15

A. Saul's Orders to "Totally Destroy" the Amalekites – 1 Samuel 15:1-11

i. Hērem

1. In order to understand the nature of Saul's disobedience in this chapter, we must review a lesson the book of Joshua teaches. It revolves around a single Hebrew word, the word *hērem*. As the NIV Bible notes, "The Hebrew term refers to the irrevocable giving over of things or persons to the LORD, often by totally destroying them."^{vi} Thus, *hērem* denotes holy war. Old Testament passages such as these make no attempt to soften God's judgment (although the concept is certainly not only an Old Testament one). To fall under the judgment of God is a true horror. Yet God is the Owner of all the earth and He has the right to reclaim our lives, our families, and our possessions. Furthermore, His judgments are always fair and right. One day, when all is made known, we will agree that God's judgments are just and bring Him glory.
2. The Israelites understood that they were to act as *God's* instrument of justice on an extremely wicked people (with whom He had been patient for many generations). These people (and often their flocks, herds and household possessions) were "under the ban" (also sometimes translated "devoted to the Lord" or "liable to destruction").

ii. The Amalekites: The Amalekites were descendants of Esau (Genesis 36:12). According to Exodus 17:8-16 and Deuteronomy 25:17-19, just after the Israelites left Egypt, at a time when they were especially vulnerable, because they were "weary and worn out," the Amalekites picked off and killed those Israelites who were elderly, infirm, weak and lagged behind. As a result, the Lord decreed the Amalekites' annihilation. Yet God waited for approximately 200-400 years before He instructed Saul (through Samuel) to carry out His judgment. During that time, the Amalekites had continued to prove their contempt for God through their mistreatment of His people (Judges 3:12-14, 6:3-5, 7:12).

iii. Samuel's Words – 15:1-3

1. On the heels of the account of chapters 13-14, it is no surprise that Samuel began his conversation with Saul by reminding him of the structure of authority under which Saul was to serve as king. Samuel had further orders from God for Saul and he was reminding him to take his instructions seriously.
2. Samuel's message from the Lord to Saul was that he was to "completely destroy" (a reference to *hērem*) the Amalekites. Although the Lord had permitted Israel to keep the plunder on some occasions, Saul was specifically told not to spare any of the women,

children, or animals. Typically, ancient Near Eastern kings would keep such things for their personal benefit and as trophies of their victory, but God wanted everything and everyone among them destroyed.

- iv. Saul's Ambush – 15:4-9: Saul and a large Israelite army set an ambush outside the territory of the Amalekites, sending away the Kenites who were living in the vicinity since they were not under God's curse. Then, Saul attacked and destroyed all the Amalekites, *except* for their king and the best of their flocks and herds.² In order to make sure we understand Saul's responsibility in sparing these, verse 9 specifically emphasizes that Saul and his men were "unwilling" to completely destroy them. Saul later claimed that he had intended to offer the animals to the Lord as a sacrifice. Perhaps he genuinely intended to do so, but the monument he set up in his honor indicates that Saul's eyes were on his own glory, not the Lord's. He failed to grasp the significance of being God's agent of judgment and spared a portion of what God had condemned, arrogantly usurping God's role and making himself the judge!
- v. The Lord's Regret – 15:10-11: The self-focus God saw in Saul when he failed to wait for Samuel in chapter 13 is revealed to us all the more clearly in chapter 15: Saul was more interested in what benefitted *him* than what brought God glory. The Lord told Samuel that, because of Saul's ongoing rebellion, He regretted making Saul king.
 1. Later in the passage, Samuel told Saul, "He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change His mind." There is no conflict between the Lord's regret and His unchangeable, divine nature. Walter Kaiser Jr. has written, "God's essence and character, His resolute determination to punish sin and to reward virtue, are unchanging (see Mal 3:6). These are absolute and unconditional affirmations that Scripture everywhere teaches. But this does not mean that all His promises and warnings are unconditional. Many turn on either an expressed or an implied condition."^{vii} God's nature and will can remain unchanging and He can, at the same time, still respond to human choice.
 2. Additionally, when Scripture says the Lord regrets (or repents), it does not imply indecisiveness on His part or any acknowledgement of wrongdoing. As scholars Keil and Delitzsch explain, His regret is "simply the sorrow of the divine love at the rebellion of sinners."^{viii}

² Some Amalekites survived (1 Sa 27:8; 30:1, 18; 2 Sa 8:12; 1 Chr 2:55). In fact, 500 years later, the Jew Mordecai was God's instrument of judgment on a family that appears to be Agag's descendants (Est 3:1, 10).

B. Samuel's Confrontation with Saul – 1 Samuel 15:10-35: We are not told what else the Lord told Samuel that night but, whatever it was, it left Samuel angry and crying out to the Lord. Perhaps, Samuel was angry about the results of Saul's self-centeredness.

- i. Saul's Monument – 15:12: The next morning, Samuel learned that Saul had gone to Carmel to set up a monument in his own honor. Setting up a monument was not, in and of itself, a wrong thing. But those that were rightly erected were done so to honor the Lord, not the person who erected it. In this case, the "victory" for which Saul was applauding himself actually resulted from God's hand of judgment. Saul failed to grasp the awesome and awful significance of being God's instrument of justice because he only thought of himself. God's glory was at stake but he was more concerned about what others thought of him.
- ii. Saul's Denial and Excuses – 15:13-21
 1. Saul went from Carmel to Gilgal, and it was there that Samuel found him. Saul greeted him with the words, "I have carried out the Lord's instructions" (15:13). As Jeremiah 17:9 affirms, our hearts are deceptive. Apparently, Saul had convinced himself of his innocence. He had justified his disobedience because he was more concerned with how *he* could benefit and what his men thought of *him* than he was concerned with God's glory.
 2. When Samuel challenged him, Saul shifted the blame onto his soldiers. *They* were the ones who spared the best among the flocks and herds, and they did so with the intent of sacrificing them to *Samuel's* God. Even if this had been true, as their leader, Saul was responsible for their actions. By blaming his men, Saul was unknowingly confessing that what his men thought of him was more important than what God thought of him.
 3. Notice also that, three times in this chapter, Saul speaks to Samuel of "the Lord *your* God" (15:15, 21, 30). Again, Saul unknowingly exposed his failure: He had turned from the Lord. His focus was on himself.
 4. In the context of Saul's defense, he let a new piece of information slip: He had not only spared animals but also the Amalekite king, Agag! We can only guess at his reason for doing so. Perhaps he intended to make a personal slave of him. The presence of Agag, the bleating of sheep and the lowing of cattle were all evidence that Saul had decided to "play God" and determine who and what would be spared.

iii. The Lord's Response – 15:22-26

1. *Obedience over Sacrifice*: Samuel's well-known response, to obey is better than to sacrifice (15:22), was not an "either/or" declaration but a statement of priorities. The Lord indeed expects us to offer Him sacrifices, but they are meaningless when our hearts are not right. Religious activity of any sort can never substitute for faith and obedience.
2. *The Lord's Final Rejection of Saul*: Ultimately, Samuel told Saul that because he had rejected the Lord, the Lord had rejected him as king (15:23, 26). If the Lord had previously only denied him a lasting dynasty (13:13), now Saul was permanently and finally rejected as king. Although he continued to be recognized as king by the Israelites for a number of years thereafter, in God's eyes, Saul's reign was over.

iv. Saul's Foolishness – 15:27-33

1. *Saul's Regret*: Twice, Saul confessed to Samuel, "I have sinned" (15:24, 30). He confessed that he feared his men more than he feared the Lord. He knew he was wrong. Genuine repentance, however, is far more than regret; it is changing one's course and turning back to the Lord. At first, it seems that this was Saul's intent, for he twice asked Samuel to worship the Lord with him (15:25, 30). Samuel initially refused but later relented and went with him. When Saul asked Samuel to go with him the second time, his true motives were revealed. "Please *honor me* before the elders of *my* people and before Israel," he begged. Saul had forgotten Whose people he was appointed to rule. He was consumed with himself and his own honor.
2. *Samuel's Torn Robe*: When Samuel turned away from Saul, Saul grabbed Samuel's robe and it tore. One's robe was often considered a symbol of his position and authority. The rending of Samuel's robe symbolized the tearing apart of the relationship of Saul and Samuel. More than that, Samuel told Saul that it symbolized the tearing of the kingdom from Saul. The Lord would instead give it to one of Saul's neighbors (who, as the next chapter indicates, was David).
3. *Agag's Death*: Samuel killed Agag, something Saul should have done quickly himself if he had truly repented.

- v. Samuel's Refusal to See Saul – 15:34-35: Until the day Saul died, Samuel never initiated contact with him again (even though Saul twice initiated contact [19:23-24, 28:10-11]). Samuel mourned for Saul but since the Lord had rejected him, Samuel did as well.

Summary Statement: Saul failed to grasp the significance of being God’s agent of judgment and disobeyed by sparing a portion of what God had condemned. In 15:23, Samuel told Saul that rebellion is like the sin of divination (like diviners, Saul did not look to God for guidance but elsewhere; in Saul’s case, he looked to himself) and arrogance like the evil of idolatry (idolatry is worship of anything other than God; arrogance is idolatry in that it is worship of self). Instead of shifting his eyes to God’s glory, Saul was focused on his own glory.

Principle: *When God’s glory is our primary motivation, we find ourselves healthier and more eager to obey Him.*

Conclusion

Saul’s legacy is one of disobedience and his life is a warning for us. As we will learn in the next lesson, ultimately, Saul’s self-focus made him mentally unstable. If we want to be spiritually healthy, we have to shift our eyes off of ourselves and onto God.

Priscilla Shirer tells of her nighttime flight from London to Johannesburg. With the other passengers, she settled back in her chair and attempted to get some sleep, but instead, she found herself gazing out the window at the “thick, velvety darkness.” Suddenly, the plane “burst through a layer of thick clouds and [was awash] in the full, stark sunlight of daytime.” As she attempted to allow her pupils to adjust, the digital clock in front of her caught her attention. It read 3:48 a.m. How strange, she thought, that it is always nighttime somewhere on the planet while the bright light of day shines elsewhere? Psalm 139:12 came to mind: “Even the darkness is not dark to You, and the night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike to you.” Priscilla writes, “Every single night of your life contains a 3:48 a.m. A very dark one, at that.” At those times, when our fears and worries are most likely to plague us, we can remember that it is never dark where God lives. *Shifting our eyes* to Jesus, she says, requires “a deliberate decision to change your perspective.” Making *that shift* requires some practice, since we are so accustomed to looking at ourselves and our circumstances.^{ix}

Saul faced a “3:48 a.m. crisis moment” at Gilgal, and again when charged with destroying the Amalekites. On both occasions, he decided it was easier to keep looking into the darkness of self, where his pupils were already adjusted, than to shift his focus to the light of God’s ability and God’s glory. Ultimately, God rejected Saul. He was disobedient and spiritually unhealthy because *he never made the necessary shift*.

When was the last time you consciously chose to look away from self to God, to worship and meditate on *Him* – His power, His wisdom, His eternal perspective, His promises, His awesome character and His glory? Doing so will not only make us more eager to obey Him but will result in greater emotional, mental, spiritual (and perhaps even physical) health. It may be more natural to keep our eyes on ourselves, but like a vehicle that needs its gears shifted, we can’t be healthy unless we make the shift.

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- ⁱ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2001). (1 Sa 13:1–2). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.
- ⁱⁱ *The New International Version*. (2011). (1 Sa 13:1). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- ⁱⁱⁱ McDowell, Josh (1999). *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (69-70). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers.
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- ^v Kaiser, W. C., Jr., Davids, P. H., Bruce, F. F., & Brauch, M. T. (1996). *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (p. 205). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity.
- ^{vi} *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. (1984). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
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