



***Becoming Fully Devoted Followers  
by Studying the Followers Before Us***

**WEEK 17**

**SAUL**

**APRIL 23-28, 2007**

DAY	<i>THROUGH THE BIBLE</i>	ABBREVIATED STUDY
Monday	1 Samuel 25-28, Psalm 81	1 Samuel 8, Psalm 81
Tuesday	1 Samuel 29-31, Psalm 82	1 Samuel 15:1-11, Psalm 82
Wednesday	2 Samuel 1-4, Psalm 83	1 Samuel 15:10-35, Psalm 83
Thursday	2 Samuel 5-9, Psalm 84	1 Samuel 18, Psalm 84
Friday	2 Samuel 10-14, Psalm 85	1 Samuel 28, Psalm 85

**READ**

1 Samuel 8

**REFLECT**

This week we will peek into the life of Saul, the first King of Israel. We start today by revisiting a passage from last week that looks at the circumstances of his coming to be king. After the death of Joshua, the leadership in Israel were the judges, with Samuel being the last. When Samuel became old he appointed his sons to be the next judges but according to 1 Samuel 8:3 they did not walk in their father's way, which had always been pleasing to the Lord. 1 Samuel 8:3 says Samuel's sons "turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice." Now this behavior in and of itself is deplorable to God and is declared to be so multiple times throughout scripture. Exodus 23:8: "Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the righteous." Deuteronomy 16:19: "Do not pervert justice or show partiality.....Follow justice and justice alone, so that you may live and possess the land the Lord your God is giving you." Surely, Samuel's sons would have made poor leaders and caused Israel to suffer if they had remained in charge. But even though the sons were removed from leadership, their sin of perverting justice had lasting effects. It became the tipping point that caused the elders to request of Samuel not only a change in leadership, but a change in the form of leadership, from judges to a king.

While at first glance it may seem reasonable that the Elders of Israel wanted a change since they were faced with the prospect of dishonest judges, the request they made for a political king exposed two problems with their thinking. First and foremost, they insulted God by saying that

they needed a king, when God was, in fact, their king. In verse 7 God tells the dismayed Samuel that his people have been forsaking God "from the day I brought them up out of Egypt." Though God had always been faithful to Israel, providing for their needs, time and again, they felt that they knew better and that God was not enough. God decided that this time Israel's consequence for rejecting God's kingship would be to give them exactly what they requested: a political king.... with all the ramifications. In God's mercy He even warned them, through Samuel, about the reality of an Israeli King. He detailed the toll that a king would take on the people: that their sons and daughters would be taken for his own purposes; that much effort would go into war-making and that the best of what the people produced would be siphoned off for the king's use. The blatant warning was of no use and the people insisted that Samuel give them a king.

The second error in the elders' thinking was that they wanted a king so they could be "like the other nations," specifically to have a leader who would "go out before us and fight our battles" (verse 20). There is a two-fold irony here because not only had God called Israel to be His HOLY nation, a people that were set apart for God's purposes, but God had made it clear that He could and would fight for Israel Himself. In other words, they already had, in the ultimate measure, the King they were crying out for.

**RESPOND**

We are part of God's Holy Nation. Will you embrace God as King?

**PRAY**

Help us, loving God, to be subject to Your authority and to bask in Your loving leadership.

- A.T.

**READ**

1 Samuel 15:1-11

**REFLECT**

In this chapter we see the ultimate turning point for Saul in his reign as king of Israel. Asked by God through the prophet Samuel to destroy the Amalekites, Saul obeys, but only partially. The part of God's command that he neglects to do causes him to lose his kingship and eventually his life. Today we will focus on what God commanded Saul to do and some of what it reveals about God. Tomorrow we will look at Saul's reaction to God.

It is interesting to note that the message comes to Saul through Samuel who implores Saul to listen to him because he was the one who anointed him. It is as if Samuel is saying, this message comes on good authority from me and, more importantly, from God, so listen up. With that introduction to Saul's required task, Samuel begins the instructions: "This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt.'" The instructions then go on to tell Saul that he must destroy them completely, putting to death all living things.

From this brief, but harsh and explicit, command we see several insights into God's character. First, God takes the initiative and the responsibility: "I will punish the Amalekites." Even though it is Saul's job to implement God's decision, God is the one who has decided that punishment should be wrought and how. Saul's responsibility is to join with God in the plan. Next, the Lord's command, when viewed in a historical context, reveals God's patience. The Amalekites are getting punished specifically for actions they committed long before, during the Exodus. The Amalekites were known to be a treacherous people, terrorizing early Israel and other nations by raiding, plundering and

kidnapping for the slave trade. Yet God had withheld judgment for some 200-400 years, giving multiple generations of Amalekites the chance to change their ways.

Furthermore, God's plan reveals a merciful God. Though a command to smite innocent women, children and animals along with the warriors of the Amalekites seems far from what a loving God might do, it is merciful when the alternatives are considered. In calling for the warriors to be brought to justice for their horrific history of aggressive terror, God's plan would leave the rest of their society, (women, children and livestock) vulnerable to a doomed life of slow death or torturous existence. This would happen either by capture into slavery by other groups or by exposure to the elements in the desert. A swift, though violent, end to the "innocents" was the most merciful way to bring the Amalekites to justice. (For a more thorough discussion of this, visit [www.christian-thinktank.com/rbutcher1.html](http://www.christian-thinktank.com/rbutcher1.html)).

Any time God acts or speaks we have the opportunity to learn more about God's character. Often there are directives, inspirations or encouragement for our own individual lives and this is where we tend to focus our spiritual energies, but listening to and observing the way God has worked and is working in broad contexts helps us to remember that we are here for God's pleasure, not the other way around. The very good news is that being a partner in God's purposes leads to a life of deep joy.

**RESPOND**

Where do you see God working? What does this tell you about God's character? Is there a part for you?

**PRAY**

Praise be to the merciful, patient God who cares about justice. Please, God, develop those qualities in us.

- A.T.

**READ**

1 Samuel 15: 4-35

**REFLECT**

Saul's reaction to God's command to destroy the Amalekites was initially quite obedient. If each person, church and community responded so readily to God when called upon, we would be so much the better for it. Apparently Saul did not hesitate when given the command; instead his disobedience came later. Saul had shown himself to be a man not afraid of going to battle and one who was a successful strategist as well. He also showed himself to be fair in v 6 when he warned the Kenites who had been kind to Israel to get out of the warpath. He attacked the Amalekites as God instructed but made two grievous errors in judgment during the battle. He spared Agag, their king, and he kept the best of the livestock, instead of destroying them.

While these actions don't seem to be so awful – in fact they seem somewhat merciful, to not kill those you've captured – they were in direct violation of God's specific commands. They were such a violation, that twice in the chapter it says that because of these acts of Saul, the Lord was grieved that he had made Saul king. Samuel knew the enormity of it as well, for when he heard, he “was troubled” and “he cried out to the Lord all night.”

It is unclear however if Saul recognized the significance of his error, because when Samuel went to discuss it with him Saul was away congratulating himself with a monument to his victory. When eventually confronted by Samuel about his disobedience, Saul defends himself, almost boasting because he kept the best to offer the Lord God as a

burnt offering. Samuel responds with the oft-quoted refrain, “to obey is better than sacrifice” and then with the life-changing words, “because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you as king.”

At this point Saul either realizes or finally admits that he has sinned and acknowledges that he did so out of fear of the people. It is at this point that Saul's character begins to become very clear: he's most anxious for the approval of the people. Not only did that *cause* him to sin, but after hearing that the God of Israel rejected him, his main concern was to be honored before the elders of his people. He shows no reverence for the God who called him, equipped him and made him successful.

We see in this account that Saul's fatal flaw is his arrogant heart. He was willing to follow God to a point at which he then twisted God's plans to meet his own ambitions. Worst of all he was so impressed with himself that he actually thought he was doing a great job. His focus on himself blurred his vision of God's purposes and in his blindness he fell into an abyss of separation from God.

**RESPOND**

In what ways do we offer sacrifices instead of obeying our Lord God? What ways would be effective for you to sharpen your vision of God's purposes?

**PRAY**

“Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness.” Psalm 115

- A.T.

**READ**

1 Samuel 18

**REFLECT**

In this chapter we see a bit more of why Saul grieved the heart of the Lord to such an extent. Here, Saul's approval of David turns to jealousy and eventually to a fearful obsession that left Saul with a lifetime enemy. So many facets of David's connection to Saul could have been interpreted as blessings from God, but instead Saul felt threatened because his own power and public recognition were what he treasured the most.

In David, God had given Saul a successful militarist, a best friend for his son Jonathan, a beloved public figure and a man of wise humility who, if Saul had embraced and supported him, would have been nothing but an asset to Saul and Israel. But Saul chose to attend to his own pride and when the crowds praised David's battle victories above Saul's, Saul became incensed and so began his fateful jealousy of David (v 7-9). It is interesting to note in verse 10 that an evil spirit came upon Saul as an immediate result of his jealousy; it was not the cause. First he chose to be jealous, and then an evil spirit inhabited him.

It is unclear whether that evil spirit caused his other actions, but two things are clear. Saul's fear of David grew and his communion with God was absent. Not only does verse 12 explicitly state that God had left Saul, but in verses 13-30 Saul talks to David, to his attendants, and to himself, but not to God. Saul's fear grew so much that he plotted to kill David by sending him to a battle scenario where he would be prone to fall at the hands of the Philistines. David, however, was victorious, which

was further proof to Saul that God was with David. This scared Saul even more.

In scripture, generally when we read about a person or group responding in fear to God's *victory*, those people are God's enemies. It is no different for Saul. Although this instance is unusual since Saul is the king of God's people, Saul is essentially an enemy of God's purposes. The image of Saul attempting to pin David to the wall with his spear is an apt metaphor for how we often deal with our own fears. We stab at them without forethought and ultimately their resolution ends up eluding us. But if we, in contrast to Saul, replace our fear of what we think will harm us with a deep reverence for and trust in God, then we will truly be safe.

**RESPOND**

What fears are you stabbing at? Have you been successful at annihilating them? Has God been a part of this process?

**PRAY**

Thank you God for being a safe dwelling place for us, for inviting us to take shelter in you.

- A.T.

**READ**

1 Samuel 28: 1-25

**REFLECT**

After spending much time and focused energy on trying to track down and kill David because of his jealousy that David was favored by God, Saul is faced with a pending battle with the Philistines. The text says that “When Saul saw the Philistine Army, he was afraid; terror filled his heart” (1 Sam 28:5). In battle, this is uncharacteristic of Saul, who, many times as Israel’s ruler, had marched into even the most precarious battle situation without hesitation and come out successful. Undoubtedly he had been changed by the fact that “the Spirit of the Lord had departed” from him (1 Sam 16:14) and an evil (or injurious) “spirit from the Lord tormented him.” He was likely ravaged by anxiety from too much time spent obsessing over David.

It was in this state that he “inquired of the Lord” to determine a battle plan. In typical Saul fashion, he appears to be doing the right thing, but ends up with an inexcusable error in judgment. He appears to be impatient in seeking counsel. His impatience had already gotten him in trouble by causing him to burn sacrifices without the presence of Samuel (chapter 13). And now, hearing nothing from the Lord through dreams or Urim (an ordained system of casting lots) or prophets, Saul was compelled to seek advice from an ill-advised source: a medium. Saul himself had actually expelled the mediums from the land, knowing that it was an abhorrent practice to God, so he had to travel in disguise to visit one, so as not to be seen as a hypocrite. The whole notion of God’s chosen king seeking guidance from a spiritist reeks of a life without anchor and indicates a man so unsure of his direction or purpose that he

would rather seek counsel from a forbidden source than either wait patiently on God or take the responsibility to make a decision on his own.

Earlier in Chapter 15 verse 23, this act is foreshadowed when Samuel is rebuking Saul for offering the Amalekites’ animals as an offering instead of obeying God and slaughtering them. “For rebellion is like the sin of divination,.....” In this case the sin of divination is an actual act of rebellion. Saul simply was too impatient to wait on God’s word. Ironically what he got from the medium was not even useful information in regard to fighting the Philistines, but rather a grim reminder about his disobedience and his impending death.

This same scenario can play out in our own lives. We may become distracted by something that threatens us and instead of turning our focus to God to inquire about His purposes we allow our fears and impatience to dictate our decisions, which aren’t always sound. But God promises that if, instead, we look to Him, our lives will be strong and solid: “Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken but endures forever” (Ps 125:1).

**RESPOND**

Are you using sources in your life that point you to God as your foundation, friend and guide?

**PRAY**

“Holy God, give me the courage to focus my attention on you and to ignore counsel that steers me away. Thank you for wanting my attention.”

- Andrea Tych