



Saul

Israel's First King

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Overview

SAUL, ISRAEL'S FIRST KING

His story is told in 1 Samuel 9-31. He is also mentioned in Acts 13:21.

First impressions can be deceiving, especially when the image created by a person's appearance is contradicted by his or her qualities and abilities.

Saul presented the ideal visual image of a king, but the tendencies of his character often went contrary to God's commands for a king.

Saul was God's chosen leader, but this did not mean he was capable of being king on his own. During his reign, Saul had his greatest successes when he obeyed God.

His greatest failures resulted from acting on his own. Saul had the raw materials to be a good leader—appearance, courage, and action.

Even his weaknesses could have been used by God if Saul had recognized them and left them in God's hands. His own choices cut him off from God and eventually alienated him from his own people.

From Saul we learn that while our strengths and abilities make us useful, it is our weaknesses that make us usable.

Our skills and talents make us tools, but our failures and shortcomings remind us that we need a Craftsman in control of our lives.

King of Israel

A Benjamite, son of Kish

1 Samuel 9:1-2

Now there was a man of Benjamin, whose name was Kish, the son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Bechorath, the son of Aphiah, a Benjamite, a mighty man of power.

And he had a son, whose name was Saul, a choice young man, and a goodly: and there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he: from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people.

Saul's personal appearance

1 Samuel 10:23

And they ran and fetched him thence: and when he stood among the people, he was higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward.

When the Israelites assembled to choose a king, Saul already knew he was the one (1 Samuel 10:1). Instead of coming forward, however, he hid among the baggage. Often we hide from important responsibilities because we are afraid of failure, afraid of what others will think, or perhaps unsure about how to proceed

Made king of Israel

1 Samuel 9

Saul Is Brought to Samuel

Saul readily went to seek his father's asses. His obedience to his father was praiseworthy. His servant proposed, that since they were now at Ramah, they should call on Samuel, and take his advice

Samuel, that good prophet, was so far from envying Saul, or bearing him any ill-will, that he was the first and most forward to do him honour.

Both that evening and early the next morning, Samuel communed with Saul upon the flat roof of the house. We may suppose Samuel now convinced Saul that he was the person God had fixed upon for the government, and of his own willingness to resign.

1Samuel 10

Samuel Anoints Saul

The sacred anointing, then used, pointed at the great Messiah, or Anointed One, the King of the church, and High Priest of our profession, who was anointed with the oil of the Spirit, not by measure, but without measure, and above all the priests and princes of the Jewish church.

Saul Prophecies

The signs Samuel had given Saul, came to pass punctually; he found that God had given him another heart, another disposition of mind. Yet let not an outward show of devotion, and a sudden change for the present, be too much relied on; Saul among the prophets was Saul still. His being anointed was kept private.

Saul Chosen King

Samuel tells the people, ye have this day rejected your God. So little fond was Saul now of that power, which soon after, when he possessed it, he could not think of parting with, that he hid himself.

The people called for Saul to reign over them.

1 Samuel 11:12-15

And the people said unto Samuel, Who is he that said, Shall Saul reign over us? Bring the men, that we may put them to death.

And Saul said, there shall not a man be put to death this day: for today the Lord hath wrought salvation in Israel.

Then said Samuel to the people, Come, and let us go to Gilgal, and renew the kingdom there.

And all the people went to Gilgal; and there they made Saul king before the Lord in Gilgal; and there they sacrificed sacrifices of peace offerings before the Lord; and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly.

Saul had been anointed by Samuel at Ramah (1 Samuel 10:1); then Saul was publically chosen at Mizpah (1 Samuel 10:17-27); his defeat of the Ammonites confirmed his kingship in the people's minds; at this time, all the people confirm his rule.

God gave a king in his anger and then removed him.

Hosea 13:11

I gave thee a king in mine anger, and took him away in my wrath.

This Jewish teacher of the Bible knew the Old Testament thoroughly, but he didn't understand what it said about the Messiah. Knowledge is not salvation. You should know the Bible, but even more important, you should understand the God whom the Bible reveals and the salvation that God offers.

Lives at Gibeah of Saul

1 Samuel 14:2

And Saul tarried in the uttermost part of Gibeah under a pomegranate tree which is in Migron: and the people that were with him were about six hundred men;

Jonathan and his armor-bearer weren't much of a force to attack the huge Philistine army. But while everyone else was afraid, they trusted God, knowing that the size of the enemy army would not restrict God's ability to help them. God honored the faith and brave action of these two men with a tremendous victory.

Have you ever felt surrounded by the “enemy” or faced overwhelming odds? God is never intimidated by the size of the enemy or the complexity of a problem. With him, there are always enough resources to resist the pressures and win the battle. If God has called you to action, then bravely commit what resources you have to God, and rely upon him to lead you to victory.

Saul Returns to his house.

1 Samuel 15:34-15

Then Samuel went to Ramah; and Saul went up to his house to Gibeah of Saul.

Samuel never went to meet with Saul again, but he mourned constantly for him. And the Lord was sorry he had ever made Saul king of Israel.

Positioning is taken.

Isaiah 10:29

They are gone over the passage: they have taken up their lodging at Geba; Ramah is afraid; Gibeah of Saul is fled.

The way these cities are listed approximates the route the Assyrians would take in their invasion of Judah in 701 B.C. They would go from Aiath (probably Ai) at the northern border to Nob (only two miles from Jerusalem).

Defeats the Philistines

1 Samuel 13

Saul reigned one year, and nothing particular happened; but in his second year the events recorded in this chapter took place. For above a year he gave the Philistine time to prepare for war, and to weaken and to disarm the Israelites. When men are lifted up in self-sufficiency, they are often led into folly.

The Philistines went to their own place.

1 Samuel 14:46

Then Saul went up from following the Philistines: and the Philistines went to their own place.

Why was Saul so successful right after he had disobeyed God and been told that his reign would end (1 Samuel 13:13-14)? Sometimes ungodly people win battles. Victory is neither guaranteed nor limited to the righteous. God provides according to his will.

God might have given Saul success for the sake of the people, not for Saul. He may have left Saul on the throne for a while to utilize his military talents so that David, Israel's next king, could spend more time focusing on the nation's spiritual battles.

Regardless of God's reasons for delaying Saul's demise, his reign ended exactly the way God had foretold. The timing of God's plans and promises are known only to him. Our task is to commit our ways to God and then trust him for the outcome.

There was consistent war with the Philistines.

1 Samuel 14:52

And there was sore war against the Philistines all the days of Saul: and when Saul saw any strong man, or any valiant man, he took him unto him.

Saul Sent to Destroy Amalek

1 Samuel 15

The sentence of condemnation against the Amalekites had gone forth long before, Ex 17:14; Deut 25:19, but they had been spared till they filled up the measure of their sins. We are sure that the righteous Lord does no injustice to any.

The remembering the kindness of the ancestors of the Kenites, in favour to them, at the time God was punishing the injuries done by the ancestors of the Amalekites, tended to clear the righteousness of God in this dispensation.

Saul Excuses and Commends Himself

Repentance in God is not a change of mind, as it is in us, but a change of method. The change was in Saul; "He is turned back from following me." Hereby he made God his enemy.

Dedicates the spoils of war

1Chronicles 26:28

And all that Samuel the seer, and Saul the son of Kish, and Abner the son of Ner, and Joab the son of Zeruah, had dedicated; and whosoever had dedicated any thing, it was under the hand of Shelomith, and of his brethren.

Sends messengers to Jesse, asking that David be sent to him as a musician and an armor-bearer

1 Samuel 16:17-23

And Saul said unto his servants, provide me now a man that can play well, and bring him to me. Then answered one of the servants, and said, Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, that is cunning in playing, and a mighty valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters, and a comely person, and the Lord is with him.

Wherefore Saul sent messengers unto Jesse, and said, send me David thy son, which is with the sheep. And Jesse took an ass laden with bread, and a bottle of wine, and a kid, and sent them by David his son unto Saul. And David came to Saul, and stood before him: and he loved him greatly; and he became his armour bearer.

And Saul sent to Jesse, saying, Let David, I pray thee, stand before me; for he hath found favour in my sight. And it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took a harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him.

When Saul asked David to be in his service, he obviously did not know that David had been secretly anointed king (1 Samuel 16:12). Saul's invitation presented an excellent opportunity for the young man and future king to gain firsthand information about leading a nation ("David went back and forth from Saul," 1 Samuel 17:15).

Sometimes our plans—even the ones we think God has approved—have to be put on hold indefinitely. Like David, we can use this waiting time profitably. We can choose to learn and grow in our present circumstances, whatever they may be.

Defeats the Philistines after Goliath is killed by David

1 Samuel 17

Men so entirely depend upon God in all things, that when he withdraws his help, the most valiant and resolute cannot find their hearts or hands, as daily experience shows.

David Comes to the Camp

Jesse little thought of sending his son to the army at that critical juncture; but the wise God orders actions and affairs, so as to serve his designs.

Saul's jealousy of David; gives his daughter, Michal, to David to be his wife; becomes David's enemy

1 Samuel 18

David's troubles not only immediately follow his triumphs, but arise from them; such is the vanity of that which seems greatest in this world. It is a sign that the Spirit of God is departed from men, if, like Saul, they are peevish, envious,

1 Samuel 19

Hears Doeg against Ahimelech, and kills the priest and his family. Pursues David to wilderness of Ziph; the Ziphites betray David.

Saul Pursues David to En-gedi

1 Samuel 24:1-6

And it came to pass, when Saul was returned from following the Philistines that it was told him, saying, Behold, and David is in the wilderness of En-gedi.

Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel, and went to seek David and his men upon the rocks of the wild goats.

And he came to the sheepcotes by the way, where was a cave; and Saul went in to cover his feet: and David and his men remained in the sides of the cave. And the men of David said unto him, Behold the day of which the Lord said unto thee, Behold, I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand, that thou mayest do to him as it shall seem good unto thee. Then David arose, and cut off the skirt of Saul's robe privily.

And it came to pass afterward, that David's heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt. And he said unto his men, The Lord forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the Lord's anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord.

David and his 600 men found the Desert of En Gedi a good place to hide because of the many caves in the area. These caves were used by local people for housing and as tombs. For David's men they were places of refuge. These caves can still be seen today. Some are large enough to hold thousands of people.

David had great respect for Saul, in spite of the fact that Saul was trying to kill him. Although Saul was sinning and rebelling against God, David still respected the position he held as God's anointed king.

David knew he would one day be king, and he also knew it was not right to strike down the man God had placed on the throne. If he assassinated Saul, he would be setting a precedent for his own opponents to remove him some day.

Romans 13:1-7 teaches that God has placed the government and its leaders in power. We may not know why, but, like David, we are to respect the positions and roles of those to whom God has given authority. There is one exception, however. Because God is our highest authority, we should not allow a leader to pressure us to violate God's law.

Saul's contrition for his bad faith

1Samuel 24:16-22

And it came to pass, when David had made an end of speaking these words unto Saul that Saul said, is this thy voice, my son David? And Saul lifted up his voice, and wept.

And he said to David, Thou art more righteous than I: for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil. [18] And thou hast shewed this day how that thou hast dealt well with me: forasmuch as when the Lord had delivered me into thine hand, thou killed me not.

For if a man find his enemy, will he let him go well away? Wherefore the Lord reward thee good for that thou hast done unto me this day.

And now, behold, I know well that thou shalt surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in thine hand.

Swear now therefore unto me by the Lord, that thou wilt not cut off my seed after me, and that thou wilt not destroy my name out of my father's house. And David sware unto Saul. And Saul went home; but David and his men get them up unto the hold.

The means we use to accomplish a goal are just as important as the goal we are trying to accomplish. David's goal was to become king, so his men urged him to kill Saul when he had the chance. David's refusal was not an example of cowardice but of courage—the courage to stand against the group and do what he knew was right.

Don't compromise your moral standards by giving in to group pressure or taking the easy way out.

1 Samuel 26

How soon do unholy hearts lose the good impressions convictions have made upon them! How helpless were Saul and all his men! All as though disarmed and chained, yet nothing is done to them; they are only asleep.

Kills the Gibeonites; crime avenged by the death of seven of his sons

2 Samuel 21:1-9

There was a famine during David's reign that lasted for three years, so David asked the Lord about it. And the Lord said, "The famine has come because Saul and his family are guilty of murdering the Gibeonites."

So King David summoned the Gibeonites. They were not part of Israel but were all that was left of the nation of the Amorites. Israel had sworn not to kill them, but Saul, in his zeal, had tried to wipe them out. David asked them, "What can I do for you to make amends? Tell me so that the Lord will bless his people again."

"Well, money won't do it," the Gibeonites replied. "And we don't want to see the Israelites executed in revenge."

"What can I do then?" David asked. "Just tell me and I will do it for you."

Then they replied, "It was Saul who planned to destroy us, to keep us from having any place at all in Israel. So let seven of Saul's sons or grandsons be handed over to us, and we will execute them before the Lord at Gibeon, on the mountain of the Lord."

"All right," the king said, "I will do it." David spared Jonathan's son Mephibosheth, who was Saul's grandson, because of the oath David and Jonathan had sworn before the Lord.

But he gave them Saul's two sons Armoni and Mephibosheth, whose mother was Rizpah daughter of Aiah. He also gave them the five sons of Saul's daughter Merab, the wife of Adriel son of Barzillai from Meholah. The men of Gibeon executed them on the mountain before the Lord. So all seven of them died together at the beginning of the barley harvest.

Although the Bible does not record Saul's act of vengeance against the Gibeonites, it was apparently a serious crime making him guilty of their blood.

Still, why were Saul's sons killed for the murders their father committed? In many Near Eastern cultures, including Israel's, an entire family was held guilty for the crime of the father because the family was considered an indissoluble unit.

Saul broke the vow that the Israelites made to the Gibeonites (Joshua 9:16-20). This was a serious offense against God's law (Numbers 30:1-2). Either David was following the custom of treating the family as a unit, or Saul's sons were guilty of helping Saul kill the Gibeonites.

His kingdom invaded by Philistines; seeks counsel of the witch of En-dor, who foretells his own death

1Samuel 29:1

The entire Philistine army now mobilized at Aphek, and the Israelites camped at the spring in Jezreel.

David waited with a secret hope that the Lord would help him out of his difficulty. But he seems to have been influenced too much by the fear of man, in consenting to attend Achish.

Saul is defeated, and is killed with some of his sons

1 Samuel 31

Saul, when sorely wounded, and unable to resist or to flee, expressed no concern about his never-dying soul; but only desired that the Philistines might not insult over him, or put him to pain, and he became his own murderer.

 Their bodies exposed in Beth-shan; rescued by the people of Jabesh and burned;
 bones of, buried under a tree at Jabesh

1 Chronicles 10

The design chiefly in view in these books of the Chronicles, appears to be to preserve the records of the house of David.

Therefore the writer repeats not the history of Saul's reign, but only of his death, by which a way was made for David to the throne.

And from the ruin of Saul, we may learn,

1. That the sin of sinners will certainly find them out, sooner or later; Saul died for his transgression.
2. That no man's greatness can exempt him from the judgments of God.
3. Disobedience is a killing thing. Saul died for not keeping the word of the Lord.

May we be delivered from unbelief, impatience, and despair. By waiting on the Lord we shall obtain a kingdom that cannot be moved.

His death is a judgment on account of his sins

1 Chronicles 10:13

So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the Lord, even against the word of the Lord, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to enquire of it;

Key Verse:

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

Lesson for life

Whatever we accomplish on our own is only a hint of what God could do through our lives. Does he control your life?

Key verses:

To ask Jesus to come into your heart please pray this Prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, I believe you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. I ask you to forgive me of my sins and coming into my heart. I accept you as savior and will follow you as Lord. Amen.

References:

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Additional comments and charts are taken from: *Life Application Study Bible*. Illinois: Tyndale House 2007. Print

Matthew Henry Concise Bible Commentary

