



CHRISTADELPHIAN ISOLATION LEAGUE

EXHORTATION

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SECTION LEADER:

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Readings: **1 Chronicles 10, Ezekiel 23, Luke 20**

Saul; Israel's First King

"Now the Philistines fought against Israel; and the men of Israel fled before the Philistines and, fell slain upon Mount Gilboa. And the Philistines overtook Saul and his sons ... Thus Saul died; he and his three sons and all his house died together." (1 Chronicles 10:1-2, 6 RSV). So Israel's first king died, who, after a promising start, came to an ignominious end. Chosen by God and anointed by Samuel it was Saul who: *"...shall save my people from the hands of the Philistines; for I have seen the affliction of My people because their cry has come to me." (1 Samuel 9:16).*

Despite the military successes of Joshua, Israel never managed to conquer the Promised Land until the time of David. Just over a thousand years before the birth of Jesus the tribes of Israel inhabited the hill country of central Israel and areas to the east of the river Jordan. Along the coastal plain were the Philistines, to the south were the Amalekites, and Ammon and Moab were to the east of the River Jordan. Population pressure resulted in frequent wars. When Israel forgot Yahweh they were punished; when they repented, Judges were raised up and they were successful. It was against this background that the people called for a king to lead them.

In **1 Samuel 9:2** we are told this about Saul: *"There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he; from his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people."* Initially he fulfilled God's promise. When news came about the plight of the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead it is recorded that: *"...the Spirit of God came mightily upon Saul." (1 Samuel 11:6).* Both the Ammonites and Philistines were defeated and **1 Samuel 14:47** records that: *"When Saul had taken the kingship over Israel, he fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, against the Ammonites, against Edom, against the kings of Zobah, and against the Philistines; wherever he turned he put them to the worst."*

And so why did he die at the hands of the Philistines on Mount Gilboa? The answer is given further on in today's reading: *"So Saul died for his unfaithfulness; he was unfaithful to the LORD in that he did not keep the command of the LORD, and also consulted a medium, seeking guidance, and did not seek guidance from the LORD." (1 Chronicles 10:13, 14).*

Samuel appears to Saul on three occasions stating that God had rejected him as king. The first occurred at Gilgal where the Israelites were faced with a large force of hostile Philistines in **1 Samuel 13**. The Philistine army was huge yet they did not attack Israel for seven days during which time Saul waited for the arrival of Samuel to offer burnt offerings and ask for God's blessing in the forthcoming battle. When Samuel did not arrive, Saul acted rashly and offered a burnt offering: *"So Saul said, 'Bring the burnt offering here to me, and the peace offerings.' And he offered the burnt offering." (1 Samuel 13:9).* Saul, having usurped the role of Levite, priest and prophet, Samuel then arrives with these chastening words: *"You have done foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God . . . but now your kingdom shall not continue." (vs.13-14).* It is a reminder to us that we all have different roles to play in our community; all of which are important, but not all are the same.

A further failing of Saul was impatience and a lack of faith that Samuel would arrive and God would give them the victory, even against overwhelming odds. Impatience is a very real human failing. We may pray earnestly and even incessantly for something, yet God may not answer our prayers! We may believe that a certain course of action is the right thing, but it does not happen. How many

times in our life, especially as we get older, do we look back and see that despite the fact that we felt God did not answer our prayers, He did so, but not in the way we expected.

The second event that confirmed his rejection was when he was told to: *“Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have; do not spare them.”* (1 Samuel 15:3). As uncomfortable as we may feel about this destruction of a nation, it was a clear instruction from God. Saul’s failure and Samuel’s words: *“Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.”* (1 Samuel 15:22) are well known and establish an abiding principle that whatever our personal feelings might be about God’s plan and purpose we must always obey Him.

So Saul is rejected and: *“...the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD tormented him.”* (1 Samuel 16:14). These bouts of depression continue with him for the rest of his life. We all have periods in our lives when everything seems to be going wrong and our faith and beliefs are tested. It is how we respond to them that are important. We have many examples in Scripture of men and women who have faced adversity but, as Paul was reminded by God: *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”* Divine grace was sufficient and God’s power was made perfect in Paul’s weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Saul was certainly weak when he came to face the Philistines for the last time. He did inquire of the LORD about the outcome of the battle before him, however: *“the LORD did not answer him, either by dreams, or by Urim, or by prophets.”* (1 Samuel 28:6). Despite the fact that he had tried to destroy all mediums and wizards, yet he visited the witch at Endor, thus showing a total forsaking of the ways of God.

Saul is a lesson to us of someone chosen by God, as we believe we are, who failed to sustain the promising start he made at the outset of his forty years reign. His disobedience cost him his throne and his failure to go to God for guidance, cost him his life.

Jesus was surrounded by enemies, as well. The High Priest and Sadducees saw him as a threat to the close relationship they had with Rome. He, and his teaching, with his popular following, was a threat to their wealth and power. Only twenty years before his ministry, when he was about ten, the rebellion of Judas of Galilee against the Roman occupation was a reminder to the authorities of the unrest there was in the land. The Pharisees saw Jesus as a threat to their rigorous keeping of the Law and their position as the leaders of religion in Israel.

All this conspired to the death of Jesus, yet we can contrast the scene in Gethsemane with that in the cave at Endor: *“Father, if Thou art willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but Thine, be done.”* (Luke 22:42). We can thank God for his willingness to obey and go to the cross.

So we come to remember the Lord Jesus Christ in bread and wine, the one who we pray will soon return to set up his Father’s Kingdom and reign as a good and faithful king, being obedient in all things.

Brother Colin Wellard, Exeter UK 27.09.20