

CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS
NOVEMBER 11 2023

so long, Saul

Scripture Story: 1 Samuel 15; 28; 31.
Commentary: *Patriarchs and Prophets* (or *Beginning of the End*), chapters 61, 66, 67.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

Saul's story is a tale of power gone sour. He began with so much promise. Scripture describes him "as handsome a young man as could be found anywhere in Israel, and he was a head taller than anyone else" (1 Samuel 9:2, NIV). He was humble (see 1 Samuel 9:21) and the Spirit of the Lord came upon him in power (see 1 Samuel 10:6, 10).

But sin, a cancer of the soul, corrupted Saul, and he succumbed to a spirit of self-sufficiency. He disobeyed God but felt no remorse for his wrongdoing. Instead, he defended himself as if he needed to answer to no one—not even God. Thus Samuel delivered the sobering message: "You have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you as king over Israel!" (1 Samuel 15:26, NIV). The Bible adds: "The LORD regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel" (1 Samuel 15:35, NIV).

From that point on, Saul's life continued on a downward spiral. He battled mental illness. He became pathologically jealous of David and tried to murder him. He got involved in the occult, seeking counsel from the witch of Endor. In the end, Saul killed himself rather than face the consequences of his actions and decisions.

Saul's story has much to teach us about the perils of arrogance and selfishness. This story also offers a spiritual perspective on depression and mental health. Another topic that emerges from this story involves the perils of dabbling in the occult. Clearly, there are many gems to be mined from the experience of Saul.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Think about the effect of selfishness on one's spiritual life. *(Know)*
- Sense the potentially fatal consequences of rebelling against God. *(Feel)*
- Be challenged to commit fully to God. *(Respond)*

III. EXPLORE

The Nature of Humanity, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, No. 7: "Man and woman were made in the image of God with individuality, the power and freedom to think and to do. Though created free beings, each is an indivisible unity of body, mind, and spirit, dependent upon God for life and breath and all else. When our first parents disobeyed God, they denied their dependence upon Him and fell from their high position. The image of God in them was marred and they became subject to death. Their descendants share this fallen nature and its consequences. They are born with weaknesses and tendencies to evil. But God in Christ reconciled the world to Himself and by His Spirit restores in penitent mortals the image of their Maker. Created for the glory of God, they are called to love Him and one another, and to care for their environment. (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:7, 15; 3; Ps. 8:4-8; 51:5, 10; 58:3; Jer. 17:9; Acts 17:24-28; Rom. 5:12-17; 2 Cor. 5:19, 20; Eph. 2:3; 1 Thess. 5:23; 1 John 3:4; 4:7, 8, 11, 20.)"

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Read some of the statements from the *What Do You Think?* section and instruct the students to stand on one side of the room if they agree with the statement or the other side of the room if they disagree. While they're standing ask for volunteers to share why they answered as they did. Here are some more statements you can use:

- Every sin is a manifestation of selfishness.
- Our society today is too quick to blame everything on "mental illness."
- If Saul had remained humble before God he would not have gone insane.

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

The Associated Press once carried the story of a toddler who found a baby rattlesnake and began playing with it, not realizing that his "toy" was a deadly serpent. The article pointed out that a single drop of venom from a baby rattler is much more potent than the same amount of venom from a fully grown rattlesnake.

The mom discovered her child happily at play, holding the deadly reptile in his hand. Before she could attempt a rescue, however, the snake bit the boy's arm. Her child was rushed to the hospital and, fortunately, survived. But the story could have ended tragically, had the mother not found the child before the venom worked its lethal results.

In the same way, many Christians "play" with sin, thinking it won't bite. Ellen G. White says in *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 431, "All who have ever lived upon the earth have felt the deadly sting of 'that old serpent, called the devil, and Satan.' Revelation 12:9. The fatal effects of sin can be removed only by the provision that God has made."

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

The serpent from the Garden of Eden is alive and well today. First Peter 5:8 (NIV) tells us: "Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." Satan wants your soul. And he's happy to weasel his way into your heart through any method you allow—impure movies, witchcraft, raunchy music, drugs—he'll destroy you however he can. Play with the devil and your game will get deadly.

The story of Saul illustrates the consequences of playing with the devil. What may have seemed like small compromises ultimately claimed his soul.

Are there any areas in your life in which you are allowing the evil one to gain access to your mind and soul? If so, consider carefully the lessons we can learn from the life of Saul.

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story *section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.*

The story of Saul is a case study in what happens when a devoted Christian puts selfish interests above obedience to God. Review the highlights of Saul's story, then facilitate a discussion by asking the following questions:

- What strategy did Satan use to take Saul down?
- What similar methods does he use today?
- In what area do you think teens are most vulnerable to Satan's attacks?

After discussing these questions about the methods of Satan, lead the students in a Bible study on the evil work Satan is doing today.

This can be done by assigning the following texts for students to look up in search of some of the names the Bible uses for Satan: accuser (Revelation 12:10), tempter (Matthew 4:3), enemy (1 Peter 5:8), liar (John 8:44), and evil one (1 John 5:19). It's important to emphasize that Christ came to destroy the work of Satan (1 John 3:8), that Christ has supremacy over the devil (Colossians 1:18), and that the power of Christ dwelling within through the Holy Spirit is greater than the devil (1 John 4:4).

Another area to explore with the students in this lesson highlights the symptoms of Saul's mental illness.

Some mental health professionals suggest that there are five basic categories of psychological disorders: anxiety disorders, mood disorders, personality disorders, dissociative disorders, and schizophrenia. Gain a working knowledge of these disorders (this shouldn't take long on the internet) and describe them to your students. Next, find examples from the life of Saul that illustrate some of these mental challenges.

Discuss how we are all spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental beings. In order to enjoy optimum life we must be balanced and healthy in all of these spheres.

Review the tragic ending of Saul's life.

Discuss how it might have ended differently. Ask for students to share their opinion as to whether or not there was a key event in Saul's life that spelled his doom (if so, what was it?); or was Saul's demise the sum total of many small compromises?

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

Each chapter in the assigned reading offers rich biblical insights worth exploring. Here is a little background from each chapter you may wish to use to dig deeper:

1. **1 Samuel 15**—Why was God so insistent about destroying King Agag and *all* of the Amalekites? Was Saul's failure to obey God in this regard all that significant? It's helpful to understand that the Amalekites were guerilla terrorists. They survived by attacking other nations and pillaging their wealth and families. They were the first to attack the Israelites when God's people entered the Promised Land. They continued to raid the Israelites on a regular basis. Thus God knew that as long as the Amalekites were around, the Israelites would never live without fear. Moreover, the idol worship and corrupt religious teachings that the Amalekites practiced threatened Israel's relationship with God. The only safeguard against this warlike nation was to utterly destroy them.
2. **1 Samuel 28**—Witchcraft was a practice that the Israelites picked up from the original inhabitants of Canaan. In the Old Testament, the practice of the "black arts" was strictly forbidden (see Exodus 22:18 and Leviticus 20:27) by penalty of death. The New Testament speaks of "seducers," "seducing spirits," "unclean spirits, working miracles," all of which are associated with the works of Satan.
3. **1 Samuel 31**—It's interesting to note that Saul faced his death the same way he lived his life—he took matters into his own hands. He acted apart from the counsel of God. Sometimes people plan to "fix" their relationship with God while on their deathbed in order to sneak into heaven at the last minute, thus amending a lifetime of sinful indulgences. The reality is, when nearing death, we will most likely respond to God in the same way that we have been responding to Him all along. Challenge the students by saying, "How do you want to face death? That's how you ought to face life today."

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Bring a radio and explain how it can provide

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Key Text**
  Invite the students to share the key text with the class if they have committed it to memory.
- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight *statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week's story found in the book* Patriarchs and Prophets. *Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from* Out of the Story.
- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week's story. Have them share the verse that spoke most directly to them and allow them to explain why they chose it.
- **Further Insight**
  Ask them how the quote in Further Insight *conveys the point of the story in this lesson.*

Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

RABBI 101

Learning by Teaching

One effective way to enhance learning is by encouraging the learners to teach the material themselves. By explaining concepts and lessons to others, the teacher, by default, becomes the most engaged student. To put this teaching tip into practice, ask the students the week before to come the following week prepared to teach one element of the story. For example, one student may teach a brief history lesson on the Amalekites. Another student may be assigned to give a brief lecture on the geography of the battles mentioned in 1 Samuel 15; 28; and 31. Of course, all of the students will learn from the peer presentations, but the "teachers" will learn the most!

entertainment, music, news, a weather report, and so on—just by tuning in to different frequencies. The broadcast you receive all depends on the station you're tuned in to. If you're not familiar with the options available, you have to scan the stations to find what you prefer. Some options are better than others.

Ask the class how the radio is like spiritual guidance. Explain that there are many spiritual counterfeits clamoring for our attention. The one we tune in to makes all the difference in spiritual life.

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

Many young people are following the example of Saul and receiving counterfeit spiritual guidance. Consequently, their soul is at peril. To conclude, read Deuteronomy 18:9-15 as a challenge to tune in to God's voice. Invite them to experience the adventure of radical obedience to God. When they make this kind of nothing-held-back commitment to God, all of the issues that we face in this life—physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual—will be shaped by the strong hand of God. Only then can a person experience the more abundant life in Christ.



Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *Patriarchs and Prophets* (or *Beginning of the End*), chapters 61, 66, and 67.

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STUDENT LESSON

Scripture Story: 1 Samuel 15; 28; 31.
Commentary: *Patriarchs and Prophets* (or *Beginning of the End*), chapters 61, 66, 67.

so long, Saul



Photo by Audrey Goforth

flashlight

"When Saul chose to act independently of God, the Lord could no longer be his guide, and was forced to set him aside. Then He called to the throne 'a man after His own heart' (1 Samuel 13:14)—not one who was faultless in character, but who, instead of trusting to himself, would rely upon God, and be guided by His Spirit; who, when he sinned. would submit to reproof and correction" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 636).

keytext

"Then the word of the LORD came to Samuel: 'I regret that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions.' "

(1 Samuel 15:10, 11, NIV)

what do you think?

Agree or disagree?

____ The root cause of depression is selfishness.
____ Mental health and spiritual health are closely related.
____ Satan cannot tempt us if we are fully committed to God.
____ One of the ways Satan gains access to our minds is through horoscopes.

did you know?

When temptations assail you, when care, perplexity, and darkness seem to surround your soul, look to the place where you last saw the light. Rest in Christ's love and under His protecting care. When sin struggles for the mastery in the heart, when guilt oppresses the soul and burdens the conscience, when unbelief clouds the mind, remember that Christ's grace is sufficient to subdue sin and banish the darkness. Entering into communion with the Saviour, we enter the region of peace."—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 250.

INTO THE STORY

"Samuel said, 'Although you were once small in your own eyes, did you not become the head of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel. And he sent you on a mission, saying, "Go and completely destroy those wicked people, the Amalekites; wage war against them until you have wiped them out." Why did you not obey the LORD?'. . .

" 'But I did obey the LORD,' Saul said. 'I went on the mission the LORD assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their king. The soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, in order to sacrifice them to the LORD your God at Gilgal.'

"But Samuel replied: 'Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.' "

"The Philistines assembled and came and set up camp at Shunem, while Saul gathered all Israel and set up camp at Gilboa. When Saul saw the Philistine army, he was afraid; terror filled his heart. He inquired of the LORD, but the LORD did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets. Saul then said to his attendants, 'Find me a woman who is a medium, so I may go and inquire of her.'

" 'There is one in Endor,' they said.

"So Saul disguised himself, putting on other clothes, and at night he and two men went to the woman. 'Consult a spirit for me,' he said, 'and bring up for me the one I name.' "

"Now the Philistines fought against Israel; the Israelites fled before them, and many fell dead on Mount Gilboa. The Philistines were in hot pursuit of Saul and his sons, and they killed his sons Jonathan, Abinadab and Malki-Shua. The fighting grew fierce around Saul, and when the archers overtook him, they wounded him critically.

"Saul said to his armor-bearer, 'Draw your sword and run me through, or these uncircumcised fellows will come and run me through and abuse me.'

"But his armor-bearer was terrified and would not do it; so Saul took his own sword and fell on it. When the armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he too fell on his sword and died with him. So Saul and his three sons and his armor-bearer and all his men died together that same day."

(1 Samuel 15:17-22; 28:4-8; 31:1-6, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

Who are the main actors in this story?

_____
_____
_____

What do you think is the key verse in Saul's story? *(Underline it.)*

What character defects do you see in Saul? *(List them.)*

_____
_____
_____
_____

What emotions, actions, or adjectives enrich this story? *(Draw a rectangle around them.)*

What words or phrases most capture the various emotions involved? *(Circle them.)*

What were the results of Saul's disobedience?

_____
_____
_____

If you were to tell the story of Saul to a class of kindergarten kids, what moral would you stress to them?

_____
_____
_____

How does this lesson apply in our lives today?

_____
_____
_____

What does the lesson teach us about selfishness? Depression? Mental health?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

punch lines

"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" **(Mark 14:38, NIV).**

"The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation" **(Exodus 34:6, 7, NIV).**

"Be careful to obey all these regulations I am giving you, so that it may always go well with you and your children after you, because you will be doing what is good and right in the eyes of the LORD your God" **(Deuteronomy 12:28, NIV).**

"Saul died because he was unfaithful to the LORD; he did not keep the word of the LORD and even consulted a medium for guidance, and did not inquire of the LORD. So the LORD put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David son of Jesse" **(1 Chronicles 10:13, 14, NIV).**

"The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons" **(1 Timothy 4:1, NIV).**

further insight

"The greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold, men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall."—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 57.

Sabbath

Read Ephesians 6:10-18; 1 Peter 5:8, 9; and James 4:7.

The *What Do You Think* section of the lesson connects Saul's story with modern-day temptations posed by the occult. How can Christians stand against Satan?

Sunday

Read 1 Samuel 15; 28; 31; and 2 Samuel 11.

In 1 Samuel 15:10, 11 God tells Samuel that He is grieved He made Saul the king. How would you explain these kinds of regrets expressed by God? Why did God choose Saul as king in the first place? Did God not know how this decision would turn out?

Another question that emerges from the story is this: What was Saul's "big" sin that ultimately contributed to his demise? Why did Saul's sin of keeping animals to sacrifice to God result in the death penalty and yet David committed adultery and murder only to be venerated as a man after God's own heart? What was the difference, in God's eyes, between David and Saul?

Monday

Read 1 Samuel 15:10, 11.

Memorize the *Key Text* then reflect on these questions:

Have I ever grieved God? If so, how?

Does God still "turn away from" people He has called to leadership? Why or why not?

What can I do to safeguard myself from God's withdrawing His Spirit from me?

Tuesday

Read Acts 13:22.

Identify two people you know who strike you as persons who might be described as David was (i.e., a person after God's own heart). List the characteristics that come to mind when you think of these people.

Wednesday

Think about the steps that led to Saul's downfall. Read 1 Samuel 15:9-11 and notice how spiritually strong Saul was when he began. Note how in the beginning of Saul's career that "God changed Saul's heart" (1 Samuel 10:9, NIV) and he prophesied along with the prophets in Gibeah. Notice the story of Nahash the Ammonite and think about Saul's fearless resolve to fight for God.

But then, as you see in the *Punch Lines*, something deep within Saul's character began to unravel. Identify the steps in Saul's downfall. What can we do today to avoid this spiritual spiral toward destruction?

Thursday

Read James 2:19.

C. S. Lewis wrote in *The Screwtape Letters*: "There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them."[1]

Which ditch am I more inclined to fall into—the ditch of disbelieving in demons or the ditch of obsessing about them? How can I view them in a balanced way?

Friday

Read Mark 14:38.

One of the primary reasons for Saul's demise was his selfishness. Ask yourself: How can I become more selfless? What examples from Christ's life give me a picture of what a selfless life looks like? Who is God calling me to selflessly serve today?

[1] C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: Macmillan, 1959 and 1961), Preface.

this week's reading*

Patriarchs and Prophets (or *Beginning of the End*), chapters 61, 66, 67.

**Beginning of the End* is a special adaptation of *Patriarchs and Prophets*, created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press®. Get more information about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#.URlhF1rBO9s. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.