

Introduction:

- A. It's a strange way to launch into the telling of a nation's story. Especially if you're trying to stir up some patriotism and enthusiasm among disheartened citizens. It would be like starting America's story by telling about Custer's last stand, or the stock market crash of 1929, or our panicked escape from the roof of the embassy building in Saigon at the end of the Vietnam War. Talk about depressing! If you're going to tell your nation's story, hit the high points! Talk about Washington crossing the Delaware, or the tattered stars and stripes waving "*by the dawn's early light,*" or raising the flag on Iwo Jima. Don't start, whatever you do, with your nation's embarrassments. But that's what the author of the OT book of Chronicles did.
- B. You'll remember that 1 & 2 Chronicles (originally one book) was written by an anonymous author around 475 BC to the remnant of the people of Israel who had returned to their homeland after decades in foreign exile. Once they had been a great power but now they looked for all the world like a nation of nobodies. We saw last week that he began with nine chapters of genealogies, linking the ragtag Israelites of his day back to the glory days of their history. **The Chronicler wanted to remind them of who they were, and what hope they had.**
- C. But then, he kicks them in their national shins. He launches into a story Israel would rather forget, the kind of humiliating story most ancient nations never let in their history books. Turn to **1 Chron. 10**. The last genealogy he gave us in chap. 9 was of the tribe of Benjamin, from whom came the first king of Israel, **Saul**. There are 23 chapters about Saul in 1 Samuel, but this is all the ink the Chronicler is going to give him and it is intended to make the whole nation wince. As I read this imagine this is about your nation. Notice all the utterly humiliating details. There is no sugar-coating here. No putting a good face on a bad story. This isn't an Alamo story where defeat leads to glory. **Vv.1-12...**
- D. Why would the Chronicler start with such a humiliating national story? Because even though 500 years had passed since that event, that was the story of their lives. When Jerusalem had been sacked just 100 years earlier and the Jews were hauled off into captivity in Babylon, well that was this story all over again. Same song, another verse. *Been there. Done that. Got the scars to prove it.* But if they or we have any hope of a bright future as God's people, we must always remember what we're really like, what kinds of colossal failures we're capable of.
- E. Saul could have been great. Do you know what the prophet Samuel told Saul when he anointed him as Israel's first king? "*The Spirit of the Lord will come upon you in power...; and you will be changed into a different person. Once these signs are fulfilled, do whatever your hand finds to do, for God is with you.*" [1 Sam 10:6-7] That was God's blank check to Saul for victory and success.
- F. We can be great Christians, too. Think of the extraordinary promises God has given us!
 - "[God] will not let you be tried beyond what you are able to bear, but with the trial will also provide a way out so that **you may be able to endure it.**" (1Co 10:13)
 - "*But thanks be to God, who **always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ***" (2 Cor 2:14)
 - "*We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair, persecuted, but not abandoned; **struck down, but not destroyed***" (2 Cor 4:7-9)
 - "*If God is for us, who can be against us? ... In all these things we are **more than conquerors** through him who loved us.*" (Rom 8:31,37)
- G. So, how's that working for you? Sometimes we really do see God's might working in us. We *do* conquer sin, we *do* persevere. We *are* victorious. But tell me you haven't fallen on your sword in defeat sometimes. Tell me there aren't times when you are a credit to other gods. Tell me there aren't times when you've abandoned all that's dear in defeat. We've got Saul's genes, to be sure. Here's the thing:

I. **WHEN GOD'S PEOPLE EXPERIENCE HUMILIATING DEFEAT THERE IS ONLY ONE EXPLANATION: WE WERE UNFAITHFUL TO THE LORD (10:13-14)**

Look at **vv.13-14**... Saul's life was long and complicated but this is his epitaph: "*Saul died because he was unfaithful to the LORD.*"

A. This word, *unfaithful*, is the flashing red warning light word at the heart of Chronicles. It keeps coming up as he describes the history of this people. Every time in Israel's history when they were humiliated and defeated this was the reason. *Unfaithful*. The word in Heb. has the same connotation as when we use it about a marriage. When we say of a husband, "*He was unfaithful*," we mean that he broke his marriage vow, his covenant with his wife. It wasn't just a spat. They didn't just hit a rough spell. He broke faith with her. He was *treacherous*. A solemn vow was broken: "*Do you promise to keep only unto her as long as you both shall live?*" "*I do*," he had said. When the Bible says that Saul "*was unfaithful to the LORD*," that's what it means. His sin was at that level. It was a kind of adultery against God. The text goes on to tell us how he did it:

B. First, "*He did not keep the word of the LORD.*" In Saul's case, it didn't take long. God told him through Samuel the prophet to go to the town of Gilgal and wait for Samuel to come and offer sacrifices to God, in order to seek God's favor and help in a looming battle with the Philistines. But Samuel wasn't showing up, and the Philistines were getting closer and closer, and Saul's army was dwindling and—well, sometimes, a leader has to take things into his own hands. So Saul offered the sacrifices to God himself and, wouldn't you know it, the coals hadn't even cooled when Samuel showed up, asking, "*What have you done?!*" This was no minor offense. Saul had taken on a solemn duty absolutely reserved for God's priests. Saul had decided that he could get God's favor and help *himself*, that he didn't have to follow God's ways. Bottom line "*he did not keep the word of the LORD*," at the defining moment of his life.

Most of us will keep the word of the Lord when there's no pressure. But when we're sick of waiting, or when things are getting all mucked up, when the wheels are coming off, well, a man has to be practical. A woman has to do what must be done. So, with a pocket full of excuses, we disobey God. *We are unfaithful to the LORD by not keeping his word.*

C. The verse goes on: *he "even consulted a medium for guidance, and did not inquire of the LORD."* The second count of the indictment for unfaithfulness is "*He did not inquire of the LORD.*" Another way to put that is, "*He did not seek the LORD's guidance.*" The expression, "*to seek the LORD*," is another key idea in Chronicles. Remember that phrase in **2 Chron. 7:14**, "*If my people, who are called by my name... will seek my face?*" When we face trouble—trouble of our own making, or trouble brought on by life or enemies, this should always be our recourse: "*Seek God's face.*" "*Inquire of the LORD.*"

The rub here is that, according to **1 Sam. 28:4-7**, Saul *did* inquire of the LORD...

By the time this story happens, Saul had been ignoring God, time and again, for years. **James 1** tells us we can freely ask God for wisdom any time and he'll give it to us. *But* when he gives it we must obey, or he'll stop counseling us. I think that is exactly why God didn't answer Saul at this point. What's more, I don't think Saul really wanted to hear what God had to say. He wanted God to tell him how to win the battle that was looming with the Philistines, and God had already decided that wasn't going to happen. There are times when we just want God to issue an order, to work a miracle, to clean up the mess, but we don't want to be left alone with him. We don't want to show him our hearts and we certainly don't want to look into his. God won't do it that way. That is not really *seeking the LORD*. I think that was Saul's mindset.

The point here is that failure to seek the Lord in our times of trouble and need is to be unfaithful to the Lord. God himself arranges these crises in our lives so that we will seek him, so that we will learn his ways and his heart, so that we will become people of faith. God said in **Phil. 4:6-7**, "*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and*

your minds in Christ Jesus.” That is how our covenant with God is supposed to work. Being faithful to God means seeking God wholeheartedly day in and day out, not only for his help, but also for his heart.

D. Two things should strike us upon hearing this tragic tale and the conclusion we read here in vv.13-14.

One is to heed this warning ourselves. I hope you have been doing that in these last few minutes. Let me ask you: in your life right now—this past week—what has been dominating your life? Are things just really hectic? Are you worried about something? Perhaps a relationship that is very challenging? Maybe it is a great need you have or a decision you must make. **Whatever it is, in that thing are you being faithful to the Lord?** There is an obedience element in there somewhere. Are you obeying God in this situation? And there is a need for you to seek the LORD. Have you done that? Have you prayed? And have you listened. Have you opened the workings of your heart in this situation to the Lord and looked into Scripture to understand the workings of God’s heart, in Christ Jesus.

The **second** thing that should strike us might not be as obvious to us as it was to that first audience: We need a better king than Saul to lead us in faithfulness to God. We need a David. The last line of **v.14** is important: *“So the LORD put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David son of Jesse.”* You know, the king rule is that your son gets to be king after you. But God overruled, and gave Israel a king who would lead them to be a people faithful to God. And that is the kind of king we need.

As God’s people, we each are expected to be faithful to our covenant with God. We bear personal responsibility for that. But we need help—lots of help—with faithfulness to God.

II. THE SOLUTION TO OUR FAITHLESSNESS IS A FAITHFUL KING TO LEAD US (11:1-3)

A. [Read **vv.1-3**...] It is interesting that the Chronicler sort of whets the appetites of his listeners for a king. This story he told them about Saul contrasted with the anointing of David naturally led to a conclusion like this: *Oh, if only we had a king like David now!* But there would be no king in Israel, not for nearly 500 years when, finally, Jesus was born in the city of David.

B. Jesus is the King who will shepherd us in righteousness.

- *“All Israel”* said to David when he became king, *“We are your own flesh and blood.”* And that is what we say to Jesus. You are our kin. You have tasted our tears and felt the pressure of temptation we live with. You know what it is like to be made of dust.
- They said, *“Even when Saul was our king, you were the one winning the battles.”* And that is what we say to Jesus. *You led the campaign against our sin, you endured death, you rose again—all while we were still sinners.* You are worthy to be our King.
- They said, *“The LORD your God said to you, ‘You will shepherd my people Israel, and you will become their ruler.’”* And that is what we say to Jesus. You are the Good Shepherd. You know your sheep. You will protect us from the wolves and lead us to green pastures and still waters. You will go out to find the one lost sheep in 100 and bring us safely home. You will rule us with wisdom, grace and power, and you will rule over all!
- Our text says that David *“made a covenant with”* Israel. Jesus made a covenant with us. He *married us!* He is our bridegroom and we are his bride. We have *“the new covenant in his blood,”* a vow that will carry us till we gather at his wedding feast in glory.
- The text says, *“and they anointed David king over Israel, as the LORD had promised through Samuel.”* God has anointed Jesus Christ as King, and has enthroned him at his right hand in heaven. And we have owned him as our King. We bend the knee to him now. We love and obey him now.
- He is the Shepherd King who will lead us to faithful-ness. He teaches us and intercedes for us and equips us by his Holy Spirit. We *can* be faithful to the LORD because Jesus is our King.

Conclusion

There’s good news—gospel news—hiding in this tragic story of Saul. Here were a people without hope, at the mercy of their enemies, and fully deserving the hopeless situation they were in. And what does God do?

He raises up for them from among sheep a Shepherd King who would lead them in the span of one generation to their nation's greatest glory. That is a gospel story. A redemption story. It tells us about the grace-filled heart and goal of God.

As we were studying this passage together the other day, Doug Becker said, *"There is a plot brewing in this story, a plot to put us on Christ's doorstep."* This story takes us by the hand and leads us to Jesus. Remember how Isaiah foretold the coming of Christ: *"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light..."* That was Israel in those dark days of waiting for a king. And it was you and me, too, "walking in darkness." *And his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever."* [Is. 9:2,6-7] Amen!