

# Samuel's Challenge

Key Verse:

**“Continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the Gospel – that you have heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under Heaven.”**

Colossians 1:23

Extra: Why do you think Samuel spoke of God's previous goodness to the Israelites?

Level 5 lesson 17

**Read: 1 Samuel 12**

**Further: Psalm 19:1-14**

**A NATION CHALLENGED**

Last lesson, we saw how despite Samuel's repeated warnings of the type of King he would prove to be, the people of Israel rejoiced at the news Saul would be their King. Now, with the whole nation gathered at Gilgal for the anointing and coronation of the new King, Samuel used the occasion to give them his final words of warning and challenge.

He began his speech by challenging them as to his own personal integrity. "I am old and grey-headed," he began. "I have been your leader until this day. Here I am; testify against me before the Lord, and before His anointed One [referring to Saul, their King]. "Whose ox have I taken? Whose ass have I taken? Who have I cheated..?"

The people willingly acknowledged the Lord was witness to Samuel's good, upright and blameless life. "You have not cheated us, nor oppressed us; neither have you taken anything from any man's hand," they said. What a wonderful testimony to a godly life! The people may have had cause to be dissatisfied with Samuel's sons - but not with Samuel! Respectfully they listened, as he recounted again what God had done for them all, from the time that Jacob went down to Egypt about 600 years previously, to their present day.

He recalled their miraculous deliverances from Pharaoh in Egypt; from Sisera; from the Philistines; and from the King of Moab. He reminded them too, of the missions of Jerub-Baal (Gideon) and Beban, and others, right up to Nahash from whom they had just been delivered. He reminded them of their idolatry - and God's forgiveness when they cried in repentance, "We have sinned!" They certainly had no cause to be dissatisfied with God either - yet still they demanded a King, even though Jehovah God was really their King (v12).

**A NATION CHARGED**

At this stage, he pointed out they now had the King they wanted. How things went from now on, would depend on their choices and behaviour. Solemnly Samuel told them what was required for the new kingdom to know God's continued blessing, guidance and protection. "If you will fear the Lord, and serve Him, and obey His voice and not rebel" he promised, "then you and the king that reigns over you will continue. But," - and what an important little word that is! - "if you will not obey the Lord, and rebel against His commands, then His hand will be against you!"

**A NATIONAL CONFESSION**

Then, to show the awesome reality of the promise, and to highlight God's displeasure at their rejection of Him, Samuel ordered the crowd to look up into the clear, blue sky. He then called on the Lord to send thunder and rain on the fields of wheat all ready for harvest, growing nearby. The Lord answered with a mighty thunderstorm!

Terrified, and in awe of both God and his prophet Samuel, the people confessed their sin, and asked Samuel to pray for them, that they might not die. Samuel assured them that providing they served the Lord, He would not forsake them, in spite of their sin, for His great Name's sake; they were still His chosen people!

What a gracious God! Samuel assured them too, of his continued prayers and guidance. How well he reflected the character of God; he had been rejected, yet he still loved them, and wished them well. His final words reveal his heart's desire for the Israelites. "Only fear the Lord;...serve Him, consider what great things He has done for you, otherwise you and your King will be consumed!"

**QUESTIONS & ANSWERS**

1. What kind of life had Samuel lived before the people?	.....
2. What did Samuel remind the people of?	.....
3. What was required of the people for them to know God's blessing?	.....
4. What was the purpose of the thunderstorm?	.....
5. How did the people respond to the storm?	.....

My Name is ..... Age .....

# Saul Forfeits his Kingdom

Key Verse:

**“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”**

Luke 14:11

Extra: What do you think is the real reason for Saul's failure?

Level 5 lesson 18

## Read 1 Samuel 13

Further reading: 2 Chronicles 26:16-21

### THE BACKGROUND

Remember how Samuel, as a young boy, had the unpleasant task of telling Eli that his days as High Priest were numbered and that his family was not to continue the priestly line? In fact, they were to be destroyed and replaced by another more faithful priest. Now again, as an old man, Samuel had a similar task to do. This time, it was regarding Saul and his kingdom, and our lesson recounts the sad story.

Shortly after beginning his reign as King, Saul established an elite group of 3,000 hand-picked soldiers. 2,000 were now with him in the camp at Michmash in the hills of Bethel, and the other 1,000 were at Gibeah with his son, Jonathan. This is actually the first time we read of Jonathan - but it won't be the last! One day, Jonathan and his 1,000 men attacked and destroyed a garrison of the Philistines at a place called Beba. Hearing of this successful attack, "Saul blew the trumpet," we read, and summoned Israel to war, saying, "Let the Hebrews hear!"

So the Israelites gathered around Saul in Gilgal. However, word also got to the Philistines of this and they answered the challenge with an immense army: 3,000 chariots, and 6,000 horsemen, along with foot soldiers "without number" - all gathered in the high country at Michmash. The Israelites were practically unarmed (see v22), and when they saw this enormous army bristling with weapons of war approaching, their courage evaporated!

Trembling in fear and distress, they began hiding themselves wherever they could; in caves, bushes and amongst the rocks wherever there was cover. Some even crossed over the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead to escape.

### THE BURNT-OFFERING

In the meantime, Saul and his faithful soldiers were waiting at Gilgal for Samuel to arrive. He had promised to come and offer sacrifices and publicly seek God's help in the looming confrontation with the Philistines.

Samuel for some reason, did not arrive at the time he had promised. Impatiently, Saul took matters into his own hands; "Bring the burnt-offering here!" he ordered. He then proceeded to offer the burnt offering and the peace offerings to God.

It seems that Saul thought his role as King entitled him to fulfil Samuel's priestly role also, but he was wrong. This was the first outward sign of arrogance in Saul's heart and a serious offence. It showed his growing disrespect, not only for the priestly role of Samuel - but for God, who had given this specific task to the priests alone. No sooner had Saul completed the offering than Samuel appeared on the scene.

Seeing at once what had taken place, he demanded an explanation of Saul. "What have you done?" he asked. Saul guiltily tried to excuse himself. "The people were scattering in fear of the advancing Philistine army and you were late in arriving," he explained, "so I felt compelled to offer the burnt-offering." Sadly, there was no hint of apology or regret.

### THE BANISHMENT

Samuel sternly denounced Saul's arrogant impatience. "You have acted foolishly!" he said. "You have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which He commanded you; for the Lord would have established your Kingdom forever. But now your Kingdom shall not continue; the Lord has sought a man after His own heart, and appointed him leader of His people!"

It would only be a matter of time now before the Kingdom was taken away from Saul and his family. Notice that God sought, "a man after His own heart" to lead His people. This was where Saul's problem lay. It is sad to see that already his heart was hardened with pride and sinfulness. He appears to have totally ignored the Word of the Lord brought by Samuel, and continued on as though nothing had happened, with no sign of grief, repentance or disappointment.

## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

- |  |       |
|--|-------|
| 1. What did Saul decide to do when he saw Jonathan's successful attack on the Philistines? | ..... |
| 2. What did the Israelites do when they saw the great army of the Philistines?             | ..... |
| 3. What did Saul do that was so wrong, and why was it wrong?                               | ..... |
| 4. How did Saul try to excuse himself?   | ..... |
| 5. What was the penalty?   | ..... |

# Philistines Miraculously Defeated

Key Verse:

**“What then shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?”**

Romans 8:31

Extra: Contrast Saul and Jonathan’s behaviour.

Level 5 lesson 19

**Read 1 Samuel 14:1-46**

**Further reading: Ephesians 6:10-20**

**A STARTLING CONTRAST**

Our story today reveals a startling contrast between King Saul and his son Jonathan. It seems all the ‘trappings’ of wealth and royalty had not affected Jonathan’s character as it had his father’s. Unlike Saul, Jonathan had grown into a man of humble integrity; loyal and brave, with a deep love for God and complete faith in Him. He loved Israel and its people and fulfilled his responsibilities as a prince and leader with dedication.

Yes, Jonathan was an inspirational leader, and as we saw last lesson, his success against the Philistine garrison prompted Saul to call Israel to war against their old enemy. The Israelites though were not so sure! They were practically unarmed and defenceless – how could they ever defeat such an enemy?! However, Jonathan was once again prepared to lead by example. “Come on,” he said to his young armour-bearer, “let’s go over to the Philistine garrison that is on the other side of the gully!”

**JONATHAN’S DARING**

What Jonathan proposed may appear foolish; an almost single-handed attack on an enemy garrison of well-armed, fully trained enemy soldiers! However, Jonathan knew his history; he remembered what God had done in past days for the people of Israel! He was convinced that numbers were nothing with God; He could deliver by many or by few. Romans 8:31 asks, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” and with this attitude, Jonathan and his loyal armour-bearer set off across the valley.

As they neared the camp, Jonathan decided to confirm the will of God in the whole mission. They would show themselves to the Philistines and their reaction would determine if this was of God, or simply human stupidity. If they invited them to “Come up,” that would be a sign that “the Lord has delivered them into our hand.” The Philistine response was immediate. “Come up here and we’ll teach you a lesson!” they jeered. “Come on!” Jonathan encouraged his friend confidently - “The Lord has given them into the hand of Israel!”

So they began climbing the steep hill towards the enemy camp. As they reached the top, an amazing thing happened. The Philistines, “fell before Jonathan, and his armour-bearer killed them behind him!”

It was a miracle; just as Jonathan said, the Lord had delivered the enemy into their hands! Panic gripped the Philistines, and an earthquake struck, adding to their terror. Some began fighting one another, while others ran for their lives in fear.

All this action had not gone unnoticed. Saul’s watchmen in Gibeah had seen the disturbance in the enemy camp. Wondering if perhaps some Israelites were involved, Saul did a quick head count of his troops and discovered Jonathan and his faithful armour-bearer were missing!

**JONATHAN’S DELIVERANCE**

Immediately, Saul ordered Ahijah the High Priest to bring the Ark, and consult the Lord about what to do. To his credit, Saul seemed to sense from the increasing panic and uproar amongst the Philistines that God was already at work! Retracting his command to the High Priest, he instead ordered the army into battle. Scripture records that even the Hebrews who had been with the Philistines, turned against them, and fought with the Israelites. In fact, Israelites from all over the area came out of hiding and joined the attack. As v23 says, “So the Lord rescued Israel that day.” and Jonathan’s courage and faith were honoured.

**SAUL’S BLUNDER**

Unfortunately, flushed with the success of battle, Saul made a foolish oath. “Cursed be the man that eats any food until the evening!” he declared. As the soldiers continued their pursuit of the enemy, they became hungry and weak. Jonathan, unaware of his father’s command, spotted a wild honeycomb and hungrily ate some. He was then told of Saul’s oath. Jonathan pointed out the foolishness of such an oath, and the unnecessary hardship it had caused the men. Later that day, the exhausted soldiers couldn’t resist the sight of the Philistines sheep and cattle, and slaughtered and ate them without even cooking them. Moses’ law of course, forbade eating meat “with the blood.” Upon finding out what had happened, Saul was naturally upset and ordered the people to make sacrifices to atone for their guilt. However, there is no hint that he ever admitted his own part in the whole episode. Eventually, he also discovered that Jonathan had broken his oath and was intent on putting him to death! However, his own men pointed out that it was, “he who had brought about this great deliverance in Israel,” and prevented Saul adding this terrible injustice to his rash and impulsive vow.

**QUESTIONS & ANSWERS**

1. What encouraged Jonathan to attack the Philistine garrison?	.....
2. What important decision did Jonathan make as they neared the camp?	.....
3. How did the armour-bearer show his loyalty to Jonathan?	.....
4. How was the Lord’s will miraculously confirmed?	.....
5. How was Jonathan’s life saved?	.....

# Saul's Kingdom Rejected

Key Verse:

**“Do not be deceived, God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.”**

Galatians 6:7

Level 5 lesson 20

Extra: Explain in your own words “To obey is better than sacrifice.”

## Read 1 Samuel 15:1-35

### Further: Psalm 20

Saul's reign, which began with such promise, was about to end. Samuel, God's Prophet, had previously declared that as a result of Saul's sin, his kingdom would not continue. Although ultimately doomed, it may have endured for a considerable time, except for Saul's sinful failure, which resulted in its premature end.

#### FEARFUL COMMAND

Saul, despite his obvious failures and weakness, was still God's anointed leader and King of Israel. As such, he was ordered by Samuel, to carry out God's righteous and holy judgement on the Amalekites; pagan idol worshippers, with a hatred and disdain for God and His people. They had attacked the Israelites earlier, and lived in complete contempt of God's righteous laws. God's instructions were to “utterly destroy them and all they have!”

Obediently, Saul gathered his troops, and with a formidable army behind him, set out to complete God's terrible judgement. Arriving at his destination, he warned the Kenites, who were not guilty like the Amalekites, to escape the coming judgement of God. Then he commenced the grim task. However, Saul again took matters into his own hands, and in direct disobedience to the word of the Lord, he spared the evil King Agag's life, along with the best of the sheep and oxen. Of course, as with all disobedience, it did not go unnoticed! God spoke to Samuel saying, “I am grieved that I have made Saul king, because he has turned back from following Me, and has not performed My commandment!” This was terrible news for Samuel, who prayed all night to the Lord about it.

#### FATAL COMPROMISE

In the morning, Samuel rose early and went to find Saul to deliver the fateful sentence. Learning that he was in Gilgal, Samuel hurried there, and finally came face to face with the king. On seeing Samuel approaching, Saul issued a very dramatic and spiritual-sounding welcome to the man of God. “The Lord bless you, I have performed the commandment of the Lord!” he began. However, this was a deliberate lie and Samuel was not fooled for a moment.

“What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears, and the lowing of cattle I hear?” he cried.

Realising he'd been caught out, Saul tried to blame others for his disobedience, and to lessen the seriousness of their offence by implying it was all for a good purpose. “They spared them,” he said, “to sacrifice to the Lord.” Samuel cut him short in mid-sentence. “Stop!” he cried. “I will tell you what the Lord has to say about the matter!” He then went on to remind Saul of his once humble spirit, and all God had done for him in exalting him to be king over Israel. Then he reminded him of the Lord's command to, “go and utterly destroy those wicked people, the Amalekites.”

#### FINAL CONDEMNATION

Confronted again with his disobedience by Samuel, Saul just repeated his earlier words, with no remorse or regret for his sinful disobedience. Rather, it was obvious that he'd had simply spared Agag the Amalekite King and kept the best of the spoils, in order to win political favour, and make himself look good in his own country. Saul had become important in his own eyes and this was his ruin. Samuel was not impressed by Saul's excuses and countered them with a statement we all would do well to note. He said that with God, “to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams.” God is pleased with obedience, not sacrifice! He wants people who obey Him in love; not people who, like Saul, selfishly go on pleasing themselves - without any thought to pleasing Him. Finally, Samuel pronounced the Lord's fateful sentence. “Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has rejected YOU as king!” What a sobering lesson this story should be to us! It clearly highlights God's perfect holiness and hatred of sin; He will not tolerate it. These Old Testament passages show this side of God's character very clearly, and we are wise not to ignore them. “The wages of sin is death!” That is why Jesus Christ had to suffer and die: to take sin's terrible penalty in our place. In grace, God can now offer forgiveness of sin to all who accept Christ's sacrifice on their behalf!

However, if we, like Saul, reject the Word of the Lord - the good news of the Gospel - we will lose something far more valuable than any earthly possession. We stand condemned before God [John 3:16-18] and will lose all hope of eternal life with God in heaven. Accept His offer of salvation today and be free of sin's awful penalty forever!

## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. What was God's command to Saul regarding the Amalekites?	.....
2. What was Saul's fatal mistake?	.....
3. How did Saul try to excuse himself?	.....
4. How will we suffer if we reject the Gospel which is God's Word?	.....
5. What have you learned from this study?	.....

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