

Dr. Robert Vannoy, Samuels, Lecture 3

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As we noted at the conclusion of our last lecture on the theme of kingship and covenant, in First and Second Samuel, we now come to the proposition that kingship as practiced by Saul failed to correspond to the covenantal ideal. And we find that discussed particularly in 1 Samuel 13 and 1 Samuel 15 just by way of review, you may remember that my suggestion for organizing the content of First and Second Samuel, under the theme of kingship and covenant, is that first: kingship is requested by the people as a denial of the covenant; second, kingship as instituted by Samuel was consistent with the covenant; third, kingship as practiced by Saul failed to correspond to the covenantal ideal, and then lastly kingship as practiced by David was an imperfect but true representation of the ideal of the covenantal king.

So we come to the third of these four propositions. In 1 Samuel 13, the chapter immediately following the description of Saul's inauguration as king in the covenant renewal ceremony held at Gilgal. We learn that Saul refused to obey a command the Lord had given him at the time of his anointing. For this offense he was rebuked by the prophet Samuel and told that his dynasty would not endure. Verse one of chapter 13 marks the beginning of Saul's reign. The private anointing in 10:16, the public selection of Saul by lot in Mispah in 10:17-27, the confirmation of his selection to be king by his victory over the Ammonites in first Samuel 11:1-13 and then his inauguration at the covenant renewal ceremony held at Gilgal in 1 Samuel 14:12-25 have now lead to the formal beginning of Saul's reign as king. That Saul's official reign does not begin until after the covenant renewal ceremony at Gilgal that we discussed in the last lecture, I think is indicated quite clearly by the placement of the typical regnal formula for the beginning of a king's reign at the beginning of this chapter in the first verse of 1 Samuel 13. The regnal formula for the reign of a king is found many times in First and Second Kings and it normally gives the age of a king at the time of his succession and the duration of his reign. In this particular example in 1 Samuel 13:1, the formula is defective in that two of its numerals are missing. I won't go into the details of that but you can look at, for

example, the NIV translation and the text notes there. But the NIV translation reads, “Saul was 30 years old when he became king, and he reigned over Israel 42 years.” There’s a note at thirty which says, “Hebrew does not have thirty.” There’s a note at “he reigned 42 years” there’s at the forty “Hebrew does not have forty.” So there’s a textual problem here. But it is clearly the reign formula that introduces the beginning of Saul’s reign; beginning here in chapter 13. So 13:1 along with a summary of Saul’s reign at the end of chapter 14 in verses 47-53 provides the bookmarks and the framing for the narratives in 1 Samuel 13 and 1 Samuel 14 that depict for us a clear contrast between Saul and his son Jonathan. And in doing this, it demonstrates quite clearly Saul’s failure to live up to the ideal of the covenantal king. In verses 2-7a of chapter 13 we find background information for the encounter between Samuel and Saul that is found later in the chapter in verses 7b to 15 which really becomes the focal point of the chapter.

One of the first things that Saul did as king was to assemble an army of 3000 men that was divided into two groups under the command of himself and his son Jonathan. We read that in verse 2. The narrative takes a surprising turn in verse 3 when it tells us that Jonathan rather than Saul took the initiative to attack the Philistine garrison and Geba generally considered a defective spelling for Gibeah, I’ll come back to that in a minute. This act of Jonathan, calls to mind the instructions that Samuel had given to Saul, shortly after his private anointing. That goes all the way back to 1 Samuel 10, verses 7 and 8. On that occasion Samuel told Saul after anointing him that he was to do whatever his hand finds to do. Or do what must be done, depending on how you translate that phrase; implying that when he returned home after his anointing, he was to attack the Philistine garrison at Gibeah that Samuel had just referred to in a preceding verse in 10:5a.

I might mention that when Samuel had anointed Saul privately, the Lord told him at that time that Saul would “deliver my people from the hand of the Philistines.” But after doing whatever your hand finds to do, that’s in 10:7 that Samuel had instructed Saul to do that, Saul was to go to Gilgal and then wait there for Samuel to come and offer sacrifices and give him further instructions. And you read that in 1 Samuel 10:8. Samuel says “Go down ahead of me in Gilgal. I will surely come down to you to sacrifice burnt

offerings and fellowship offerings. But you must wait seven days until I come to you and tell you what you are to do.” Saul however, not only did not take any action against Philistines when he returned to Gibeah, he did not even tell his uncle about the momentous task to which the Lord had called him when his uncle had asked him what the Samuel had said to him.

In any case, Jonathan’s attack on the Philistine Garrison, and Saul’s inauguration as king, aroused the Philistines to action. They assembled a large army of chariots and warriors and camped at Michmash (verse 5). In the meantime, word spread among the Israelites that the Philistine garrison had been attacked and that Saul summoned addition groups to join them at Gilgal (verse 4). There’s something ominous though as you read this narrative in the way this scene is depicted. As Walter Bruggemann notes, these verses, “Portray the Philistines as having superior numbers and superior technology. Conversely the Israelites are frightened and intimidated, and they behave in a cowardly way.”

In verse 6 we are told that the Israelites hid in caves and thickets because their situation was critical, as the NIV translates it. They were hard pressed by the Philistines. In verse 7 Saul’s men at Gilgal are said to be “quaking with fear” while others deserted to the East of the Jordan River. The picture here is quite different than that of 1 Samuel 11, when Saul was energized by God’s spirit and rose to meet the arrogant spirit of Nahash the Ammonite; and then led Israel to a resounding victory. In sharp contrast to the battle with the Ammonites, here we see a people with little confidence in either Saul’s leadership or the Lord’s protection. The irony is that the people had asked for a king in order to find a sense of safety and security. Now they have a king but they are just as fearful as they were before kingship had been established. In verses 7b to 15, we read of Saul’s disobedience and Samuel’s rebuke.

In the meantime Saul had gone to Gilgal as he had been instructed by Samuel in 1 Samuel 10:8. He waited for Samuel for seven days, but Samuel did not come as he had promised. With the military situation becoming more and more precarious by the hour, Saul gave an order for sacrifices to be offered without waiting for Samuel’s assistance.

But just as these sacrifices were being completed, Samuel did arrive, apparently late on that seventh day. He confronted Saul by asking him in verse eleven, “What is this you have done?” The question implied strong disapproval. Saul’s response was defensive, suggesting he knew his actions were questionable and they needed some justification. He explained to Samuel that because his own men were deserting and the Philistine attack appeared to be imminent he felt, “Compelled,” to offer the sacrifices and to ask for the Lord’s help even though Samuel had not arrived. We read that in verses 11 and 12. The Hebrew for, “I felt compelled” is literally, “I forced myself to do this.” Samuel does not discuss Saul’s excuses but he severely rebukes him. He told Saul he had been foolish because he had disobeyed the command the Lord had given him, and because of this Samuel told Saul that his dynasty would not endure and that the Lord had already chosen another ruler who would be, “A man after his own heart.” We read that in verses 13 and 14. “You have acted foolishly” Samuel said. “You have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you. If you had he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. But now, your kingdom will not endure. The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people because you have not kept the Lord’s command.”

I think it should be noted that Samuel held Saul accountable in spite of Saul’s attempt to justify his behavior by saying he compelled or forced himself to offer the sacrifices before Samuel arrived because of the seriousness of the Philistine threat, the disintegration of his army, and his desire to seek the Lord’s help in a battle that appeared to be, to all outward occurrences, quite imminent. Saul’s excuses betray his mistake of letting circumstances determine his actions rather than the commandment of the Lord. No doubt the circumstances he encountered were alarming, and no doubt the test he had underwent was a severe test, but at the same time it was a very important test. The issue here on the line for Saul is this: Would he be a king under God? Or would he be a king in place of God? Was he a person who was prepared to wait on the Lord in complete submission and trust no matter what the circumstances might be? Or, was he someone who viewed himself as above the Word and the law of the Lord? This was the central

issue of covenantal kingship. The issue was not offset or erased by allegedly pious motives, asking for the Lord's help; or performance of a religious act, offering sacrifices prior to battle. I think it's easy to confuse genuine piety with religious words and religious acts.

But it should be remembered that religious words and religious acts do not necessarily coincide with walking in the way of the Lord. It's not religious words and acts in and of themselves that determine the integrity of a person's behavior. The more important question is whether or not what a person does arises out of love for God and trust in his word and whether or not one's behavior is consistent with God's commands. Saul used a religious argument to justify his actions much as he would do again in 1 Samuel 15. But as Samuel told him, on that later occasion in 1 Samuel 15, "obedience is better than sacrifice and submission is better than the offering of rams", 2 Samuel 15:22). Saul showed himself to be a person who, in the words of Gordon McDonald, in one of his novels describes as, "A person who had not much notion of obedience to God, but he had some idea of respect of religion." In the final analysis it was Saul's lack of confidence and trust in the Lord that led him to make a foolish decision.

The next chapter in which Saul's failure to live up to the standards of a true covenantal king comes into sharp focus is 1 Samuel 15 where Samuel again confronted Saul for disobeying the Lord. This time told him that because of his disobedience, and because he rejected the Word of the Lord, the Lord rejected him as king over his people. That statement is in chapter 15 verse 23.

In the chapters leading up to 1 Samuel 15 Saul has repeatedly fallen short of his responsibilities as a true covenantal king. As we noted previously when he returned to Gibeah after being anointed as king by Samuel he took no action against the Philistine garrison located there in spite of the explicit suggestion of Samuel that he do so in 1 Samuel 10:7. Moreover, when he was questioned by his uncle about what Samuel had said to him, he avoided telling him that he had been chosen to be king in 10:14-16. At the Mispah assembly described in 10:17-27 he had hidden among the supplies, you recall, during that process of his being selected by lot to be king. It seems there was a reluctance

to come forward. Then after his inauguration he disobeyed the Lord's command through Samuel to wait for seven days for Samuel's arrival at Gilgal in 13:7-15. As we just noted, Samuel rebuked him for that offense, and told him that because of his disobedience he would not have a continuing dynasty. In the next chapter, chapter 14, Saul continues to be compared very unfavorably with his son Jonathon. And in the ensuing battle with the Philistines, initiated by Jonathon, Saul became more of a hindrance to Israel's success than he was a help.

There are a number of troubling things concerning Saul that surface upon a reading of 1 Samuel 14. I'm not going to look at chapter 14 in detail, but I want to make just a few comments on it before moving on to chapter 15. One of the most apparent of the troubling things about Saul in chapter 14 is the way in which he repeatedly covered his self-centered and imprudent behavior with pious language and religious acts. In verse 34 he said, "Do not sin against the Lord by eating meat with the blood still in it." In verse 35 he began to build an altar to the Lord, and I say began to build because contrary to the NIV's translations which said, "He built an altar to the Lord," the idea of the text there is that he began to build; we really don't know whether he ever finished it. He may have broken it off and left in pursuit of the Philistines. In verse 39 he vowed by the name of the Lord. He said, "As surely as the Lord who rescues Israel lives, even if it lies with my son Jonathon, he must die." In verse 41 he prayed. In verse 44 he used God's name in an oath, "May God deal with me may it be ever so severely if you do not die, Jonathon." Verse 24 describes a foolish oath that Saul had imposed on his troops, you may be aware of that, and the oath was "Cursed be any man who eats food before evening comes, before I have avenged myself on my enemies." This is also an oath presumably taken in the name of the Lord. In verse 37 he sought divine counsel, although God did not answer. We read there Saul asked God "Shall we go down after the Philistines, will you deliver them into Israel's hands?" but God did not answer him that day.

In all these statements and actions, Saul projects the appearance of a pious and spiritual person, but the reality is, Saul was not acting as a true servant of the Lord but

instead was attempting to coerce the Lord into serving his own ambitions. In addition, it seems clear that in Saul's mind, his son Jonathon was deserving of death because he violated the foolish oath he had imposed on the troops, rather than a man of faith whom the Lord had used to give Israel a great victory. To the reader the reality seems much closer to the reverse, Saul mistakenly regarded Jonathon as the one whose behavior caused divine silence while Jonathon, with much more justification, had the similar view of his father. He is the person who hindered Israel's success in battle. In verses 29 and 30, Jonathon said, "My father has made trouble for the country. See how my eyes brightened when I tasted a little of this honey. How much better it would have been, if the men had eaten today some of the plunder they took from their enemies. Would not the slaughter of the Philistines have been even greater?" V.P. Long in commenting on this chapter sums it up very well I think when he comments, "Thus the day that began with Jonathon placing his life in jeopardy by his daring attack against the Philistine outpost ends with him narrowly escaping death at the hands of his own father. And the day which held promise with a crushing victory over the Philistines ends rather meekly with Saul giving up the pursuit and the Philistines simply returning, 'to their own place,' verse 46. Rebuked by Yahweh, forsaken by Samuel, at odds with Jonathon, Saul ultimately finds himself completely isolated; alienated by his own obduracy, even from his own troops." So in chapter 14, all of this combines to raise questions about Saul's future as Israel's anointed king.

When chapter 15 opens, Samuel came to Saul with a new word from the Lord, and thus he was presented with a new opportunity to demonstrate a willingness to assume the responsibilities that were his as king over God's government people. Samuel's opening words were reminders to Saul of his anointing and of his responsibility to be obedient to the words of the Lord's prophet. You read in 1 and 2 Samuel said to Saul, "I am the one the Lord sent to anoint you king over his people Israel, so listen now to the message from the Lord," it's literally "the words from the Lord," "this is what the Lord Almighty says," and he follows with some instructions he said to Saul in which Saul is given a clearly defined task that is presented to him as a message from the Lord, literally as the words of

the Lord. 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. Now go attack and totally destroy everything that belongs to them. Do not spare them, put to death man and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.” So Saul and his army were to be the instrument of God’s judgment on the Amalekites for their attack on Israel at the time of the Exodus. As Israel was journeying from Egypt to Mount Sinai they had been attacked by the Amalekites. I think at that point the Amalekites, perhaps unwittingly, were an instrument of Satan to attempt to prevent Israel from entering into covenant with God at Sinai. So in a sense it’s an attack on God’s redemptive purposes, and God responded very strongly. Exodus 17, it’s recounted in Deuteronomy 25 as well, where the Lord says he will “completely blot out the memory of the Amalek from out under heaven and he will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation.”

So that’s the background of the instruction that is here given to Saul. Saul is commissioned to carry out that judgment on the Amalekites, completely destroying them and all their possessions. Saul’s performance of that task would demonstrate if he was obedient, that in spite of past failures, he truly did desire to be a faithful servant of the Lord. Well, Saul responded to the instructions he had been given. He assembled a large army in the southern part of Judah, we read in verse 4, because the Kenites inhabited some of the same area as the Amalekites. And because the Kenites, unlike the Amalekites, had been friendly to the Israelites at the time of the conquest and even later, Saul gave them advanced warning about the impending attack and they left the area. Saul’s success in battle is described in verse 7, “He swept through the area south of Judah. He killed Amalekites all the way to the eastern frontier of Egypt.” But verses 8 and 9 inform us that he spared the Amalekite king Agag and he kept the best of the sheep and the cattle, killing only what was “worthless or of poor quality” as translated in the New Living Translation or “killing only what was despised and weak” as the NIV translates. These were indisputable violations of the mandate he had been given by Samuel described in verse 3. It seems clear that Saul has again failed to function as a true

covenantal king because he has been disobedient to the word of the Lord.

In verses 10 to 35 we read of Samuel confronting Saul and telling him that because of his disobedience, the Lord had rejected him as king. Saul was returning from the battle the Lord spoke to Samuel and told Samuel that Saul had not carried out the task that he had been given. Two specific things are mentioned in the Lord's indictment of Saul in verse 11. The first thing is interesting because of the wording, "he turned aside from following the Lord." NIV says "he turned away from me," NLT says, "he has not been loyal to me, but he turned aside from following the Lord, he did not carry out the Lord's command," literally my words. Notice the language specifying this dual offense defines the essence of covenantal kingship. Following after the Lord is literally "to be after Yahweh," is to recognize afresh the sovereignty of Yahweh over the nation and over its human king; that's going back to the language of 1 Samuel 12:14. This was the fundamental requirement of the restructuring of the theocracy as it had been described by Samuel in 1 Samuel 12:14b when Saul had been inaugurated as king. Saul has now demonstrated his unwillingness to do that very thing, "to be after Yahweh." The refusal to carry out the Lord's commands or words, literally, was a violation of the very words the Lord had spoken to Samuel in verses 2 to 3 at the beginning of the chapter that are specifically characterized as the words of the Lord. For these reasons the Lord says in verse 11 that he was sorry that he had ever made Saul king. So the next morning, Samuel set out to find Saul, you can find that in verse 12.

The seemingly incidental report in 12d, that Saul had set up a monument in his own honor at Carmel and then gone on to Gilgal, carries enormous significance for understanding the remainder of the chapter. You read in verse 12 early the next morning Samuel got up and went to meet Saul. But he was told Saul was going to Carmel, there he has set up a monument in his own honor, and in turn gone down to Gilgal, the reference to a monument in Saul's honor, speaks volumes concerning Saul's frame of mind subsequent Israel's victory over the Amalekites. That Saul would set up a monument to himself, suggested in his own mind the battle against the Amalekites had ceased to be the Lord's battle, it had become his own battle. He apparently viewed himself as a

successful military leader whose accomplishment merited the kind of recognition that a victory monument would secure. From this perspective it's only a short step to the conclusion that as payment for such a great accomplishment that Saul had the right to share in the plunder and participate in a victory celebration in which the defeated enemy king would be put on display and a monument to the victorious king would be unveiled. In this scenario Saul is no longer subordinate to Yahweh as an instrument of the out-vaded judgment on Amalek but rather he has become the autonomous absolute monarch in effect has become the anti-theocratic king. By telling the reader in advance about Saul's erecting of a monument to himself, the narrators give the reader a good reason to question Saul's subsequent protestations of innocence and his effort to put a spin on what he did.

When Samuel finally catches up with Saul he greets him warmly that is Saul greeted Samuel warmly. Before Samuel could say even one word to Saul, Saul said, "the Lord bless you. I have carried out the Lord's command," that's verse 13. Saul's statement flatly contradicted what the Lord had said to Samuel in verse 11. In verse 11 the Lord said to Samuel he has turned away from it and is not carried out my instruction. Saul says, "the Lord bless you I have carried out the Lord's command." Saul's overly eager claim of obedience even before Samuel had asked him a question which seems already a bit suspicious.

But if Saul had something to hide and he is well aware of it, Samuel did not directly challenge Saul's statement but simply inquired in verse 14 what then is all the bleating of sheep and goats and lowing of cattle that I hear. Saul had a quick and ready response he said that the best animals had been spared why? In order to offer them as sacrifices to the Lord (verse 15). That response I seem to be a reasonable justification for saving the best of the animals I think at closer look at the wording of the response suggests that everything is not as it might appear. It should be noted that Saul claims the animals were for sacrifice to the Lord your God he says. He doesn't say the Lord our God to Samuel but the Lord your God by putting it that way it would seem whether deliberately or inadvertently Saul is not including himself among the followers of the

Yahweh. In fact, as is expected Samuel progresses and Saul repeatedly attempts to cover his disobedient behavior with pious talk and language becomes clearer and clearer that deep down his heart was not right with the Lord. Samuel responded to Saul by reminding him that he was the anointed king of Israel verse 17 the Lord anointed you king over Israel and the Lord sent them on a specific mission that included completely destroying Amalekites and taking no plunder verse 18. Go and completely destroy these people the Amalekites, make war on them until you have wiped them out. He then told Saul he had not obeyed the Lord and he had done evil in the Lord's site (verse 19). Saul however was still not prepared to witness his guilt and he attempted to justify his actions by claiming that he had listened or obeyed the voice of Yahweh (NIV). But I did obey the Lord he says. That he had killed all the Amalekites except Agag and that it was his troops or soldiers who had kept some of the best the animals to offer sacrifices again to the Lord your God in Gilgal.

Samuel however did not want to listen to anymore of Saul's' excuses and he responded in verses 22 and 23 with one of the most profound statements in the Old Testament concerning the distinction between true religion on the one hand, and religious ritual acts on the other. You find that in verses 22 and 23, "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord. To obey is better than sacrifice and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination and arrogance like the evil of idolatry." That statement then climaxed with Samuel telling Saul that because he had rejected the commands of the Lord. The Lord had rejected him as king 23. Samuel's statement that obedience is better than sacrifice was the same message that Israel's prophets were repeatedly to proclaim to a people who was as Isaiah 29:13 puts it, "come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips but their hearts are far from." That's quoted by Jesus in Matthew 15:8 and Mark 7:6.

The prophets' denunciation of Israel for ritualism in later times was sometimes so strong that their critiques of the bringing of sacrifices almost seemed to suggest they favor abolishing the sacrificial system and replacing it with ethics and doing justice but that really wasn't their point and that's not Samuel's point here. "To obey is better than

sacrifice,” what both Samuel and the prophets promoted is consistent. God is not interested in displays about work piety. Whether that be offering of sacrifices or whatever he’s not interested in displays of outward piety that are used as a cover for disobedience. Religious or ritual acts that are performed in the absence of a heart desire to live in obedience to the Lord's commands are not only not acceptable to the Lord they are an abomination to the Lord.

As the Lord says in many passages in Isaiah 66 verse 2, following the Lord says, “This is the one I esteem, he who is humble, contrite in spirit and, trembles as of my work, but whoever sacrifices of fool is like one of who kills a man whoever offers a lamb like one of breaks a dogs leg, whoever makes a grain offering is like one who present pig’s blood and whoever burns memorial incense like one who worships an idol. They have chosen their own ways their souls delight in their abominations.” The tendency for religious people to move toward this sort of hypocrisy and religious observance is a constant problem. It's so every bit as much so today's was in the time of Samuel and Saul.

But to get back to our story, when Samuel said in verse 23 that rebellion is as sinful as witchcraft its language echoes what he had said at the time of the inauguration of Saul that you go for 1 Samuel 12:14 when he told the people and Saul that if you do not rebel against the Lord's command and you fear him and obey him then both you and your king will show that you recognize God but if you do rebel against the Lord's command his hand will be heavy upon you.” Saul had violated a fundamental requirement of the terms governing the theocracy. The terms had been made clear to him at the time he assumed office. So, Samuel concluded by telling him that because he had rejected the command of the Lord and the Lord had rejected him as king

Upon hearing that his disobedience would result in his dismissal from royal office Saul appears to reverse himself and confess his sin. Although Saul had said that he had carried out the Lord’s command in verse 13, now he says in verse 24, “I have violated the Lord’s command and your instructions.” He prefaced this confession by admitting that he had sinned. He then asked for Samuels’s forgiveness and asked him to accompany him in the worship of the Lord in verse 25. I beg you forgive my sin come back with me so

that I may worship the Lord. Saul's confession however fell on deaf ears. Because Samuel refused the request to go with him and he repeated almost verbatim what he had said before, since you have rejected the Lord's commands, he has rejected you as king." It is clear in Samuel's mind, Saul's confession was not acceptable. And the question now then is why? The first thing to notice is that Saul's confession was a sort of "yes but" response he said, yes I have sinned, but then he qualified this acknowledgement by saying I was afraid of the people so I gave into them (verse 24). He then added to his confession the double request of Samuel not only to forgive him but to accompany him in the worship of the Lord. This "yes but" sort of confession contrasts sharply with David's unqualified confession in the aftermath of the Bathsheba affair where, when he was confronted, he said I have sinned against the Lord. And his confession, after his sin of numbering of the people, the census is taken in chapter 24 of 2 Samuel when all he says is "I have sinned greatly." In addition, close attention to the wording of Saul's confession reveals a serious deficiency in his thinking. The word "obey" has occurred several times earlier in the chapter. In connection with obey or listen to God's word, or God's voice. But in Saul's confession he said he feared the people and obeyed their voice, listened to their voice, in obedience to God's command, becomes instead, obeying the voice of the people. He didn't listen to God's voice he listened to the voice of the people as a reason for disobeying God's command.

But it's not only the term obey, that appears in an inverted sense in Saul's confession because the same things happen with his use of the word "fear." When Samuel laid out the governing principals of the theocracy at the inauguration of king in 1 Samuel 12:14 he said, "now if you fear and worship Yahweh and listen to his voice, if you don't rebel against the Lord's commands, both you and your king will surely recognize Yahweh as your God." Saul's justification for not obeying the Lord's command but the voice of the people was because I was afraid of the people. So in Saul's confession fear of the people has been substituted for fear of God; which actually serves to intensify rather than justify his disobedience.

Added to Saul's self-incrimination to justify his disobedience and shift

responsibility from himself to the people is his desire to avoid a public loss of face through an open break between himself and Samuel. Because of this he requests Samuel accompany him in the worship of the Lord. The real purpose of this becomes clear when after Saul refused to Saul repeated the request with an added explanation at least honor me before the elders of my people and before Israel (verse 30). When confession of sin becomes so closely linked with concern about public image and honor, the authenticity of the confession is suspect in this case after Samuel denied his request and began to walk away. Saul tore the hem of his robe, in an attempt to hold him back or a symbolic gesture of supplication but that incident gave Samuel an additional opportunity to reaffirm Saul's rejection by the Lord by using the torn robe as a symbol of Saul's loss of the kingdom when Samuel says, "the Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to someone else." One who is better than Saul (verse 28). The person to whom the kingdom had been given is yet unknown both to Samuel and to Saul was David who was here in advanced characterized as someone who is better than Saul. Verse 31 translated in the NIV is: "So Samuel went back to Saul and Saul worshiped the Lord." It's been understood to say Samuel changed his mind and contrary to his previous denial of Saul's request in verse 26 now, for some reason, had decided to accompany him. Robert Alter has given good reasons for questioning that conclusion, Alter translates verse 31 "and Samuel turned back from Saul and Saul bowed to the Lord." And older comments from all English versions render this to indicate that Samuel nevertheless accompanied Saul to the sacrifice but the expression "turned back with" as in verse 30 and "turned back from" as here in verse 31 are antonyms. The later meaning "to abandon." It's precisely the later idiom we see in God's condemnation of Saul in verse 11 because he has "turned away from me." So Samuel is really completing his rejection of Saul here by refusing to accompany him in the cult; shaming him by forcing him to offer the sacrifice without the officiating man of God. I think Alter's suggestion to translate this as "Samuel turned back from Saul," not only provides a better rendering of the Hebrew expression, it also produces a response by Samuel to Saul's request that is more consistent in the more narrative context. Samuel's concern was for the honor of God's

kingdom not for the personal honor of Saul.

So Samuel set out to complete what Saul had left undone, he called for Agag, the king of the Amalekites, to be brought to him and he executed him in fulfillment of the Lord's original commandment to Saul. Samuel and Saul then parted ways, Samuel going back to Ramah Saul to Gibeah (verse 34). This was the last time they spoke to each other (verse 35). Their parting not only marked the ending of a personal relationship but it also terminated the continuing the legitimacy of this covenantal king. His abortive kingship had proved to be a failure because he was unwilling to submit to the requirements to the office as those had been explained to him by Samuel at the beginning of his reign. The stage is now set for the introduction of the person who was better than Saul as described in 15:28 to fulfill the role in which Saul had failed. The remainder First Samuel describes the downward spiral of Saul's life, ultimately ending in suicide in 1 Samuel 31. And at the same time the rise of David to the throne through many difficult experiences in which he consistently refused to lift up his hand against the Lord's anointed, that is, Saul even though Saul made numerous attempts to take his life.

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