

**The History Channel: Messages of Israel's Historians**  
**Dangerous Devotion: Kingdom Life According to Saul**  
**I Samuel 15:13-23**

Intro: I am dropping back 500 years this morning to the first king of Israel, Saul of Tarsus, who reigned 42 years. He was 30 when he started his reign, and he fell out of God's favor in just a little while.

Samuel rehearses three dimensions of the kingship of Saul of Tarsus as he prepares to deliver the bad news about his rejection as king. Saul forgot or set aside each of these each time he took things into his own hands and rejected the instructions of the Lord. Here are the perspectives that keep us true:

**I. Keep yourself in the background:** You were once small in your own eyes (1 Samuel 15:17)

\*\*\*Do you know how big a person appears to be in a picture when they are standing in the foreground? Sometimes we begin to reframe the photo of ourselves with our companions, and we place ourselves in the foreground. That is what Saul did.

A. The first time we meet Saul he sees himself as from the least clan in the smallest tribe of Israel. He has no idea why the prophet Samuel would be interested in him and his family. When the prophet is looking to anoint him as king, Saul is hiding from him in the baggage (1 Samuel 10:22).

Saul is self-effacing. He is humble. He is "small" in his own eyes, occupying a place in the background of his mental picture of the world.

B. Jesus commended this self-image and self-placement. He suggested that we should be servants of all if we want to be first in the Kingdom of God. He would have us picture ourselves, not seated at the place of honor at the banquet, but serving the food with a towel on our arm. When we see ourselves in the servant role, we see ourselves as God would have us. Jesus emphasized this "small in your own eyes" view by saying that even he, the Son of God, "did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

C. Saul has now moved himself from the background of his mental picture of the world to the foreground where he dominates the landscape and all other individuals. He is first in his own estimation, and he can do as he pleases. This pride is his first sin, not disobedience in regard to the ban. It is pride that brought down this king, and pride that will bring you down as well.

D. The wisdom literature says that pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall. Men have affairs, James Dobson says, because of their ego needs. They want to conquer, to prove themselves.

E. The companion of this inordinate pride is INSECURITY. The fact is—Saul is unstable and insecure. He wants everyone to like him, but he knows that they do not. He is afraid of betrayal on every hand—even from his favorite son, Jonathan. He is blinded by this pride to the true plan of God. Jonathan can see that David should follow his father on the throne of Israel. Saul cannot see it

**II. Keep the Lord in the Foreground:** The Lord anointed you king over Israel (1 Samuel 15:17).

A. Saul was a nobody, and he knew it at first. He knew that he had not earned a visit from the prophet. He felt unworthy for such a thing. He hid in the baggage because he was intimidated by the great man of God. He was not able to sit eye to eye with him.

He was not in royal lineage. His family was a small clan among the children of Israel. His father was a man of standing in his small call. But they had no national prominence or renown.

Saul was a tall man, but he knew his great stature was a gift, not something that he earned. He stood head and shoulders above all the others, the finest specimen of a man in all Israel.

B. The Lord selected him from among the people of Israel to lead them as their king. This selection was based upon the gracious word of God, not upon Saul's experience as a donkey herder.

We are chosen by the Lord for his gracious purposes. He does not select us for our merits any more than the children of Israel were selected as his people for being meritorious. They were in fact a tiny nation, a stubborn people. King Saul is a good look, actually, at the soul of this people. Whenever God gave them success, they got large in their own eyes and defied their God.

C. We are ANOINTED by the Holy Spirit. He abides in us, takes up residence in us. We do not anoint ourselves. We are passive in the anointing, just as Saul was. We kneel, and someone pours the oil upon us. The oil signifies the presence and favor of the Lord, and his choice of us. But we are on our knees. We do not do this for ourselves or to ourselves.

We are elevated to royalty through ADOPTION as sons of God. We are not by nature children of God but children of wrath. Yet God loved us so much that he sent his One and Only Son to die on the cross for our sin. This is our salvation.

D. We must keep this perspective all of our lives. *You did not choose me, but I chose you* (John 15:16). The Preacher of Ecclesiastes, who had fame and fortune beyond compare, concluded that everything is vain except serving the Lord and keeping his Word. Do not be proud of your good looks. They are not your own doing—nor of your athleticism or your intelligence or your financial gain. All of these are gifts. They are grace gifts. You did not earn them. You did not deserve them. And the minute you think that you deserve them, you begin the decline into your own selfishness, pointlessness, and meaninglessness.

### III. Keep the Mission in Focus: He sent you on a mission (1 Samuel 15:18).

A. Saul's mission was to "Go, and completely destroy those wicked people, the Amalekites; make war on them until you have wiped them out" (1 Samuel 15:18).

The "ban" is here in dispute—the slaughter of everything that lives and breathes explicitly including women and children as well as all domestic animals. This terrible judgment on whole peoples seems so hard to reconcile with the teachings of Jesus.

The ban seems to be the only way to keep the people of Israel from intermarriage and, eventually, from following other gods. Many illustrations of this temptation to follow the gods of foreign wives are in the OT.

This is not the first time that Saul has gone against the word of the Lord. In Chapter 13 he does his own sacrificing in the absence of Samuel, a practice that is forbidden. He has also already issued a silly and harmful decree to his soldiers that ended up putting his own son, Jonathan, before the firing squad. Only the intervention of his soldiers keeps Saul from foolishly killing his own son.

Saul's mission from God was to destroy the Amalekites. These pagan people trouble Israel for their entire history. Saul does not follow the instructions for complete annihilation of the Amalekites and their animals. Instead, he spares King Agag and the best of the flocks and herds.

Haman, whom we met last week, was an Amalekite AND an Agagite, a descendant of Agag. Many scholars believe that this is the reason Mordecai would not bow to him. And it may also explain in part the burning hatred that Haman had for the Jews. Had Saul performed his duty as outlined by Samuel, perhaps Haman would never have arisen with the intent to destroy the Jews 500 years later in Persia. His failure to perform his God-ordained mission put the entire nation in jeopardy.

B. Our anointing is clearly tied to our mission. We are chosen to be children of God, and we are called to be servants of the Lord. Note these words of Jesus again: *You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father*

*will give you whatever you ask in my name. <sup>17</sup>This is my command: Love each other (John 15:16-17).*

C. We are never so focused and purposeful in our lives as when we are living out the mission for which we are saved and called of God. We must have this mission upon our hearts every day.

D. Saul set aside his mission, and God set aside his kingship. If we set aside our mission as a church, God will raise up others to take our place in his work. Whenever you leave the mission God has given you, you are the loser.

E. We want to rebuild our city one life at a time.

\*\*\*I answered questions in the Discovery Class last week. One of them was about my own presence in New Orleans. I can tell you, my call to this city and mission in this city remain strong for me. Many of you know by heart the story of my stars. Let me tell you how I interpret my mission here in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. We want to rebuild our city one life at a time.

1. The primary focus of that mission is SPIRITUAL. We are seeking to work as medics in this battlefield, rescuing the perishing and caring for the dying.

2. A secondary focus is our hurting community. We are seeking to be engaged in the good work of restoring homes and lives in our city. We bear witness to Christ through this work.

\*\*\*I offered the invocation at the kickoff of this week of the Jimmy and Rosalyn Carter Work Project. I included in my prayer the focus of our work—bringing glory to God through Christ.

**CONCLUSION:** Have you grown large in your own eyes? Have you forgotten that all you have is a gift? Have you wandered from the mission God gave you?