

God Save the King

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 11 November 2007

Preacher: Paul Barker

[0 : 0 0] who texts the best texts don't have any number there. Some suggest that he reigned just for two years but we really don't know. It seems that he reigned a bit longer than that but nobody really knows. Possibly 40 years according to a reference in Acts and I think in Josephus a first century historian but otherwise it's a bit of a gap. But in the end it doesn't matter too much it seems to me.

Well let's pray. God our Father speak to us from your word tonight. Give us understanding both inform our minds and reform our lives. Help us to learn and apply what we learn so that we may be people who bring you glory and honour and who obey your commands to us.

Lord God we pray this for the sake and for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Well the reason they wanted a king was to fight their battles and if you remember back to the beginning of this little series 1 Samuel chapter 8 a few weeks ago their desire was for a king to fight their battles to fight the enemies back in chapter 8 verse 20. Indeed they asked for a king like the nations. At two levels we understand that. A king in the sense that other nations have kings so we want one but it's a little bit more loaded than that. We want a king like their kings that is fighting battles, military warriors and ideally military victors as well. And we saw a couple of weeks ago in chapter 11 that Saul passes his first test. He's the king and we've seen that in recent weeks him becoming king and he passed his first test. On debut he delivered Israel from the hands of the Ammonites. He saved the town of Jabesh Gilead on the Transjordan side, the east side of the Jordan River and so he's acted well. First test, first victory, defeated the enemies. But now the old enemy rears its head again. The old enemy of the Philistines. The Philistines were the people who settled along the sea coast of ancient Israel. Maybe a little bit after the conquest by Joshua, the flat area alongside the Mediterranean Sea on the west side of Israel. Where is now the Gaza Strip, that sort of area and a little bit north of that. It's from the Philistines who perhaps emigrated from possibly from Crete in the Mediterranean Sea that we end up with the name Palestine today. The Philistines were fierce people.

They were fairly well advanced in their technology. It seems that they had military weaponry advanced over Israel's and other nations round about. And for a lot of the early Israelite history, they seemed fairly well entrenched in that flat seacoast area adjacent to the Mediterranean Sea. But from time to time and over a long period of time, they brought about a number of incursions into the heartland of Israel's land. The seacoast where they settled was part of the conquered or the promised land. So for most of the time, Israel basically had lost that. But at other times, they moved up into the hills. And in a sense, the central hills of Israel were where the battles would often be fought between Israel and the Philistines. And in a sense, the Philistines would move up a bit. And then after a while, the Israelites would move down. It's a bit like if you ever watch Dad's Army and you've got at the beginning the symbolism of Dad's Army and the flags of Britain and Germany moving around Europe. Well, it's a bit like that. For a time, they'd move up and for a time, they'd be beaten back. And they keep cropping up through Old Testament history. The Philistines, they were there in the book of Judges in the time of Samson. It's against the Philistines that Samson is raised up to be a judge. And when Samson does his sort of terrorist suicide act of bringing down the temple of Dagon, it's one of the Philistine temples that he destroys as he takes his own life in doing so. The Philistines were the key enemy in the early part of 1 Samuel, part that we haven't looked at in this series, but we did a year or two ago, where they capture the Ark of the Covenant, in a sense, the symbol of God's throne, and take it away to one of their cities. And in the end, it wreaks havoc for their gods and their cities. And so they, in a sense, pass it back to Israel, back in 1 Samuel chapter 6. Well, now the Philistines rear their heads again. And this is a very serious threat to Israel's land. They have a garrison at a town called Geber, which is not all that far north of

Jerusalem. Not that Jerusalem was that significant at this time. It was not yet the capital and not yet a major city of Israel, but relatively central in the land of Israel. That is, when we're dealing with some of these towns that are mentioned here, even though for most of us they're pretty foreign names, we are dealing with the fact that the

[5 : 14] Philistines are well entrenched through the land of Israel, not just on the outskirts of the land or on the borders of the land. Far from that. And so in verse 2, Saul, the king, gets his army together.

He chooses 3,000 out of Israel, 2,000 with him in a place called Michmash, and in the hill country of Bethel, again, not all that far north of Jerusalem as it is today. And 1,000 were with Jonathan. We're not told who Jonathan is here. It's only later on, in a later chapter, a later verse, that Jonathan is clearly Saul's son, and becomes in fact a key figure in the story of the rest of the book of 1 Samuel. And he is in Gibeah of Benjamin, a fairly central tribal area, again north of what is Jerusalem today. And in verse 3, we read that Jonathan, with his thousand men, defeated the garrison of the Philistines that was at Gibeah. And the Philistines heard of it, that is, the other Philistines who were not part of the garrison. I mean, the Philistines in the garrison would have known of it because they were the ones defeated. But the other Philistines heard of it, and Saul, the king, blew the trumpet throughout all the land, saying, let the Hebrews hear. So they were proclaiming a victory over the Philistines. And of course, there was no telephone system, there was no CNN in those days. So the way of communicating the news was to blow a trumpet of victory, and that would sort of pass itself around the country, that victory had come to Israel. Notice verse 4, when all Israel heard that Saul had defeated the garrison of the Philistines, and also that Israel had become odious to the Philistines, the people were called out to join Saul at Gilgal. Scholars make a lot out of the language of that verse. When all Israel heard that Saul had defeated the garrison, well, it was Jonathan who defeated the garrison. And so there are some who say, well, here is Saul's press release. You know, it's actually his son who's won the victory, but he announces the press release to draw the attention and glory to himself. I'm the one who's won the victory. It could be read like that. It could be read as that little undercurrent of taking the glory from what was actually his son's victory, especially if you read on into chapter 14, a victory and dealing with Jonathan again. But other sources of ancient Near Eastern history show that in similar situations, the ruler, the king, the emperor, would actually claim in a sense the victory, even if it was their generals or their son or others who won the actual battle.

And that does seem fair enough. So maybe we ought not to read too much negatively into this. Well, this little victory is far from final. It's just the defeat of one garrison in the town of Geba.

[8 : 08] It's hardly the complete rout of the whole of the Philistines. And so in verse five, the Philistines mustered to fight with Israel. So this is their retaliation or revenge. Notice the numbers.

30,000 chariots and 6,000 horsemen and troops like the sand on the seashore in multitude. That is, in a sense, metaphorically, too numerous to count. Israel's army is 3,000.

This far, far outnumbers the Israelite army. And they came up and they encamped at Michmash to the east of Beit Arvin. Now, Michmash is the very place that Saul was at a couple of verses before. But he's left Michmash, it seems, to go further east to Gilgal, there to get all of Israel together. Gilgal was a place where they celebrated crossing the Jordan River back in the time of Joshua.

So it seems to be a place where, in a sense, it's got a notable part of Israel's history. So no sooner has Saul left Michmash to go to Gilgal than the Philistines walk into the town that he's just left and they encamp there. They take it over, in effect.

[9 : 25] So clearly the Philistine threat is very strong indeed. We're only seven miles from Jerusalem at this time. As I say, don't think Jerusalem as in the capital city today, but the point is that it's very central in the land.

So no wonder, in verses 6 and 7, Israel is afraid. When the Israelites saw that they were in distress, for the troops were hard-pressed, the people hid themselves in caves, holes, rocks, tombs and cisterns.

The people are afraid because the enemy is strong and threatening. And we know that in ancient Israel, as in modern Israel, there are lots of caves in the hills, lots of holes in the ground in which people might hide.

David does that later on in the same book. In rocks, in tombs, people would... Tombs are not so much buried graves, as we would know, but rather caves where bodies would be placed.

So it shows the desperation that Israelites would actually be prepared to go into tombs where presumably they were dead bodies or remains, thus rendering them ritually unclean, but in order to hide from the enemy.

[10 : 34] And the cistern is not quite like a little toilet cistern that we might think of, but would be a cut hole in the ground, plastered, and to keep water free from algae so the water wouldn't drain away and it would be dark in the ground in a dry country.

So it shows their desperation in hiding away from the Philistines. Some Hebrews cross the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead.

That is, they've gone out of the Promised Land area in one sense, over to Transjordan, and that is away from the Philistines, further away, heading east, where they think they'll be safe.

Gad is one of Israel's tribes that lived on that side of the Jordan. Gilead is the old name for the area before Israel took control of it as well. Jabesh Gilead was the town we saw a couple of weeks ago that was protected by Saul.

And it's the town of Jabesh in Gilead, in effect, is the name of that town. So things don't look good. There's this initial rout or defeat of one little garrison, but now the threat of the Philistines is hugely significant.

[11 : 44] Saul has gone to Gilgal, and now we read from verse 8. Saul waited seven days, the time appointed by Samuel, but Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and the people began to slip away from Saul.

Gilgal is towards the Jordan, in the main part of the Promised Land, and Saul has gone there. Other Israelites are gathering there.

His army is with him, it seems, and he's waited seven days, a week, for Samuel to come. It's the time appointed by Samuel, verse 8 says.

That may refer back to chapter 10, which has a similar sort of idea that Saul is to remain one week in Gilgal.

And then in verse 8 of chapter 10, it says, Samuel will come down to you to present burnt offerings and other sacrifices of well-being. Seven days you shall wait until I come to you and show you what you shall do.

[12 : 55] It's hard to know whether that's exactly the verse that this is the background of, because there's a bit of a time lapse between chapter 10 and chapter 13. But it could be another unspoken command, or it could actually be referring all the time back to chapter 10, verse 8.

What's happening, though, is that during this week, the army, or members of the army, are slipping away. They're giving up. They're afraid. They think, what's the point?

We're all just sitting here doing nothing. Samuel's not coming. The Philistines are mustering around us. We're getting out of here. And they begin to slip away, as verse 8 tells us, out of fear or disillusionment or whatever.

Now, in the laws about warfare in the Old Testament, it's very clear how warfare should be conducted. The laws you find mostly in Deuteronomy 20, but in a few other spots in Deuteronomy as well.

They're things like, if it's a legitimate war, where the threat is in the Promised Land area itself, as this is, then God is the one who fights and brings victory.

[14 : 06] God is present in the people's midst, and therefore they need to be ritually clean and have offered sacrifices and so on, because it's as if they've come to church. God is present, even though they're about to fight a battle against the enemy.

They need to have, in a sense, got themselves right with God, if God is to be in their midst fighting for them. God is the one who takes the initiative in warfare and gives the direction to fight.

And Israel is, as part of getting ready for God's presence, to sacrifice, and God is to lead. A week passes, Samuel the prophet does not come.

So what's going to happen? What do you do? Samuel had said you are to wait one week. And now we're told a week passes. Is it that Samuel hasn't kept his word, that he's running late?

Do you keep waiting? Well, Saul takes matters into his own hands. In this sense, one might say he exercises leadership. In verse 9, Saul said, Bring the burnt offerings here to me and the offerings of well-being.

[15 : 15] Burnt offerings are the basic offering or sacrifice for sin, and the offerings of well-being are what you would offer after a burnt offering in order to celebrate a renewed relationship with

God.

And he offered the burnt offering. As soon as he had finished offering the burnt offering, but presumably before he'd offered the sacrifice of well-being, so that is, it's as though Samuel's sort of been hiding, watching, and as soon as the burnt offering was offered, there arrived Samuel on the scene.

Verse 10, And Saul went out to meet him and salute him or greet him. Well, what would you have done if you were Saul? Would you have waited and waited for Samuel?

Would you have thought somehow he's been unavoidably detained? He told me a week, a week's now passed, it's now time to act. You see the people slipping away.

You seem to have lost your ability to motivate them and to excite them. What would you do? The Philistine threat is growing and it's close at Michmash.

[16:30] In verse 11, Samuel says, What have you done? And Saul replies, When I saw that the people were slipping away from me, when I saw that you did not come within the days appointed, when I saw that the Philistines were mustering at Michmash, I said, Now the Philistines will come down upon me at Gilgal, and I have not entreated the favour of the Lord.

So I forced myself and offered the burnt offering. The language of forced myself could maybe better be expressed as I was compelled.

That's how some translations put it. Not so much that I force myself, but I was forced. I had no choice, is the sense of that. That is the urgency of the threat.

The Philistines mustering not far from us. My army slipping away. Samuel is late. The people are losing motivation and morale. What else can I do?

I have no choice but to offer the sacrifice. It's the best I could do in a bad situation. That's in effect what Saul is saying to Samuel.

[17:41] And Saul's response is so typical. That is, when we're hard pressed, we often make the excuse, indeed we often think, I have no choice but to do this thing.

Where it might be the demands or pressures of work that are upon us and we say, I've got no choice but to work through Sunday night service so I'm not going to church.

It might be that the pressures of study, I've got all these exams coming up this week and next week. I actually have no choice but to skip church or home group for a couple of weeks and study until my exams are over.

It may be that we've found a non-Christian that we're quite keen on and someone who begins to make us happy and we might well say, well, actually, I don't think I've got a choice.

this is the right person for me. It may be that we have told an untruth, a lie. Maybe trivial, maybe serious. But again, maybe our response is, well, I've got no choice but to say something untrue because I don't want to hurt somebody.

[18:57] How many times have I thought that or heard that? There will be others who might say, well, yeah, I took drugs because I really had no choice. If I was to keep awake and be alert to finish my study or this project or this work demands from my boss or university or whatever, the pressure from friends, I've really got no choice, no option here if I'm to keep my friends or pass my exams or stay awake.

I had an abortion. I had no choice. My parents would have disowned me. Now, the number of circumstances could be multiplied.

All sorts of things where in a sense we think and we say I've got no choice in this matter. That is, the way that we have perceived the situation means that we, in a sense, do what is wrong thinking this is the best that I can do in the circumstance.

Friends, that is behaviour like the nations. Saul's response shows a complete abrogation of responsibility.

A complete denial in fact of reality. Not my fault is what he's saying to Samuel. Samuel says, what have you done? And Saul says, not my fault.

[20:25] Think of all these factors here. My army is going. You're late. The Philistines are there. What else am I going to do? I have to. I've got no choice but to offer this sacrifice. In fact, the way he says it even hints of blame back to Samuel.

You were late is how it, the emphasis in fact in verse 11. You were late. Just like Adam in the Garden of Eden saying to God, the woman you gave me, she gave me the fruit and I ate.

Passing the blame which is again so common when we're hard pressed by urgency and circumstances. See, what's going on here for Saul is that he's deceived by sin into thinking that he has no choice.

That this is the best that he can do and therefore it's a legitimate course of action. Sin often tricks us into thinking that way. The deceit of the devil in effect.

Calling us, urging us, tempting us to succumb to what is urgent and to succumb to the pressures of circumstances around us. But in doing that it blinds us to a true perception of reality.

[21 : 38] That is, it leaves God out of the equation in some way or other. That is, the best thing I can do here is have an abortion because my parents are going to disown me.

As though my parents' reaction to me is actually what drives me. That's the key bottom line in this. Or whether it's passing exams. The only choice I've got is to skip church or to take drugs or something that's going to get me through my exams.

To cheat or something because passing my exams is actually the bottom line for me. Or doing successfully at work, making enough money on commission or whatever it is, therefore I'll do anything to get that.

I've got actually no choice. Or if happiness is my goal in life and somehow I'm being made happy by a person who's not a Christian, then I might think, well, I've got no choice but to continue this relationship because actually in the end, happiness is the bottom line for me.

You see, sin tricks us and deceives us into seeing something that is not actually the reality. That is, in the pressure of circumstances and the urgency that surrounds us, what are actually our idols come quickly to the fore.

[22 : 52] And that's actually what's happening here for Saul in a way. His key motivation is his own status as king or his success as king or the loyalty of his people.

It's not actually obedience to God. When you say I have no choice but to do this course of action even though I know that somehow it's not right or not perfect, we are saying I am not trusting God in the middle of this mess.

I'm denying the sovereignty of God. And Saul shows that because he takes control of the situation. He usurps God's authority in this.

He ignores God. He ignores God's command. He ignores God's word through his prophet. Even if the prophet is a bit late. Saul judges what is best but it's not what is perfect.

He shows a lack of trust in God in this. And not only that, he then defends himself in an act of self-justification against the accusation saying, it's not my fault, actually Samuel, if anyone's fault, it's your fault, Samuel.

[24 : 13] That's where sin blinds us and increases our pride. Where we rely on our own resources and ingenuity but not on the sovereign power of God.

And it's no different from us. We're just like that. Samuel's rebuke to Saul is quite stinging in verse 13. Samuel said to Saul, you have done foolishly because the fool is someone who really does not have God in their heart.

You have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God which he commanded you. Now there's an element of sympathy we might have with Saul because of the circumstances that are confronting him.

Most of us I suspect might have acted the same sort of way. But there is a basic commandment from God maybe spoken through the prophet that Saul has disobeyed. And in many of those examples of circumstances that we face it's the same sort of thing.

That is we compromise or dismiss or put aside or relativize the commandment of God. As though okay yeah that might be the ideal but in this circumstance there is something better to do to tell a lie to have an abortion to skip church to ignore Christian fellowship or to go out with someone who's not a Christian or to cheat or lie or whatever it may be.

[25 : 33] Samuel goes on to say the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. You see Saul in excluding God in the equation thought the only way his kingdom will be secure is for him to act this way.

Not so. Sin blinds us and deceives us. Saul was blinded and deceived. But now Samuel says in verse 14 your kingdom will not continue. The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and the Lord has appointed him to be ruler over his people because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you.

Now some of us may think well this is a little bit harsh on Saul. I mean it was a pretty difficult situation. His army fleeing, the Philistines mustering over the hill and Samuel was late after all. What else was a man to do? But disobedience of a commandment of God is serious. It's not a light matter. It doesn't matter what command it is. Disobedience is serious.

And so God's response to Saul is not disproportionate really. Saul himself is still the king but he's lost the opportunity of an eternal dynasty that through his son, Jonathan presumably, and through his son's sons to come and so on, Saul may have been the first of a long line of Israelite kings but not so.

[26 : 53] He'll be the first and the last of his dynasty. He's lost that opportunity. Later on in a couple of chapters after yet more mistakes by Saul, he'll actually lose the kingship.

And that's hinted at here by the fact that God has appointed somebody else already but for the time being Saul will continue to reign as king of Israel. The point is there is never any excuse to disobey an explicit command of God.

Our lives, if you think back, probably show you many times where you think that's not true. Whether it's to lie or cheat or steal or murder, to marry a non-believer, to give up on church, to take drugs, whatever it may be, there is actually never any excuse the end never justifies the means.

The pressure of circumstances though we face when we're under stress, when we're in difficulty, often means that our idols, which are sometimes sort of buried in our heart, actually become more obvious and prominent.

If our idol is success, then it is that that will drive our decision-making. If it's happiness or pleasure or fun or reputation or fame, a parent's approval, if they are our idols, that will dominate our decision-making.

[28 : 32] Our decisions betray the treasure in our hearts. Pleasing God was not Saul's goal. It never was.

He was a king like the nations. The nations kings weren't out to please the God of Israel. And nor, by and large, was Saul.

So God will appoint another king. Notice how he's described in verse 14, a king after his own heart, or a man after his own heart.

Not a perfect man. man. In fact, that first man wasn't. But a man whose heart is basically to please God. Not perfectly, but that's the desire of that person.

And of course, in a few chapters time, that person will be revealed in chapter 16 as David, a mere shepherd boy at the time, who in chapter 17 defeats Goliath, and by the end of the book, is in effect the king.

[29 : 37] Well, the result of this episode, Samuel departs in verse 15. We should take that with full significance, it seems. It's not just that Samuel, okay, has rebuked Saul, so he now goes back to do whatever he wanted to do, but the departure of Samuel represents, in a way, the departure of God's guidance and word through his prophet to this king, Saul.

The rest of the people, followed Saul to join the army. They went up from Gilgal towards Gibeah of Benjamin. Saul counted the people who were present with him about 600 men.

He started with 3,000 and even that didn't seem to be enough. He's now down just to 600. But what we read in the next verses is even more terrifying.

the threat of the Philistines is even stronger. Verse 16, Saul, his son Jonathan, and the people who were present with them stayed in Geba of Benjamin, the town that Jonathan had won the victory over the garrison.

But the Philistines encamped at Michmash, the same place that they'd entered after Saul had left earlier in this chapter. Raiders came out of the camp of the Philistines in three companies, in different directions this is.

[31 : 01] one company turned towards Ophrah, to the land of Shual, another company turned towards Beit Horan, and another company turned toward the mountain that looks down upon the valley of Zebulun, towards the wilderness.

Basically from the north down to the south, spreading out. This is a serious threat now of the Philistines. But even more than that, not only is Israel outnumbered by the Philistine armies and their threats by sending raiding parties in different directions, verse 19 to the end of the chapter tells us that the Philistines as a country have a monopoly on metallurgy, and that is seriously weakening Israel.

See what it says in verse 19 on. There was no smith to be found throughout all the land of Israel. Well, there's plenty of smiths here tonight, Jenny, Jonty, and others. Lots of smiths in our church. These are people who are dealing with metal. For the Philistines said, the Hebrews must not make swords or spears for themselves. Now, this is not just a new thing right now. This is a situation that's already existing.

That is, in the earlier times, the Philistines who are wanting to make incursions into Israelites territory are saying, okay, we're going to put the economic pinch on them and the military pinch on them by restricting their ability to have weapons.

[32 : 21] So they don't allow them swords and spears. But even more than that, we're told in verse 20, all the Israelites went down to the Philistines to sharpen their ploughshare, mattocks, axes or sickles.

Now, we're not talking right here this minute while Saul has gone to Gebar, but rather in the earlier times, this has been the practice. To go down to the Philistines shows that they're on the seacoast and the Israelites are up in the hill country.

And so in order for them to have their farming utensils sharp, they have to go and in effect pay a tax to the Philistines to get them sharpened. That shows the advance of the Philistines and their monopoly in metalwork that is weakening Israel.

The charge was two thirds of a shekel for the ploughshares and for the mattocks and a third of a shekel for sharpening the axes and for setting the goads. So on the day of the battle, neither sword nor spear was to be found in the possession of any of the people with Saul and Jonathan, but Saul and his son Jonathan had them.

Now that's an astonishingly weak army. 600 men compared to the 30,000 chariots of the Philistines and their army that is more numerous than sand on the seashore, but what's more than that, they're not just outnumbered in number, but they're outnumbered in weaponry.

[33 : 41] The Philistines have got all the weapons and what have you got in the whole of Israel? The king and his son have got a spear or a sword each and that's it. See, chapter 13 ends in what we might call utter hopelessness, utter despair for Israel.

Their king has been rebuked, they are vastly outnumbered, their weapons are just two things, the Philistines are in control of the central land of Israel, they are sending out raiding parties north, south, east and west without any problems at all.

What hope has Israel got? Now in a sense, God in his mercy is teaching a lesson here that Saul ought to have known when he was at Gilgal waiting for Samuel.

This book 1 Samuel will go on to make it very clear what hope Israel has. For not by sword nor by spear does the Lord save.

The words of David, the king after God's own heart, death, as he defeats Goliath in chapter 17. In the pressures of our world and circumstances, we're so easily tempted to think we have no choice but to do something that is wrong, to compromise our standards, to compromise God's.

[35 : 03] But God is sovereign. There is never any excuse to take an avenue of sin. Don't be blinded or deceived by the pressures of circumstances upon us to say I've got no choice.

You see, God here is teaching a lesson that there is no way out for Israel. They've got utterly no hope at the end of this chapter. But they do have hope.

Not by weapons, not by the skill or ingenuity of a king, but from God. It is God and God alone who can and will save. So there is never any excuse to disobey a commandment of God.

God is the one who's sovereign. If we're in a pickle or in a mess, to get out of that mess is not by an avenue of disobedience, but rather by trusting and obedience to God.

To obey is better than sacrifice. Indeed, one of the saddest things about Saul, both here and in chapter 15, is that he somehow cloaks his disobedience with acts of religious piety, as though somehow some religious ritual will atone for his disobedience.

[36 : 23] It's not the only time in the Old Testament that happens, it happens time and time and time again. In Proverbs, in the prophets, Amos for example, the more religious people are, sometimes the more sinful they are because they seem to somehow load ritual and religious activity on top of or to hide their actual disobedience and sin.

How good it is to remember that even when the circumstances wherein seem to show an utter hopelessness that gives all the more opportunity to display the power of God.

Even more than David's little slingshot, which later brings victory over the Philistines in the defeat of Goliath, their giant, God orchestrates that utter hopelessness leading us to the cross of Christ. Not by sword or by spear does the Lord save, not even really by a slingshot, but by a cross. For it's while we were yet helpless that Christ died for us. God often actually leads us into messes. [37 : 38] He leads us into trials to prove us, to test what our hearts are, to expose what are the gods, the idols, the desires of our heart.

Friends, if our heart is like the nations, we'll embrace sin and disobedience without shame. The circumstances that we're confronted by will direct us to run towards our idols. God's. But if our heart is like God's, then even in mess, even when humanly speaking we can see no way out, we will not compromise our obedience to God's commands.

Even if that's utter foolishness in the eyes of the world, as it usually would be, it will not be so to God. What did Samuel say to Saul in verse 13?

How foolish. The world would have said, how clever, what leadership you've exercised. What God says is, how foolish.

[38 : 49] Don't be blinded by sin to think you have no choice but to disobey. Don't be fooled by sin to think that somehow in some circumstance disobeying God is justified.

Don't be deceived by sin to think that some religious ritual, sacrifice, offering or act of piety will somehow make your disobedience okay.

It will not. Let's pray. God, our Father, we thank you that you are sovereign, that you are powerful to save in ways that we do not expect.

And even when the urgency and pressures and circumstances of our life come upon us and we're tempted down wrong paths because we see that as the only way out and all other doors closed, guard us, protect us and remind us that the door of obedience and faith is the only right way out. Amen. Amen. Amen. Dinge that venir in our ■ Bolt ■■ weary goes ■■■ hat van