“I REGRET THAT I HAVE MADE SAUL KING”

In last week’s lesson, 1 Samuel Chapter 12, Samuel makes his final address to the people of Israel before he officially steps back and lets Saul assume the leadership of the nation. Remember, Samuel had been the leader of Israel for the last 40 years, but the people demanded a king, God gave them what they wanted, Saul was chosen, and now it is time for Samuel to fade into the background and let Saul rule. Saul actually started out pretty well and the people rallied around him as their new king.

In his closing remarks (Chap 12), Samuel makes it clear to the people and to Saul that just because there has been a change in government from a judgeship to a monarchy, God’s laws and His requirements for His covenant nation have not changed. God continues to expect His people to obey Him and honor Him as the one true God. Samuel reminds the people of God’s conditional promise that He had made to them back in Deuteronomy Chap 28. Samuel’s closing words to the people should have been underlined in their scrolls and memorized... “Only fear the Lord and serve Him faithfully with all your heart. For consider what great things He has done for you. But if you will do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king.” In other words, people, nothing’s changed just because you have a king. God still requires your faithfulness to Him.

Chapter 11 records what I consider to be King Saul’s finest moment when he defeats the Ammonites and rescues the city of Jabesh-gilead from certain destruction. Chapter 12 is Samuel’s final address. Between Chapters 12 and 13 you need to understand that some 30 years passes. The Bible doesn’t say a whole lot about the first 30 years of Saul’s monarchy. We know that Saul’s military victories help to expand Israelite territory quite a bit. Chapters 13, 14 and 15 focus primarily on the last 10 years of Saul’s reign where we see him make one wrong choice after another. There is a steady spiritual decline that is taking place. Saul displays his arrogance, presumption and is disobedient to God. Let me summarize very quickly…

(1) To prepare for battle against the Philistines, Saul follows the instructions Samuel gave him back in Chapter 10. He waits 7 days at Gilgal for Samuel to come and offer sacrifices to the Lord. At that point Samuel will direct Saul as to what to do. However, Saul becomes impatient while he’s waiting for Samuel. Rather than continue waiting, Saul steps into the role of priest, violating God’s law. When Samuel finally does arrive, Saul tries to justify his actions, but Samuel angrily rejects Saul’s excuses. Saul is disqualified from a permanent position of leadership because of his blatant disobedience. Oh and by the way, Israel is defeated by the Philistines and retreats. (2) The Philistines take over a strategic location at Michmash. Rather than engage the enemy, Saul sits with his troops at Gibeah. [show slide and point out Gibeah and Michmash today]. Jonathan, Saul’s son along with his armor bearer (just these 2 men) cross over a rocky crag from Gibeah to Michmash and surprise the Philistine garrison camped there. Immediately they kill 20 Philistine soldiers. This sends the Philistines into a panic. In their mass confusion they turn their swords on each other (this is reminiscent of what happened in Chapter 7 when the Lord defeated the Philistine army at Mizpah). From their position at Gibeah Saul and his army see the Philistines suddenly fleeing. They pursue them westward down thru the Aijalon valley and toward the coast. (3) Saul gives a foolish and rash order forbidding any of his men from eating food until he has avenged himself against the Philistines. Perhaps Saul intended this to be a fast but it was not God directed – it was his own idea). The penalty for violating Saul’s “do not eat” order is death. Jonathan is unaware of Saul’s order and eats some wild honey that he finds. Saul is all set to put Jonathan (the hero of the day) to death for violating his foolish order but the people intervene on Jonathan’s behalf and spare his life. (4) The Lord directs Saul to utterly destroy the Amalekites – men, women, children, animals. Saul was only partially obedient. He kills most of the Amalekite people but inexplicably spares Agag the king. He also keeps the best of the sheep and the oxen “and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them.” Saul was partially obedient, but in God’s eyes that is the same as being disobedient.

A side note here: we know that Saul did not kill all of the Amalekite men, women and children as he was instructed to do. Some must have escaped alive. How do we know this? 1 Samuel 27:8 (David and his men made raids against the Amalekites), 1 Samuel 30:1 (Amalekites made a raid against Ziklag) and from 2 Samuel 1:8 (the man reporting to David that he had killed Saul identifies himself as an Amalekite). So, as a result of Saul’s failure to carry out God’s directive, the Amalekites continue to live in the land and wreak havoc.

ASK this question about Saul. What do you think? Was Saul not saved, not a believer and of the devil (J. Vernon McGee’s viewpoint)? or was Saul saved, a believer and just being disobedient (our quarterly writer’s viewpoint)? Is the proof whether a person is saved or not in how they act?

Well, King Saul proves to be a major disappointment to God. Now, let’s pick up the action in Chapter 15 beginning with verse 10…

READ 1 Samuel 15:10-11

The Hebrew term translated as “I regret” does NOT mean God had done anything wrong. It means that God is deeply saddened over Saul’s sinfulness, his lack of obedience. This term is used only one other time in the Bible, in Genesis 6:7. There it describes God’s great disappointment as He sees the moral depravity of the people during Noah’s day. Well God took action. He destroyed the world with a flood sparing only Noah and his family. And with Saul, God plans to remove him as Israel’s king and raise up someone else. Just as it grieved God, so also Samuel grieves to see Saul fail so miserably. You can sense Samuel’s anguish as he spends a sleepless night crying out to God on account of Saul. Samuel remains faithful in offering up prayers on behalf of God’s people and their imperfect leader (just like he had promised in Chapter 12).

READ 1 Samuel 15:12

Notice that Saul is all caught up in his own importance. When Samuel goes to find him to confront him Saul is down in the town of Carmel SE of Hebron setting up a monument to himself. Remember the monuments, the stones of remembrance that Jacob, Joshua and Samuel set up, were to commemorate what God had done. Saul has moved so far away from God that he actually thinks Israel’s military victories are all about him!

Well, Samuel finally confronts Saul at Gilgal. READ 1 Samuel 15:13-16

Saul gives Samuel a weak excuse. Does he actually think he can pull the wool over Samuel’s eyes? Does Saul think he can do whatever he wants and get away with it? Notice that he blames the people – “THEY have brought them from the Amalekites…” Saul forgets HE is the king and the people wouldn’t have done anything unless he directed it! Next he tries to make his disobedience look spiritual… “to sacrifice to the Lord.” Notice that Saul says to Samuel, “the Lord YOUR God.” What, Saul, is the Lord no longer your God too? Saul acts here like he somehow knows better than God what should be done. He is so full of himself, so far gone spiritually. Samuel finally has enough of listening to Saul’s lame excuse and says, “Stop!” And he proceeds to deliver the message God gave him for Saul.

READ 1 Samuel 15:17

He reminds Saul where he came from, of his humble beginnings and that it was by God’s grace that Saul had been the one chosen to be king. Recall that in Chapter 9 when Saul had been informed of his choice as king that he had exhibited great humility.

READ 1 Samuel 15:18-21

After Samuel confronts Saul with his sin of disobedience to destroy the Amalekites Saul refuses to take responsibility and admit his own failure. He basically argues with Samuel (and God). He tries to convince Samuel that he has been obedient and again blames the people for his own actions. But Saul is just fooling himself.

READ 1 Samuel 15:22

Carrying out religious rituals or duties is no substitute for trusting and obeying the Lord with all our heart. “To obey is better than sacrifice.” Psalm 51:16-17, Proverbs 21:3, Hosea 6:6

READ 1 Samuel 15:23

God had already rejected Saul as king once before, back in Chapter 13 – why? Saul’s disobedience. So this is nothing new. This time Saul wants to argue with God about it. So God underscores His rejection of Saul in no uncertain terms! “He has rejected you, Saul, from being king. And in Chapter 16 God directs Samuel to anoint a new king, David.

READ 1 Samuel 15:24-26

Saul backed into a corner finally admits he has sinned. He wanted to be a people pleaser more than a God pleaser. Now he wants to save face with the people and so he asks Samuel to return home with him. Samuel is still greatly respected by the people and so Saul knows he will look better if Samuel accompanies him. But Samuel will have none of it. What’s done is done. God has rejected Saul and so Samuel too rejects Saul and distances himself from Saul from this point forward.

READ 1 Samuel 15:27-31

Saul is a sad, sad man here. He is so far gone spiritually. And he has brought it all on himself because he would not do as God directed. Even in his repentance we still see Saul’s sinful desire to be honored and look good to the people. He just doesn’t seem to get it!

READ 1 Samuel 15:32-35

Samuel does what Saul should have done and kills King Agag. The legacy of King Saul who started out with so much promise – “The LORD regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel.”

So, what about us, as God’s elect, as the bride of Christ, as His children – can we disappoint God too? Is the Christian life just about getting saved and avoiding hell or is there more to it than that?