

What Is The Word Of God To You?

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[0 : 00] You may be seated. Isaiah 40 reminds us that the grass withers and the flower fades but the word of the Lord stands forever. Luke 1 says that no word from God shall be void of power. Let's pray.

! Lord, will you please enliven your people? Will you please shine the light of your word into our hearts? I ask, Lord, that by the ministry of your word and the living word of God applied to the hearts of Christians, that you will turn us who follow Christ into your great army, that you will raise us up, that you will sharpen your people like iron sharpens iron.

We ask, Lord, that you will be glorified, that we will always be a church under your word. We ask this for your glory. Amen.

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, what is God's word to you? What is God's word to you?

One of our brothers shared with me recently how he was challenged to begin reading the word of God on a regular basis at home during the week and how it's been life-changing in the years that have followed.

[1 : 32] We know that words hold the power of life and death. Proverbs 18.31 says this.

And those who love the word of God will eat its fruit. If you love the word of God, you will enjoy the fruit of knowing God through his word, which is eternal life with him.

This is what Peter confessed. Where else can we go, Lord? You alone, Jesus Christ, you have the words of eternal life. The reason I've picked this as our theme for today is because this is what seems to be Saul's great undoing.

The word of God was not what it ought to have been in Saul's life. And the results are devastating for him and for the nation. So as we read through this passage together, I hope to make four observations.

The first is this. Because the Lord is all-powerful, his word stands forever. See, the promises in scripture that the word of the Lord stands forever, they're attached to God himself.

[2 : 44] It's because God is all-powerful. He's the creator and the sustainer of everyone and everything, including his own word. Would you look at 1 Samuel chapter 13, verse 1 with me?

If we were to do a sampling right now and take turns with everyone who had a different English translation, reading verse 1, especially the first half of it, we would have a lot of questions and problems.

If we go back to the best preserved ancient Hebrew copy that we have, the Masoretic text, it would read like this, word for word. So Saul, this king who we've been learning about.

The next word is Ben. We know the word Ben means son. So Saul, son of. Then the next word is year. What a confusing combination of words.

It's curious even to Hebrew scholars because to refer to someone in years like that is a way of expressing their age. It's seldom used as a reference to the length of the king's reign.

[3 : 49] Then what comes next is says that he reigned for two years over Israel. Well, this doesn't help bring any more clarity. Paul in the New Testament in Acts 13, 21 says that Saul reigned for 40 years.

So what do we make of these hard Hebrew words at the very beginning of this chapter?

Remember, what I'm wanting to show you is because the Lord is all-powerful, his word stands forever.

Now, some English translations have looked at the Septuagint, the Greek translation of this old Hebrew passage. So the NIV, the NASB, and the Legacy Standard Bible.

They've assumed that maybe the copyists left out a key word there and they've added in a number. Like Saul was 30 years old when he began to reign and he reigned 42 years.

Assuming that maybe Paul in the Acts just rounded it down. But that's not what these words say. Let's pull in some light from Scripture. This is always an important principle when we come apart a hard verse or a hard set of words in the Bible.

[4 : 57] So we know from 2 Samuel 5, 2 that David became king when Saul died and that David was 30 years old when he became the king. We also know that in this chapter, chapter 13, Jonathan, who was a close friend of David, was old enough to be leading an army.

We believe that not only is the Bible breathed out by God in the original language, but that God also preserved it.

Second London Confession of Faith, chapter 1, verse 8, says that God breathed out the Old Testament in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek. And by his singular care and providence, he kept his word pure in all ages.

Therefore, what we do hold in our hands, even with some of these difficulties, we hold with confidence. This is God's preserved word. We can genuinely say this is the authentic word of God. So I think the ESV, the King James and the New King James, do a good job of preserving that even into the English. And it's helpful now, I think, to set really the theological point of this whole chapter.

[6 : 07] Thank you for bearing with me. This is this is important. We can't skip over it, even though it's difficult. So the ESV says Saul lived for one year. The King James and the New King James say Saul reigned for one year.

And then when he had reigned two years over Israel, it goes on to explain. Now, what we will see is this. If we begin back in first Samuel, chapter 10, we see that there was an inauguration of Saul as king.

And then some time passed. And then there was a second coronation of Saul before all the people. So one way of understanding this deliberate phrasing that God preserved is this, that Saul was a son in this sense.

He was anointed and favored by God. He was under God's authority. He was the crown prince, you could say, for a year. And then in verse the rest of verse one, when he had reigned over Israel, two things or two years, he began to do these kingly things.

He was inaugurated in chapter 11 and he started acting as a king. And that's exactly what follows next. If you look at verse two, what did he do? Saul chose for himself.

[7 : 19] Three thousand men of Israel. You remember what was Samuel's warning to the people? You want a king like all the other nations? He will take your sons for himself as a standing army.

Right. You're getting exactly what God sternly warned you you would get from your king. I just want to pause for a moment to point out what I think the people of Israel need to realize as well in this point in history.

And we as God's people need to hold on to it now. The moment we latch our hope and expectations on anything that will fade away, we will be disappointed. So what do we put our hope in?

We put our hope not in a man from our nation, not in a personality or a charismatic leader for a congregation. We put our hope in the word of God, specifically the living word of God, Jesus Christ. We will never be disappointed. One nation after another, one man after another will wither and fade away. But the word of the Lord stands forever. Jesus said in Matthew 24, 35, heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

[8 : 36] The word of the Lord stands forever. Because the Lord is all powerful. He preserves and sustains his people by his word. Here's the second observation.

Only God is the king of kings. And the words of all others fall short. Only God is king of kings. The words of all others fall short.

The word of God alone is pure. I want to set up three contrasts. And this is the first one. The words of this king from Israel are not pure.

Look at verse two. Saul chose for himself 30,000 men of Israel. 2,000 were with Saul in Michmash in the mountains of Bethel. And 1,000 were with Jonathan in Gibeath of Benjamin.

It's the first time Jonathan is mentioned and he's not attached to his son, to his father. He's not referred to the son of Saul. He's separated.

[9 : 36] The son of someone is really what their whole identity and what they're all about represents. And he's not called the son of Saul. He's special. Let's pay note of this Jonathan.

In verse three, we read that Jonathan attacked the garrison of the Philistines that was in Gibeah. And the Philistines heard of it. Now pay close attention here.

What does Saul do? Saul then blew the trumpet throughout all the land saying, let the Hebrews hear. Notice he doesn't say let them hear the truth that Jonathan did it.

But let them hear a politically charged twisting of the facts. A grabbing of the credit. It's calculated propaganda. Let Israel hear that Saul attacked a garrison of the Philistines.

And that Israel also had become an abomination to the Philistines. Literally a stench. They've become odious. So the Philistines are now setting up garrisons or fortified battalions in all these Jewish cities.

[10:41] Israel is occupied by the Philistines. And under Philistine rule, they're crippling the people of God inside the promised land. Jonathan goes to this garrison in Gibeah of Benjamin.

The exact location in 1 Samuel 10 that the Lord told Saul to go and conquer. Saul didn't do it. And now Jonathan did what the father neglected to do.

And Saul turns around and wants the people to hear that he is the one who did it. The words of King Saul are not pure words.

When God is the king of Israel, the people enjoy the pure word of God. Remember, as Samuel was ministering God to the people, not a word that he spoke fell to the ground.

The Lord wouldn't let it. The words of God were pure. And the people could prosper and enjoy peace with God as their king. And the second contrast is that the word of God alone can fill weak men with divine power.

[11:46] Notice what Saul's trying to do. He's trying to muster up the troops. Saul blew the trumpet throughout all the land saying, Here's what happened, people. Come, rise up.

And this blowing of a trumpet and calling the people. We're told this happened also in Judges chapter 3, verses 26 and 27, by the mighty judge, Ehud. The difference is that Ehud was doing this under God's orders, with God as the king.

And Saul, let's see whether he is able to fill these weak men with the power that God could. He said the people were called together to Saul at Gilgal.

Well, that's where we left off, where Samuel had preached this wonderful, powerful message. And he had pointed in Gilgal. Here's the 12 stones from inside the Jordan River. It's the same place as Samuel after the Lord defeated the Ammonites.

But how will it go now with Saul as the king? We read in verse 5, The Philistines then gathered together to fight with Israel. 30,000 chariots.

[12:54] Now, the same word for thousand is regiment. So most likely the Philistines didn't report their exact number. It could have been exactly 30,000, or it could have been from the Israelite perspective.

Here's 30 different banners, and each one of those representing a regiment. And the point is made really clear to us with an expression that comes next in verse 5. The people of the Philistines were as the sand, which is on the seashore in multitude.

Well, this should also get our attention because we're in the promised land, the land that God promised to Abraham. And God promised Abraham that his descendants would be like sand on the seashore.

But now it's the Philistines that are matching that description. And the Philistines came up and encamped in Michmash to the east of Beth-Avon.

The Philistines have set up their line of attack in Benjamin. This is the tribe where the king of Israel is from. They're not beating around the bush or trying to flank.

[14:00] They're going straight to the headquarters of the Israelite stronghold. It's an aggressive stance these Philistines have now taken. Michmash is just north of the site where Saul and his son Jonathan would be ready to go and fight.

This is their capital city. So the Philistines are showing this is how dominant we are. It's a very aggressive move. They're calling Saul's bluff. This is going to be like attacking Washington, D.C. to just strike at the heart and bring the battle to an end. Well, it works. This aggressive move by the Philistines. Look at the effect on God's people. In verse 6, it's doomsday panic.

Which answers our question. The word of Saul was incapable of filling God's people with power. It's the word of God alone that can fill weak men with divine power.

And here's the third contrast. The word of God alone can comfort the fears of his people. The setup that we have in this passage is the same as in Joshua chapter 11, verse 4.

[15:16] The enemy's armies come out. And the language is used of the Canaanites in the book of Joshua. As many people as the sand that is on the seashore with very many horses and chariots.

But Yahweh and Joshua says to the people, Do not be afraid because of them. For tomorrow, at this time, I will give all of them over to you.

They will be slain before Israel. And you shall hamstring their horses and burn their chariots with fire. The word of the Lord comforts the fears of the people. And in Joshua, that generation, they are filled with power from God.

They are confident in the Lord to give them the victory. But notice under the leadership of Saul how this king's words fall flat. In verse 6, Imagine being one of these Israelites.

A cistern is where you try to pull up the water and let it sit there stale to make it through the dry months of the year. And when it's dry, it's not much left in there. You could jump in there and play hide and seek.

[16:32] The people are following their king. Remember where Saul was? He couldn't be found anywhere. He was hiding. They're in the promised land following the example of their king.

Imagine watching these Philistines go and take your home as you sit in a cave or a pit. Watch your land be used by their troops. When they see an Israelite scurrying around, they say, oh, look at that stinky person.

Odious, a stench. They're forcing God's people to surrender in the very land God had promised to his people. They had forgotten all of God's promises.

The people of God had no faith, no confidence, no hope. We read in verse 7, some of the Hebrews even crossed over the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead.

What a contrast we have where Joshua led the people into the promised land. Under King Saul, the people are crossing back over the Jordan and abandoning the whole kingdom. See how the word of God alone can comfort the fears of his people.

[17:46] These words of King Saul fall flat. Only God is the king of kings and the words of all others fall short. The third observation for today from our passage is this.

Because God is Lord, his word is to be obeyed. Why should we obey God? It's because he is Lord. He's not been silent.

He's given us his word. And because he is Lord, the word of God is to be obeyed. It's that simple. Would you look at verse 8? What happens next? At Michmash, the headquarters of the Israelites where the Philistines are approaching to attack, Jonathan stays there.

Saul then goes all the way to Gilgal. And this is where Samuel had led the people for a worship service. And in Gilgal, these events take place in verse 8.

Saul waited there seven days, according to this time set by Samuel. Now, a lot of time has passed between 1 Samuel chapter 10, verse 8 and 1 Samuel chapter 13.

[19:00] But here are the words of God through Samuel to Saul. Now, whether these were repeated other times, we're not given that information.

What is clear, though, is that God had spoken to Saul and he knew what he was to do. What we are given is 1 Samuel chapter 10, verse 8. You're welcome to flip there. Samuel said, Now, notice Samuel told Saul, My role will be this, to be God's priest.

I will come down to offer burnt offerings and sacrifice peace offerings. What's your role to do in this, King Saul? You shall wait seven days until I come to you.

And Samuel's role, not the king's role, is to be God's priest. I will make you known. This offering on your behalf gives you access to God and then he'll be God's prophet.

I will tell you what you ought to do. Now, we read in 1 Samuel chapter 13, Samuel did not come to Gilgal and the people were scattered from Saul.

[20:10] In verse 9, So Saul said, Bring a burnt offering and a peace offering here to me. And Saul offered the burnt offering. He didn't even get to the peace offering.

These offerings were additional laws. God's law, the moral law transcendence, the law of Romans 2 that's written on every man's heart and mind, every man's conscience. We know we are sinners before a holy God.

But in the covenant with his people, the Lord also gives additional laws. In the garden, it was, Do not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

And garden keep, this garden expanded. And the Ten Commandments and the Mount Sinai were the moral law codified for the people of God in addition to ceremonial and civil laws.

Civil laws are laws for the kingdom. The ceremonial laws are laws foreshadowing the work of the great Lamb of God, the sacrifice. What Saul is breaking here is part of the ceremonial law.

[21 : 15] The ceremonial law was for a priest to follow in Leviticus 1, verses 8 and 9. We read, And the king of Israel was to copy down the law, to be a king under the great king.

It was to be a king under the law. But Israel wanted a king like all the other nations. And that's exactly what they got. In the ancient Middle East, it was common for the kings to offer sacrifices themselves.

An ancient manuscript reveals this prayer to Baal, one of the gods that the Israelite people flirted with, worshipped by the Canaanites as well as the Philistines.

And the prayer was like this, O Baal, chase the strong enemy from our gates, the mighty foe from our walls. A bull, O Baal, we consecrate. And then Baal will heal your prayer, and he will chase the strong enemy from your gates, and the mighty foe from your walls.

So here is Saul doing what all the other kings of these pagan nations do, not a man under the law. We read in 1 Samuel 13, Now it happened as soon as Saul had finished presenting the burnt offering, that Samuel came.

[22 : 46] See, he wasn't late at all. He came as God said he would. And Saul went out to meet him, that he might greet him. Verse 11, Samuel said, What have you done?

These are the same words in the Garden of Eden. The Lord knows where Adam went, but God still asks him, Adam, where have you gone?

The Lord knew what Eve did, but the Lord asked her, Eve, what have you done? You see the patient God, the same God of all the Bible. Both God and Samuel knew exactly what Saul had just done, but the Lord ministers to him.

Well, just like Adam and Eve shifted the blame for their sin, notice how nothing has changed. Saul is proud, and he shifts the blame in at least three ways.

First, he blamed those over whom he was responsible. He says the troops were scattering. He had 3,000, left 1,000 with Jonathan, 2,000 for himself, from 3,000 down to 600.

[24 : 00] Well, isn't that exactly the type of army that God uses? Think of Gideon. The Lord intentionally whittled down the numbers of the troops. That should not have been a reason to lose faith.

Number two, Saul blamed God's servant. Samuel didn't come. Isn't that just what we want to do? Rather than letting the Lord humble us, confess our sin, we want to blame anyone else.

And number three, he blames the situation. He says the Philistines gathered to strike your people, God. They're under imminent attack, as if he could care more about God's people than God himself. He says in verse 12, I felt compelled. If I don't do this, no one will. No one will. Remember, would you just turn back to chapter 12?

God's word is known to Saul and to God's people. Look at chapter 12, verse 23. The final words we have from the prophet, the one who speaks on God's behalf.

[25 : 10] 12, 23, Samuel says to the people, I will teach you the good and the right way. Verse 24, only fear the Lord and serve him in truth with all your heart for consider what great things he has done for you.

But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king. And now in chapter 13, verse 13, Samuel connects the dots.

You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the Lord, your God, which he commanded you. Proverbs 10a says that the wise in heart hear and humbly receive the commands of God.

But it's a prating fool, the proud, ignorant, babbling talker. He will fall. Why do we listen to God's word?

And why does God expect his people to hear his word? It's because God alone is Lord. And the Lord deserves to be obeyed. Well, the final observation for today is this, that because the Lord is a covenant keeping God, his word is binding.

[26 : 27] Because the Lord is a covenant keeping God, his word is binding. Let's start at verse 13. For now the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever.

But you disobeyed. Well, who would have come next in the line after Saul? We already heard of this great accomplishment by Jonathan.

The Lord was with him. The Lord gave this garrison of the Philistines to Jonathan. But how devastating the sin of the father now upon his own son, Jonathan. The curses of sin carry over. There's already a hint. There's an attractive inclination toward Jonathan. We read in verse 14, but now your kingdom shall not continue. He had just said in chapter 12, that blessings are reserved only for the obedient man, a righteous king.

So now he tells Saul that the Lord has sought for himself, a man after his own heart. See, the Lord has sought.

[27 : 39] Saul is the king that the people had sought. The Lord seeks. Why does he seek a different type of king? He seeks a king for himself. What will this king be like?

Well, he will be a man. He will be a mediator. And what's his qualification? He will be after God's own heart. For what purpose?

It's because the Lord has commanded this man to be a commander over his people. We know that what the people deserve because of their king's sin is banishment.

If you disobey, you will be swept away. That's why Samuel just told them. And here their king, their federal head that they chose, has disobeyed. Samuel is prosecuting the covenant.

And what they deserve is to not have the land and not have a king. But what does the Lord give them in this verse? In verse 14, he says, the Lord will give you a better king. See, they deserve curses and the Lord's promising blessings.

[28 : 43] I will give you a better king who will be a commander on God's behalf over his people. It's a blessing. See, you have not kept the Lord's commandment, Saul.

And if you do wickedly, you, the king and the people will be banished. But yet God's promise is greater than Saul. It's greater than this generation.

God promising right now, a seed of the woman who will crush the serpent's head. We read in verse 15, Samuel rose up and went from Gilgal, way down where Joshua crossed the river, where the 12 stones are.

He went all the way up to the capital where Benjamin was, where the capital of Benjamin, Gidea, where Jonathan, his son was. That's where Samuel goes. He's representing the word of God.

No longer with Saul. The word of God is going to where Jonathan is. From Samuel's perspective, he doesn't likely know how the Lord will unfold all of redemptive history. I imagine Samuel maybe even grieving.

[29 : 49] He just had to deliver this news now to Saul. It won't be Jonathan. It can't be from your line. And now Samuel goes back to be with Jonathan. A brief observation for the next generations within the church.

It's think of how Samuel had done his best to raise his family in the Lord, and they were evil, corrupt. Now think of how Saul, a man not under God's law, is blessed with a son like Jonathan. It's the Lord who seeks and raises up. And if anyone of the next generation follows the Lord, all glory be to God. No credit be to the parents.

Saul numbered the people present with him about 600. In verse 16, Saul, Jonathan, his son, and the people were now present, and they remained in Gibeah of Benjamin.

But the Philistines encamped in Michmash. The king's disobedience has been publicly exposed and condemned. His judgment has been pronounced.

[31 : 01] The people deserve the curses for a fallen king. And yet there's a promise of a king that the Lord shall raise up and look beyond Jonathan.

Things get worse before they get better. Look at verse 17. Then the raiders of the Philistines came out of the camp of the Philistines in three companies.

And they're able to raid and pillage and steal from the people because the people have no weapons. They were already weak. The Philistines already dominated them politically.

Now they dominate them economically and with their military. It's a people with no hope, made even weaker, even more crippled.

In verse 19, we see how the Philistines had not allowed the Israelites to even have a blacksmith.

They could barely have enough metal tools to farm, much less could they turn those metal tools into weapons.

[32 : 03] We read in verse 22, So it came about on the day of battle that there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people who were with Saul and Jonathan.

You see the stage that's been set for us. No hope. But then we're left with this verse. In verse 22, They were found with Jonathan, Saul and Jonathan, his son.

In verse 23, And the garrison of the Philistines went out to the pass of Michmash. Before we see this reversal of what the Lord's going to do with all the odds against his people, we're to leave this chapter with these two men.

There's the people of Israel. There's the great threat of the enemy. There's no resources available to the people, but there is Saul and there's his son Jonathan. That's the lasting impression we have. Two men put side by side. The needs of the nation are very clear. Saul reminds us of Adam, that federal head from whom came curses and banishment, no hope.

[33 : 21] And who does Jonathan point us to? Remember, the name Saul means asked for. It's exactly what the people asked for. The name Jonathan means the Lord gives.

The name Nathan means to give. He gave. And Jehovah Nathan, or sometimes it's shortened, Yehonathan.

That means Yahweh, Jehovah, gives. Do you see what's being hinted at right now?

The people deserve curses. They deserve to get exactly what they asked for. But because God is a covenant-keeping God, he binds himself to his word.

Yahweh gives grace. And he gives grace to those who deserve curses. How does he give grace? John 3.16.

[34 : 23] Because God is love. That he so gave his only son, much greater than Jonathan. He so loves the world, he gave his only son, Jesus Christ, that whosoever, Philistine or fearful Israelite, whoever will believe in his son, Jesus, will have eternal life.

He's a covenant-keeping God. Deuteronomy 7.9. Therefore, know that the Lord your God, he is God, the faithful God, who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love him and keep his commandments.

The problem of the Israelites is our problem under Adam. We can't keep his commandments. So how can we expect him to be a covenant-keeping God to us? And it's only because Jesus Christ came as our federal head, as our great king.

Jesus said in John 15.10, I have kept my father's commandments and I abide in his love. So now you keep my commandments and abide in my love.

This is good news for you and me. In 1 John 3.24, we're told, By this we know that he abides in us, by the spirit whom he has given us.

[35 : 44] He is a covenant-keeping God. So much so that he himself kept the covenant his people never could keep so that we don't have to flee across the Jordan or hide in caves and caverns.

We don't have to be afraid of the enemies that want to wipe out the people of God on earth. We are secure in Jesus Christ. He guards us.

He's our protector. Much greater than Jonathan. Much greater than Gideon. Much greater than David. God's very own son. He's the living word of God.

We abide in him and his word in us. And by his spirit, his righteousness becomes ours. He bears the fruit and the lives of his people.

We're going to sing a song that helps us as the church to relate to the people of Israel in this life using language from the New Testament. May this be your prayer if you rely on Jesus as the covenant-keeping God binding himself to his word.

[36 : 50] Guide me, O thou great Jehovah, pilgrim through this barren land. I am weak, but thou art mighty. Hold me with thy powerful hands.

Strong deliverer, be thou still my strength and shield. Strong deliverer, be thou still my strength and shield. Let's go to the Lord in prayer and thank him for his living, powerful, covenant-keeping word. Lord. Amen. Amen. Amen.