

### Context:

The book of I Samuel bears the name of a prophet who was born as an answer to the heart-touching prayer of a barren woman, named Hannah. She promised to devote her son to the service of the Lord, so young Samuel became an apprentice to Eli the priest, from whom Samuel learned to hear and to obey the voice of the Lord. Samuel was obedient to tell Eli of God's displeasure with his sons' behavior, just as Samuel followed God's instructions to select and anoint young Saul as Israel's first king.

Not long after, the Spirit of the Lord came upon Saul mightily on two occasions: once when he prophesied (and was changed dramatically), and again when God stirred him to lead the people to defeat their enemies. But then things began to go wrong in how Saul carried out his ministry. Instead of relying on God and remaining within his designated role, Saul grew anxious in the face of an attack and tried to force a spiritual event by his own hands.

Later, he put his people under a religious-sounding, but self-generated vow to fast as they were facing yet another enemy in battle. That religious imposition actually diminished the victory they would have had by simply trusting in God's great power “to save by many or by few.” Then came the ultimate rebellion. God told Saul to destroy the Amalekites--those people who had always resisted God's plans for His people--but Saul didn't do it, not completely. His rebellion led him to construct his own notions of what should be done, and he followed them!

As it always will, disobedience stripped him of his spiritual authority, so the rest of his life he tries to maintain his grip on power by taking matters completely into his own hands. The story of Saul is the story of what happens to our life and ministry when we elect not to follow God's word fully. It is a tragic story.

Saul comes into bondage to an evil spirit, and he falls into fits of rage, depression, paranoia and incoherence. He kills 85 priests and their families because he mistakenly imagines that they had helped David, the man of whom Saul is most afraid. David is everything Saul might have been if he had been careful to follow God fully. Saul persecutes and rejects David and forces David to go away.

Without his best general, without his prophet friend Samuel (who died), without the sense of God's leading, Saul now faces his enemies:

### Chapter 28