

Saul, the first king of Israel, lessons and challenges from his life

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- I Saw this recently on a high school seniors FB page:
 - I WILL PASS MY FINALS.
 - I WILL PASS MY CLASSES.
 - I WILL NOT BE DEFEATED.
 - I WILL FINISH STRONG.
- Sounds like something we all want
- We all want to do well in the daily as well as the big challenges
- To help us be successful in daily tests as well as the BIG challenges of life

We are going to look at the life of Saul, the first king of Israel

- He is a useful lesson because he had everything that is often seen as important for success: great looks and build, a powerful job, family
- But he died a miserable, self-pitying suicide.
- Today we'll look at how that happened, what and how we can avoid his mistakes
- Remember not everything the Bible talks about is a good example, sometimes the bad ones teach us

But first a Review of where we are in through the Bible reading

- ALWAYS IMPORTANT because we don't want to pull characters or lessons out of the Bible without:
- #1 READING about them in context: whole verses, chapters, books, ALL the Bible
- #2 REMEMBERING all the Bible is part of one great story—that of God redeeming humanity from their rebellion and working towards paradise restored when God's kingdom will come, and he will again walk with his people. . . . But a lot has happened and will happen before that takes place.

Bible review so far—Podcasts on all available at Bible 805.com; iTunes, and many other podcast sources

- Genesis & Job
- Genesis: Start of humanity created in a perfect setting to walk with God
- Sin destroyed their relationship and their world
- A Savior promised
- Job—answering some of the BIG questions of life and showing how God is at work among all people
- Back to Genesis: The Flood; focus on one line after it—Semites
- Further to Call of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob—family to Egypt and where for 400+ years they become a nation
- Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy: deliverance, failure and wandering;

- Joshua: conquer and divide the land
- Judges: everyone does what is right in their own eyes and it wasn't pretty—sin, bondage, deliverance cycle—great heroes like Gideon, Deborah, Sampson
- Samuel—the last Judge

Samuel the last Judge

- Born in answer to prayer
- Raised in the Temple
- Served God from an early age
- Led people after ark stolen and Tabernacle at Shiloh destroyed
- Judged Israel on a circuit; started a school of prophets
- However,....
- When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as Israel's leaders. The name of his firstborn was Joel and the name of his second was Abijah, and they served at Beersheba. But his sons did not follow his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice.
- So, all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. They said to him, "You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have." 1 Sam. 8:1-5

The people ask for a King

- Not a bad thing in itself
- God has instituted human government and planned that earthly leaders should reflect His leadership
- Prophesied they would have a King in Jacob's blessing (prophecies) of his sons:
- The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his. Genesis 49:10
- But their reason was wrong; perhaps timing
- "to lead their armies and to be like other nations"
- God gave them what they asked for after assuring Samuel they were rejecting God, not him

Lesson: "Be careful what you ask for because you might get it."

- God sometimes answers prayers that shouldn't be answered
- *And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul. Psalm 106:15*
- *They wanted a king; they got a king, years of fighting, civil war followed*
- A caution—to always pray God's will be done
- May mean an entirely new solution or way of doing something you can't imagine
- May mean waiting, often means waiting

Practical advice

- Develop a conversational time of prayer and journaling with God
- You have a desire, a need, whatever it is
- Tell the Lord, but ask his will to be done
- You can talk over possible solutions, but leave it open for God to work
- In circumstances and in changing your desires
- He sees the BIG PICTURE of our lives, his purpose, purpose for all—really makes much more sense to trust than to simply demand what we want
- “It’s easy to trust God when he does what we want; it’s the other times we grow.” Bob Goff

Saul anointed king

- God called a group of men to follow him
- Not much happens until challenge to city of Jabesh
- Threat; Saul answers, raises an army and rescues them
- His kingship is confirmed, and Samuel retires from leadership
- For the sake of his great name the Lord will not reject his people, because the Lord was pleased to make you his own. As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by failing to pray for you. And I will teach you the way that is good and right. But be sure to fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you. Yet if you persist in doing evil, both you and your king will perish.” 1 Samuel 12:22-25

War with Philistines

- Army assembled at Gilgal; waited for Samuel to come to offer sacrifices
- Saul gets impatient—he offers the sacrifice and Samuel shows up
- Saul doesn’t repent—excuses, “I felt compelled to offer the sacrifice.”
- Samuel’s response:
- “You have done a foolish thing,” Samuel said. “You have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. But now your kingdom will not endure; the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him ruler of his people, because you have not kept the Lord’s command.” I Sam. 13:13-14

What was so wrong

- He was told to wait by God’s prophet
- He gave in to fears of people, his army and his enemies
- Acted as priest—forbidden
- Did not repent of his actions, offered excuses

Application #1 Always play to an audience of ONE

- Saul didn’t—his actions were determined by the reactions of people and enemies
- Clear guidance from God, should have kept his eyes on Him—no matter what
- Example of Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego— “God able to deliver us, but even if he does not, we will now bow down” Daniel 3
- Get settled in your life where your ultimate loyalty is—should be in God
- NEVER waiver from it—you won’t have to decide each time which way you will go, what you will do
- If clear guidance from God in his Word, or in a personal way for you obey what he tells you

Application #2—Don’t try to manipulate God through religious actions

- Used the sacrifices as a sort of magic action to keep the army from leaving
- Like Israel bringing the Ark into battle
- That is not what God gave them the religious system that he did
- We can’t use religion for our own purposes
- Showy religious actions without a proper heart response are not pleasing to God

Application #3: know YOUR calling and focus on it

- Saul was a soldier and king
- Samuel was a prophet and priest
- The duties of a priest and prophet very carefully detailed and NO ONE else was to do these things
- God’s punishments severe if disobeyed, as Saul did
- For us—know what we are called to do and focus on that
- Pray for others, don’t try to take over their work
- Be satisfied and thankful that the Lord has given you the job he has given you
- New Testament (1 Cor. 12) teaching of the Spiritual Gifts where each person has a job in church

Sadly, he did not learn from this

- 1 Sam 15—Commanded to destroy Amalekites AND all livestock, everything—like command to destroy Jericho
- Saul wins the victory but kept many of the spoils—obviously God sees this....
- 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.” Samuel was angry, and he cried out to the Lord all that night. I Sam 15:10-11
- Gets up to once again confront
- Saul meets him.... “I carried out the Lord’s instructions!”
- “What then is the sound of bleating of sheep in my ears?”

Saul's response; God's response

- Saul excuses, blames the army, did it for God to be able to sacrifice to Him
- 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.
For rebellion is like the sin of divination,
and arrogance like the evil of idolatry.
Because you have rejected the word of the Lord,
he has rejected you as king." 1 Samuel 15:22-23

David appears on the scene

- The Lord tells Samuel to anoint David and he does—but his patience will be tested anywhere from 8 to 15 years (I think the 15 is closest)
- More about David in coming weeks
- Kills Goliath, Saul should have been the champion, but no spiritual strength
- David knew the true battle Goliath "defied the armies of the living God."
- Great victory, Saul praises him, gives him daughter but relationship goes bad

Next 10 years or so

- Saul deteriorates in jealousy and rage
- Blames his family, his army, David
- Wastes time chasing David
- David does not retaliate, spares Saul's life several times
- Goes on for a long time.....

Big battle with Philistines

- Samuel has died
- Saul desperate for guidance, goes to see the Witch of Endor to call up the spirit of Samuel
- She reminds him Saul has forbidden what asks
- Samuel shows up, shocking them all and tells Saul:
- "The Lord has done what he predicted through me. The Lord has torn the kingdom out of your hands and given it to one of your neighbors—to David. ¹⁸ Because you did not obey the Lord or carry out his fierce wrath against the Amalekites, the Lord has done this to you today. ¹⁹ The Lord will deliver both Israel and you into the hands of the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. The Lord will also give the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines." 1 Sam. 28:17-19

Prophecy came true

- Saul and sons died; Israel defeated
- Important note: Saul committed suicide but told in advance that "You and your sons will be with me."
- Suicide a sad ending, but not the unforgiveable sin.
- Once a child of God; always His child

- More on David, Psalms in coming lessons

Final applications

- Back to that initial saying
 - I WILL PASS MY FINALS.
 - I WILL PASS MY CLASSES.
 - I WILL NOT BE DEFEATED.
 - I WILL FINISH STRONG.
- To pass the tests of life and finish strong, like preparing for a test
- Cramming doesn't work well
- Prepare ahead—live NOW as you know God wants you to—listen last week to the **How to love Jesus** and especially those guidelines for life from St. Benedict and Johnathan Edwards
- "Never to do anything which I should be afraid to do if it were the last hour of my life." Johnathan Edwards
- Many prepare financially or for disasters, but spiritual preparation for each day and for all of life is so important

Suggestions for life study plan

- Start wherever you are now
- Trust God in the situations you are in now, David a shepherd and in protecting his sheep killed a lion (About 445 lbs.) and bear (approx. 6-7 feet, 550 pounds)—Goliath not such a big deal
- Many things are preparation

Specific action to take now

- For this week a challenge to pray and journal
- Dialog with God about a specific need/concern/area you want to grow in—thinking that if you knew you were to meet God in a month what would be the most important area of your life you would want different than it is now
- For how to react, read God's Word, interact with him on it
- *Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything; tell God your needs, and don't forget to thank him for his answers. If you do this, you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will keep your thoughts and your hearts quiet and at rest as you trust in Christ Jesus.* Phil. 4:6-7

One more encouragement

- In preparing for this test, this final exam, we have a great Tutor
- ³ I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴ In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now,⁶ being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.