

SUNDAY SCHOOL MATERIALS FOR ADULTS

LESSON 6



THE FAILURE OF SAUL

Scripture Text: 1 Samuel 13:1-15

The deterioration of Saul's character is clearly set before us. In this lesson we see the beginning of the misery and despair under which Saul lived throughout his life.

Extreme oppression from the Philistines had brought Israel to a grievous situation. Was it too much for God? Here we can plainly see the difference between trusting in earthly help and trusting in God's help. Obedience brings His help.

The rebellion against Samuel, the outward symbol of the Divine Presence, was a most serious matter and demanded immediate attention. The conflict between the king and prophet, which Saul had initiated, continued down through Israel's history. A time of extreme peril is a time to trust God. To have faith for the crises of life, build it continually from the time of conversion by obedience to, and communion with, God.

MEMORY VERSE: *And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God.—Mark 11:22*

A Discouraging Condition

1 Samuel 13:1-7 Saul had been King of Israel two years and had gathered an army of three thousand men. The remainder of the people was sent back to their tents. He kept two thousand under his own command and one thousand under Jonathan, his son. Jonathan was an excellent warrior with a pleasant personality. He was brave and faithful and is one of the most delightful characters in the Bible. Saul posted his two garrisons at strategic sites to observe the movements of the threatening Philistines. It was not long before Jonathan, tired of inaction, raided the Philistine garrison at Geba. This brought the Philistines with a much larger army than Saul's. Saul and his men had been at Michmash, a city a few miles north of Jerusalem. The Philistines took over Michmash, forcing him to retreat to Gilgal. Frightened and without weapons (**1 Samuel 13:19-22**), the Israelites left their homes and hid in caves, thickets, pits, etc., or fled to Gad and Gilead. This was a great trial of faith for Saul's trembling army.

Saul's Failure

1 Samuel 13:8-10 Here, according to **1 Samuel 10:8**, Saul was commanded to wait seven days until Samuel would come and start the battle with an offered sacrifice. The arrangement had already been set up earlier. The time was up. When Samuel did not arrive on the morning of the seventh day, Saul became alarmed. The enemy was fearsome. No move was being made. The people were scattering. It was indeed, discouraging. What was Saul to do? He looked around and not up. He looked at his earthly resources and forgot the heavenly. What were the heavenly? Samuel's promise. Samuel's position with God. God's power and faithfulness that Saul had tasted in his own experience. Samuel did not say that he would come at any set time of day; he had only said he would come on the seventh day. Forgetting these, Saul hastily overstepped his authority and took over the holy duties of offering sacrifice to God, a duty that Samuel alone was to perform. The ceremony had only begun when Samuel appeared.

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Saul Explains

1 Samuel 13:11-12 Samuel asked, **What hast thou done?** Saul gave four futile excuses for his action: 1. The scattering of the people from him. 2. Samuel's absence. 3. The gathering together of the Philistines at Michmash, and 4. Lack of a formal invoking of God's help. He said he **forced** himself. Against what did he need to use force? Against his knowledge that he was out of line. Against the impression from the Lord in that still, small voice within to wait and trust. A good lesson to learn here is the fact that God is never late; He is always on time. If only Saul had stopped, looked, and listened for guidance!

What was wrong with what Saul did? Wasn't it natural to act as he did under the pressures of the moment? That is just the point. He acted only naturally when he had the supernatural at his disposal. How often we do the same! Do we look at visible circumstances and forget God's whisper to wait upon Him? Let us be alert to avoid similar failure. Saul had been given a new heart, and had heard God speak to him. He had felt the moving of the Spirit of God. He had been used of Him to prophesy. He did not cultivate and build on these. Thus, when the crisis arose, he failed.

The Consequence

1 Samuel 13:13-15 And Samuel said to Saul, **Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God, which he commanded thee.** This was a foolish act indeed. Probably he did not plan to disobey God, but by neglect of close fellowship with the Lord, not listening, and little faith, he actually committed outward sin. Samuel pronounced words of doom on the house of Saul: **Now thy kingdom shall not continue: the Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart ... because thou hast not kept that which the Lord commanded thee.** Because of disobedience, therefore, Saul's kingship was denounced. Samuel sorrowfully left Saul and went to Gibeah, hopeful that Saul might see his error and repent of his sin.

Just Punishment

This was a crucial test, and the outcome was to affect the whole course of Saul's life. The test was whether Saul was to be a godly leader or a self-willed tyrant, whether he would be submissive to the Word of God as revealed through the Prophet or be guided by his own wishes.

Was Saul's punishment just – loss of the kingdom for one foolish act? This is consequence rather than punishment. It takes only *one* sin, *one* act of foolishness at some unguarded moment for one to reap the consequences that sin always brings – sometimes for life. Each one of us can know what God has laid out to accomplish through us. He places each where we can best serve His purpose. Will we endure when He tries us? We must, or He will choose another **after his own heart** to take our place.

Saul lost a kingdom. What are you losing, dear friend? What foundation are you laying against a future need? Can the Lord trust you? There are many that God cannot take to Heaven. This is consequence as well as punishment. God cannot carry out His plan with fearing, doubting, and disobedient people.

JUST A THOUGHT

Guilt and peace cannot live together.

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