

Crowd Control (1 Samuel 15:24-35)

1. Crafty and Cunning Confessions at Gilgal (v.24-29)

- After hearing the irrefutable rejection of him as king (v.23), Saul changes his strategy. For the first time, he "confesses" his sin.
 - A. First Confession (v.24-25):
- He provides greater detail to his biddings with his soldiers. Previously (v.15, 21), he isolated himself from their request (as though their act of disobedience was an honorable act of religious sacrifice). Now we see the reason for his disobedience: he feared the soldiers' perception of him at the expense of God's displeasure.
- Saul and the people were already commanded to obey the voice of the LORD (12:14) and the warned of the dire consequences for disobedience (12:15).
- Samuel is using Saul's own confession against him. Instead of obeying and fearing the LORD (12:14-15), Saul has feared and obeyed the voice of the soldiers (15:24).
- The terrible irony of this heart-wrenching failure is God's command to Samuel (8:22): obey the voice of the people in their request for a king. The king who was appointed by "obeying the voice of the people" has failed precisely because their "voice has been obeyed" (15:24). God gave the nation what they wanted: a man who would obey their voice and not the LORD's.

Saul's Request (v.25): He asks Samuel to pardon his sin and make sacrifices to the LORD. The LORD is not Saul's God; he is Samuel's (v.15, 21). Saul begs for another integration of Saul and the nation into the plans of the LORD (11:14-15). Saul wants another "renewal" at Gilgal.

Saul's Reach and Samuel's Response: (v.26-29): After Samuel, for the second time, reminds Saul that God has rejected him (v.23, 26), Saul seized the "skirt" of his robe. The Torah required that tassels be present in the corner of the robe as symbolic reminders of all of the LORD's commands (Num. 15:38-39). Saul ripped the tassels off of Samuel's robe, which is parabolic: just as Saul has "ripped" or "broken" God's command, Saul's kingdom has been ripped from him and given to another who is his "neighbor".

B. Second Confession (v.30)

- "I have sinned." This is the second time Saul has acknowledged that he has sinned (v.24). This time, no details are given. Instead, Saul makes the same bold request as before (v.25) but provides additional details: "elders of my people and before Israel."

2. Contrary Motives at Gilgal (v.31)

- After Saul's first request for Samuel's company in Gilgal (v.25), Samuel was departing from Saul. This time, however, Samuel accompanies Saul. What has changed?

Public Appearance (v.31):

- Saul, in requesting Samuel's presence, wants the appearance that all is well.
- Samuel, in accompanying Saul to Gilgal, is exercising prudence: if the soldiers hear of the news that Saul has forfeited his kingship, and that a "neighbor" will replace him, there could be tremendous inner conflict and bloodshed in the nation; another potential Civil War.
- While Samuel pitied Saul, he would have not participated in any of Saul's sacrifices.

*as both of them are in Gilgal, it would appear as though they are both are deceptive. However, Saul is concerned with public appearance. Samuel is buying time until the "man after God's own heart" is revealed (13:14). While they may be in close proximity physically to one another, they are spiritually distant; Samuel loves the LORD and His people. Saul loves his popularity and public perception.

Samuel summons Agag (v.33). The Mosaic legislation prescribes that the witness of a crime should initiate execution (Deut. 17:7). While Samuel isn't a direct witness, he acts as the LORD's intermediary and hacks Agag to pieces. This action is a further rebuke to Saul since Samuel carried out what the LORD commanded him to do (v.3).

3. Common Heartaches Beyond Gilgal (v.34-35)

- The LORD's remorse is not over unanticipated, or unplanned events, but instead, over Saul's willful disobedience and the people's continued idolatry.
- Not only is Samuel angry (v.11) but he is also grieving. This can be translated as "lamenting." It is the same verb that is used to describe Jacob mourning after hearing of Joseph's death by a fierce animal (Gen 37:33-35). Similarly, this verb is used for David lamenting and mourning over Absalom's death (2 Sam. 19:1).
- Samuel and Saul did not see each other again (other than short ethereal conversation in chapter 28). For all intents and purposes, this statement is the loss of a relationship between the king and the prophet. The king's reign has ended in the eyes of the LORD.
- There is prophetic grief (v. 35b) and divine sorrow (v.35c). There will be no more counsel or commands from the prophet.
- While Saul has lost his kingdom (13:14) and now kingship (15:23, 26-27), there is no repentance of his disobedience to the LORD. He chooses to remain hardened of heart in a continued devotion towards divination and idolatry.