

Freedom Way M.B.C.

Bible Study Lesson #649

Date _____

Mishandling Holy Things (King Saul)

Biblical Passages: 1 Samuel 13:5–14;
15:10–11, 26

Supporting Passages: Genesis 17:15–16;
Leviticus 1:1–17; Deuteronomy 17:14–20;
Judges 19:1–21:25; 1 Samuel 8:1–9:2;
9:15–10:27; 11:12–15; 13:1–14; 15:10–35;
Proverbs 19:21

Memory Verse: 1 Samuel 13:14

Biblical Truth: Because of Saul's disobedience, God took away his kingship.

Context: This lesson takes a look at Israel's first king, Saul, and the mistakes he made. Though God warned the people against having a king, in their stubbornness, they refused to listen, and God gave them what they asked for. By looking at Saul's life as part of this series, people will understand how the monarchy began and the troubles it brought with it, which are foundational to an understanding of the Old Testament.

INVESTIGATION

The people of Israel had complete trust in Samuel, but as he got older, they realized Samuel's sons were not like their father. Like Eli's sons, Samuel's sons "did not walk in his ways" and "perverted justice" (1 Sam. 8:3). So the people asked for a king. Samuel prayed and sought God's leadership. God reminded him Israel had continually rejected God from the time He brought them out of Egypt to the present (1 Sam. 8:8). God instructed Samuel to warn the people that a king would take away many of their freedoms (1 Sam. 8:10–20). But the people refused to heed God's warning and demanded they be given a king. So the Lord said to Samuel, "Listen to them and give them a king" (1 Sam. 8:22). The Lord told Samuel to anoint Saul commander over the people of Israel (1 Sam. 9:15–17).

Saul was the son of Kish, a Benjamite. Saul was the most handsome person in the land and he

taller than any of the people (1 Sam. 9:1–2). When Samuel told Saul he was the desire of Israel, Saul answered that he was a Benjamite, the smallest of the tribes, and his family was the least of all the families. Initially, Saul showed humility and appeared to be a good choice for their king, but this did not last very long. Samuel could not find Saul the day he called all the people and tribes together at Mizpah. Saul already had fear and hid himself. But Samuel anointed Saul as king of Israel, and the Spirit of God came upon him.

IMPORTANCE

What was wrong with Saul's actions? Why did he face such a bad rap for his impatience? Because he mishandled something sacred—the sacrificial system God established for the nation of Israel. The Bible is God's Word, and in it God has told His people how to live holy lives. His instructions are not options, and Leviticus 1 clearly states that making sacrifices is the priest's responsibility. Yet Saul, afraid to wait for Samuel to arrive, "felt compelled to offer the burnt offering" (1 Sam. 13:12). Samuel spoke truth to him: "You acted foolishly . . . You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. But now your kingdom will not endure" (1 Sam. 13:13–14). Although Saul knew God's Word, he did not obey it, and as a result, God took away his kingship. Obeying God's Word is a serious matter.

Because God has given His Word, people are held responsible to do what is says. Saul's kingship consists of blunder after blunder. He acted impatient, jealous, prideful, and selfish. God forgave Saul, but Saul still had to face the consequences of his disobedient actions.

This passage also touches on other key truths: God is and The Future is in God Hands.

INTERPRETATION

1 Samuel 13:5–7 After Saul had served as king for about two years, the Philistines were gathering to fight Israel. The Philistines had 3,000 chariots and a powerful army of horses and soldiers. The men of Israel saw the great army and were afraid.

Because of their "critical" situation, the Israelites "hid in caves and thickets, among the rocks, and in pits and cisterns" (v. 6). Instead of trusting God's power and faithfulness, the people were afraid. They focused on their own weakness and the Philistines' apparent strength. They did not take courage in the Lord.

1 Samuel 13:8–12 Samuel told Saul to wait at Gilgal seven days. He would then arrive to make a sacrifice to God before the battle with the Philistines. But when Samuel had not arrived and the people were so afraid, Saul took matters into his own hands. He offered to God a burnt offering and peace offerings.

As soon as Saul finished making the sacrifice, Samuel arrived, and Saul "went out to greet him" (v. 10). Apparently Saul thought he was justified in what he did, or perhaps he hoped Samuel would not find out or get angry. Samuel asked Saul, "What have you done?" (v. 11), which resembles God's response to Adam and Eve's sin in the Garden of Eden (Lewis, 1980). Like God, Samuel asked Saul what he had done. And like Adam and Eve, Saul tried to make excuses. But he, too, was deceived into doing the wrong thing.

Saul replied to Samuel's questions with three excuses for his actions. First, he appealed to the idea that his men were afraid. Since they were afraid, should he not, as their king, do whatever he could to give them renewed courage to face the Philistines in battle? Rather than reminding his army of God's faithfulness and power, he took matters into his own hands. Second, he reminded Samuel that he did not arrive when he told Saul he would. This assertion places the blame on Samuel for Saul's rash actions. Third, Saul told Samuel what the opposing army was doing, implying that because the Philistines were preparing for battle, Saul needed to hurry and do the same. Each of these excuses shows a tremendous lack of faith in God. Because of these excuses, Saul told Samuel he "felt compelled" (v. 12) to make the sacrifice, thereby sinning against God.

1 Samuel 13:13–14 Samuel's response shows his passion for the holiness of God. He spoke the truth to Saul, telling him he "acted foolishly" by not keeping the commandment of God (v. 13). To Samuel, the right decision was clear despite the excuses Saul offered. God ordered that priests

make sacrifices, and Saul's circumstances did not change that.

Samuel then proceeded to tell Saul the consequences of his disobedience. He told Saul if he had kept God's commands, God "would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time" (v. 13). Saul had an opportunity to be established in his kingship. But by his disobedience, he gave up that potential.

Samuel also informed Saul that God had found someone to take his place—"a man after his own heart," known later as King David (v. 14). Like Saul, David made mistakes. But David treasured God's Word in his heart. When David made mistakes, he would confess, repent, and turn back to God, clinging to His Word for guidance.

1 Samuel 15:10–11 When God told Saul to attack the Amalekites and destroy everything, Saul did not listen to God's commands. He allowed King Agag to live and did not destroy the best sheep, oxen, and lambs. The Lord made His commands clear, but Saul willfully disobeyed.

Scripture says God was "grieved" that He made Saul king over Israel. God's desire was to be the only King to rule His people, but He knew the people would want a king. God told Abraham that Sarah would be the mother of kings (Gen. 17:15–16). He warned the people of the dangers of having a king and what to watch for when it happened (Deut. 17:14–20). God did not make a mistake by giving Saul the kingship; God cannot make a mistake. The harmful effects Saul's kingship had on the nation of Israel grieved God's holy heart. Samuel responded to God's word with grief as well. He was "troubled" and responded by crying out to God all night (v. 11).

1 Samuel 15:26 Samuel confronted Saul with the word God gave him. He reminded Saul that obedience is more important than burnt offerings and sacrifices to God (v. 22). Samuel told Saul God had rejected him as king (v. 23). This time Saul admitted his wrong behavior and admitted he had disobeyed God's instructions. He begged for forgiveness (v. 25). But willful disobedience and wrong decisions ultimately led to his rejection as king. Samuel told him, "I will not go back with you. You have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you as king over Israel!" (v. 26).

IMPLICATIONS

God called Saul to an awesome task, but Saul failed because of his lack of obedience to God's Word. He did not have a truly repentant spirit when he disobeyed. Saul gave up easily and lacked courage, relying on his own strength and ability. He never reached the point where he could trust God, and because Saul did not obey God's Word, he fell into sin again and again. Be especially mindful of those in your class who are discoverers. Like Saul, they sometimes act impetuous, making snap decisions when their circumstances test their faith. Encourage them to know the Word. Emphasize how the Bible has ultimate authority over all areas of life, even when patience seems difficult.

God allows us to make our own decisions. With freedom comes responsibility. You make choices every day, some good and some bad. God's grace is sufficient for all you do, and His forgiveness is always available; however, forgiveness does not mean that you will not face consequences for your actions. For example, if someone jumps off a cliff and asks God's forgiveness while falling, God would forgive that person immediately, but he or she would still hit the ground. People need to take responsibility for their decisions.