

## STUDY 5

### 1 Samuel 13-15

#### Mishmash at Michmash and Dismissal at Gilgal

#### The Beginning of the End

Read 1 Samuel 13.1-23

##### Saul's Reign

We do not know exactly how old Saul was when he became king, or for how long he reigned. The Hebrew text of the Bible that we have today has lost these particular details at 1 Sam 13.1. We can, however, make some good guesses. When Samuel anoints Saul in chapter 9, he is described as a 'man'. This means that Saul was probably at least 20 years old, because 'man' usually refers to males of fighting age (over 20 years); and, after all, the elders of Israel had demanded a king who could lead them into battle. We also know that Saul eventually had four sons, and that at least three of them were of fighting age while he was still alive (Saul also had two daughters). Thus, by chapter 13, Saul had probably been king for a little over 20 years.

##### *Just for starters*

Think of some famous leaders who "fell from grace"? What caused their downfall?

##### *Investigate*

1. What factors lead to Israel's fear? (13.5-7, 19-23)

##### *Think it through*

2. Do you think Saul is wise or foolish in offering the sacrifices? (13.8-13)

### **King and Prophet**

Israel was a nation that was ruled by the word of the LORD. As such, the prophet, who delivered the word of the LORD, had the most important office in the nation. Even the king was to be subject to the word of the LORD's prophet. In Deuteronomy 18.15-22, the LORD had promised to raise up a prophet like Moses to guide the nation of Israel, and the nation was to show complete obedience to the prophet's word. Although this promise ultimately finds its fulfilment in the Lord Jesus, the LORD did indeed raise up numerous prophets to bring His word to Israel. Samuel was one such prophet. For Saul, this presented a dilemma. Saul took a course of action that to him seemed perfectly logical—it made good sense. And clear, logical thinking is what any nation would want from their leader. However, Saul also had to contend with the direct word of the prophet. Thus, for Saul, we have a problem: to what extent could he himself follow his own logical instincts? How much authority did his own good ideas and commands carry? In other words, did Saul have the authority of a prophet? Was Saul also among the prophets?

## **A Turn of Events**

### **Read 1 Samuel 14**

#### *Investigate*

3. How does Jonathan's behaviour contrast with Saul's? (14.1-7)?
  
4. What is Jonathan's reasoning for his actions? What is the result? (14.6-7, 14-23)

### **Urim and Thummim**

We are not exactly sure what the Urim and Thummim were. We do know that they were commissioned by the LORD to be carried on the breastplate of the High Priest (Exod 28.30) and only the priests handled them for determining divine decisions (Num 27.21; Deut 33.8; Ezra 2.63). Some have thought that 'Urim and Thummim' was the term given to the twelve precious stones that were inlaid into the High Priest's breastplate (Exod 28.17-21). However, that is just a guess. It is reasonable to assume, however, that whenever an 'ephod' (the priestly garment) appears in a narrative, it is mentioned because it has the Urim and Thummim with it (1 Sam 14.3).

#### *Think it through*

5. Why was Saul's vow foolish? (14.30, 32-34)
  
6. What does God's Law say about broken vows (Deut 5.11, 23.21-23)? How does this reflect on Saul and his vow?

## A Turn for the Worse

### Read 1 Samuel 15

#### *Investigate*

7. What does Samuel instruct Saul to do? Why? (15.2-3, 18)
8. Does Saul follow through on God's instructions given through Samuel? Why or why not? (15.7-9, 14-15)

#### **Sacred Ban**

The LORD brought the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt to give them the land of Canaan, just as he had promised to Abraham. God gave Israel the land by pouring out his fearsome judgement on the pagan inhabitants of Canaan for their terrible sinfulness. He used Israel to do this by having them execute a 'sacred ban'—that is, God demanded that Israel devote the inhabitants to him for destruction: men, women, children and all their possessions (Deut 7).

To us today this sounds like a harsh and even criminal measure, similar to the atrocity of ethnic cleansing. However, God takes sin very seriously (compare Jesus' shocking words in Mat 5.29-30) and demanded that Israel be a holy nation—that is, an especially distinguished nation. As such, he ordered a thorough purge of sin from Israel's midst. A sacred ban was not so much 'ethnic cleansing' as 'sin cleansing'. And by annihilating absolutely everything, the LORD made sure that there was nothing left over to lead his people Israel into pagan sinfulness.

Furthermore, to allow anyone or anything to survive a sacred ban was to stifle God's righteous judgement—in effect, to obstruct justice. Anyone who failed to carry out a sacred ban was guilty of obstructing justice and being in contempt of the LORD. When Israel first entered Canaan, an Israelite named Achan kept some of the spoil from a sacred ban (Josh 7). As such, he tainted all of Israel with sin and obstructed God's righteous judgement. As a consequence, the LORD's righteous judgement fell on Achan and his entire clan—in other words, the sacred ban fell on Achan and all that was his. He and his family were stoned to death and their bodies and possessions were burned.

#### **The Dismis-Saul**

9. With what does Saul seem to be preoccupied? (15.12, 30)
10. How does the LORD respond to Saul's actions? (15.10-11, 22-23, 26-28)

### **Robes and cloaks**

In ancient time, robes and cloaks were symbols of authority (much as they are today). The High Priest had special robes to signify his authority to act as priest. The fact that Samuel's mother made him a robe when he was a little boy was symbolic of the authority that Samuel was to have (1 Sam 2.19). When the prophet Ahijah signalled the split of the Kingdom of Israel, he symbolically tore up a new garment (1 Kgs 11.30-32). With his cloak, the prophet Elijah parted the waters of the Jordan River, and when he was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind, he left his cloak behind for Elisha to carry on as his successor (2 Kgs 2.8-13). Here, in 1 Sam 15, the tearing of Samuel's robe is symbolic of the tearing away of Saul's kingdom.

### **Does God regret his own actions?**

After Saul's failure to carry out the sacred ban on Amalek, God expresses his regret to Samuel for having made Saul king (1 Sam 15.10). However, Saul was the king that the people of Israel wanted—not whom the LORD wanted. Popularity is not a sign of God's approval. When Israel asked for a king, they rejected the LORD. Therefore, the LORD chose to give them a reject-king. The regret that the LORD expresses over Saul is, in many ways, the regret he planned to have. It is like the LORD saying, "I'm sorry, but I'm going to have to reject Saul." As such, Samuel is fully justified in saying that God 'is not a man, that he should have regret' (1 Sam 15.29). God had given Saul the opportunities to obey him and so prosper as king: Samuel had written down the king's obligations and God's Spirit had come on Saul at crucial moments. However, Saul turns out to be the defiant people's defiant king. Saul had the appearance of a good king. However, appearances can be deceptive.

### *Think it through*

11. Has Saul's kingship been doomed from the start? (Consider 8.18; 10.19; 12.14-15; 13.13-14)

12. At this point, how are things looking for God's people and God's promises to Abraham? (12.22; 13.14; 15.28)

13. What place do the following characteristics have in leadership?

a. Obedience

b. Popularity

c. Rationality

d. Initiative

14. How does the picture of God seen throughout this study compare with popular perceptions of God today?