

# **Saul and David**

## **Introduction**

Saul and David were the first two kings of Israel. Both of them were great, heroic warriors. Saul laid the foundations of Israel's period of power by defeating the Ammonites and then breaking the Amalekite yoke. David carried on to defeat the Philistines, the Moabites, the Syrians the Edomites and others, and to gain control of a large empire. Both Saul and David were chosen by God and experienced the power of His Spirit. Neither of them was perfect, but both committed serious sins. Yet with all this in common, one was accepted and loved by God, although he committed adultery and murder; the other, whose sins seemed far smaller, was rejected.

As we trace and compare the histories of these two men, we will probably see their characters reflected in people around us, and more importantly in ourselves.

There are few characters in the Bible more tragic than Saul. He could hardly have had a better beginning, or a more miserable end. He began with the blessing and power of God. He ended seeking help from a witch the day before he and his three sons were killed in battle against the Philistines.

David by contrast endured many years of tribulation and suffering as Saul hunted and persecuted him, till in desperation he fled to the Philistines for refuge. God preserved him through all his trials and eventually established him on the throne of Israel. God then gave him victory over all his enemies.

Saul died, but David lives. In the New Testament the name of David occurs about 60 times. Apart from Jesus his is the first name in Matthew and the last name in Revelation. King Saul is not once mentioned. The Apostle Paul, though of the same tribe of Benjamin, even changed his name from Saul to Paul. In Israel today people sing 'david melech yisrael chai chai' - 'David, king of Israel, is alive, is alive'. David lives also in the songs he wrote which are still sung in a multitude of languages throughout the world. In all these ways David lives, but above all God promised him a throne that would endure for ever. That throne is now the throne of the Messiah who came to give eternal life.

## **Saul's Call**

Chapters 9 and 10 of 1 Samuel give us the account of Saul's call. Saul is described as a 'choice and handsome man, and there was not a more handsome person than he among the sons of Israel; from his shoulders and up he was taller than any of the people.' Saul and his servant are searching for his father's donkeys. When their search is unsuccessful, Saul plans to give up and return home, but the servant suggests a visit to the local man of God. Samuel greeted Saul with the news that the donkeys were already found, gave him the place of honour at the feast, and began to tell him of his future calling.

The following day Samuel anointed him with oil and said: 'Has not the Lord anointed you a ruler over His inheritance?' He then gave him a detailed prediction of his coming journey home. Every detail was fulfilled exactly.

When Saul left Samuel we read that God changed his heart, and later in the day when he met a company of prophets, the Spirit of God fell upon him and he prophesied among them (as 1 Sam 10:10 is normally translated).

Samuel then summoned the tribes of Israel to choose a king for them. Instead of telling them that God had already chosen Saul, he made the choice by casting lots. The lot fell on Saul, giving yet further confirmation that Saul was

God's choice. Saul however was nowhere to be seen. He was hiding among the baggage. Yet another word from God revealed where Saul was, and the people ran to drag him from his hiding place, shouting 'Long live the king.'

No one could have had a clearer, more divinely sealed calling to his life's work than Saul. There was absolutely no mistaking it. The hand of God was in evidence in every detail.

### **Saul's Victory**

Chapter 11 of 1 Samuel tells of Saul's first military conflict. Nahash king of the Ammonites was attacking Jabesh-gilead. The Spirit of God fell upon Saul and with great authority he called the Israelites out to battle. A resounding victory confirmed their allegiance to him, and he was now firmly on the throne. 'Nahash' in Hebrew means a serpent, and we are reminded of the verse, 'I have written to you young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one' (1 John 2:14). Israel was delighted with her new king, and the last verse of the chapter tells us that 'Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly.'

Things are not always as good (or as bad) as they appear to the human eye. Samuel lived in a realm above Saul and Nahash and the people of Israel, and he could not share in their rejoicing. He knew better than anyone else the certainty with which God had called Saul. Yet he said to them, 'Your wickedness is great which you have done in the sight of the Lord by asking for yourselves a king' (12:17). From man's perspective it all looked good, but Samuel saw with the sight of God.

Spectacular victories are no evidence of spiritual maturity. Often they occur in spiritual youth. We must move on from the realm of Saul who won battles to the realm of Samuel who knew God.

### **Saul's Sins**

Saul's next conflict was with the Philistines (chapter 13). The Philistines invaded Israel in great numbers and Saul's army began to panic and desert him. He waited seven days for Samuel to come and offer offerings to the Lord, but Samuel did not arrive. Saul decided to make the offerings himself. He had just finished sacrificing when Samuel appeared. Saul was motivated by fear and not by faith, and he had stepped right outside his office as king into a higher realm that was not his. Samuel rebuked him and announced that his kingdom would not endure. 'The Lord has sought out for himself a man after His own heart, and the Lord has appointed him as ruler over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you.'

Saul's next major test came when God commissioned him through Samuel to destroy the Amalekites. The Amalekites were an extremely cruel and destructive race who had nearly obliterated Israel when they first came out of Egypt. Haman the Agagite, who again nearly destroyed the Jews in Persia, appears to have been a descendent of their king Agag. If Velikovsky's historical reconstruction (the book *Ages in Chaos*) is correct, the Amalekites had in fact conquered Egypt and were a scourge to the whole area as far north as Syria. Their rule over Egypt continued from the time of the Exodus till their defeat at Saul's hands. God had told Moses to record in a book, 'I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven'. In God's sight, their destruction was essential, and no doubt for the good of Israel together with many other countries who had suffered at their hands. If we do not purge out evil when and how God tells us to do, we will surely suffer for it.

Saul defeated the Amalekites and liberated a vast area from their control, but, under pressure from his people, he spared Agag their king and kept all the best of their livestock. He was disregarding the plain commandment of God. God revealed this to Samuel who went to face Saul with his sin. Saul greeted him with the words: 'Blessed are you of the Lord! I have carried out the command of the Lord.' In the ensuing interview we have Samuel's well-known words,

'Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry.'

Saul's reply reveals his heart: 'I have sinned; I have indeed transgressed the command of the Lord and your words, because I feared the people and listened to their voice.' Then he says, 'I have sinned; but please honour me before the elders of my people and before Israel, and go back with me, that I may worship the Lord your God.'

The primary motivation in Saul's life was the crowd. If he was with a crowd of prophets, he could prophesy. If the crowd was deserting him in battle, he could not trust God. If the crowd wanted the spoils of war, he could not stand in their way. Even now he was rejected by God, the crowd must not know it.

This also was the underlying motivation at Babel. 'Let us make for ourselves a name,' they said, 'lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.' They found security in a crowd, while they ignored God. Multitudes of people today will only follow where the majority leads.

### **David's Call**

At this point in the story Samuel goes to anoint David. There are no spectacular signs this time, but a much lower-key affair. The level of drama is seldom a clue to the spiritual significance of an event. Samuel goes through all the sons of Jesse and rejects them one by one. Eliab the eldest was tall and good-looking like Saul, but said Samuel, 'Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart'. That was only too clear from the life of Saul. Finally David is brought in from the fields. He was not searching for donkeys like Saul, but keeping sheep like Moses when God called him. Jesus himself is the Good Shepherd and both Moses and David are types or pictures of Him. The Spirit of God fell on David and we read that an evil spirit from the Lord terrorized Saul.

### **Goliath**

Saul's story is now a steady, sad, downward progression. Once again the Philistines invade, and this time Goliath comes out of their ranks to challenge Israel. If anyone could have fought him, it should have been Saul who stood head and shoulders above his people. Instead he and his army can only tremble in fear.

Saul was a man of the crowd, but David was a man of God. He hears Goliath's challenge and his response is, 'Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should taunt the armies of the living God?' Eliab opposes David and Saul discourages him, but he is moved by God - not by kings or older brothers, or even a panicking army! He had already proved God alone when the lion and the bear came to raid his flock and the Lord delivered him.

David went out in the power of God, and one stone from his sling brought the Philistine giant to the ground.

There are two parallels to Goliath in the book of Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, saw in a dream a great image with a head of gold, a chest of bronze, legs of silver, and feet of iron mixed with clay. This great image was destroyed like Goliath by a stone. The stone then became a great mountain (signifying the kingdom of God), and filled the whole earth. He was astounded when Daniel told him both his dream and its interpretation. Wisdom however had only reached his head, and not his heart, because soon after he erected a golden image sixty cubits high and six cubits wide. When six different musical instruments sounded, all had to bow down and worship it. Goliath likewise was six cubits tall; his spear weighed six hundred shekels and he had six pieces of armour. Six throughout the Bible is the number of man, and Goliath therefore stands for the great manmade system of Babylon with its antichrist head.

Saul could do nothing against Goliath. In some ways he was only a smaller version of the same thing. Large sections of the organised church have a similar problem with the world. They think, act and live in the same man-centred way. Hence they have no power against it. David was impelled and empowered by the Spirit of God, and the odds weighed against him did not matter.

When David returned from killing Goliath, he had a short-lived honeymoon period of promotion and success under Saul. Before long the women began to sing, 'Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands'. Saul must have the praise of the crowd, so David's troubles began.

### **What Spirit?**

Soon after, we read the significant statement, 'an evil spirit of God fell upon Saul, and he raved (or prophesied) ...' (1 Sam 18:10 literally). Ch 10 v 10 (Saul's initial calling, previously quoted) reads literally, 'a spirit of God fell upon him, and he prophesied'. The only difference in Hebrew between the two verses is the inclusion of the word evil. In both cases the spirit is of God (Hebrew in fact omits the word of). In both cases the result is prophecy. (The normal Hebrew verb meaning prophesy can probably also be translated rave.)

(In Hebrew it is not the spirit, it is simply spirit. The definite article is not used here. Hebrew has no capital letters and so we cannot distinguish Spirit from spirit).

We see that the same man can prophesy or act under the inspiration of different spirits - especially if he loves the praises of the crowd. The fact that a man has exercised genuine spiritual gifts is no guarantee that he will never exercise counterfeit gifts. Even Peter had a revelation from God when he recognised Jesus as the Messiah, and moments later spoke under the inspiration of Satan when he tried to deflect Jesus from his sufferings. Jesus rebuked him with the words, 'Get behind me Satan' (Mat 16:17-23).

Are things different today? Can we rely on healers and evangelists to be led only by the Spirit of God? Are they all free of the love of the praise of man? Are there perhaps some Sauls among their ranks?

The following chapters narrate Saul's long pursuit and persecution of David. God is with David and against Saul.

The night before Saul dies he expresses outwardly what he has already done in his heart. He goes to the witch of Endor. Earlier, when he disobeyed God, Samuel had told him that rebellion was as the sin of divination. The sin of sparing Agag had seemed mild. Now Saul was actually turning to the occult for help in his hour of need. This was the logical conclusion of his previous sin.

Disobedience was the root sin in the garden of Eden. Obedience is the first necessity with God, as in a family, because everything else springs from it. Without it the end result is total lawlessness. That is the way the world is currently moving. We must move the other way into total obedience to God.

Saul's story ends the following day with his inglorious death in battle against the Philistines. His three sons died with him.

### **Saul's Children**

One man was caught between Saul and David. He was Saul's son and David's much-loved friend Jonathan. Little wonder that they loved one another. They were so alike. When all Israel trembled before the Philistines, Jonathan went out alone against them with only his armour-bearer, and put them to flight. Like David he was a man of faith and courage. When David returned from killing Goliath, 'the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as himself'.

Jonathan loved David against all his own interests. By all natural thinking David was set to usurp the throne that was Jonathan's by right, and, if he had been a normal king of his time, to assassinate all Saul's and Jonathan's offspring.

Jonathan did not live with David, but died with Saul. Why could not this faithful, self-sacrificing friend of David's have sat beside him on his throne?

There came a critical moment of choice for Jonathan. He and David had a secret meeting in the fields so that Jonathan could tell David if it was safe to return to Saul in the palace. Saul's hatred was implacable and Jonathan had to tell David to flee. 'David rose and departed', we read, 'while Jonathan went into the city' (20:42). Jonathan loved David, but he threw in his lot with Saul. He could have chosen the life of wandering and deprivation that now fell to David, but instead he returned to the comfort and security of his father's palace. We also have the choice of 'coming to Jesus outside the camp, bearing his reproach' (Heb 13:13), or remaining in the safety and respectability of the crowd.

Jonathan's sister Michal loved her husband David and on one occasion saved his life. Like her father Saul, however, she was conscious of the crowd. When David brought the ark up to Jerusalem, he laid aside his kingly robes and danced before it wearing only a linen ephod. David was conscious only of God, but Michal had her eyes on the spectators. She despised him in her heart and rebuked him for his actions. Her reward was a figurative partaking of Saul's death. She was barren for the rest of her life.

### **David's Sin**

Like Saul, David sinned. He fell to the lusts of the flesh and committed adultery with Bathsheba. Then he had her husband Uriah killed in battle to cover up his tracks. When the prophet Nathan came to rebuke him for his sin, his reaction was utterly different from Saul's. His repentance was total and from his heart. Saul had disobeyed the direct command of God. He then wanted a cover up, so that man would not know. David's concern was with God. In Psalm 51 he pours out his repentance and we see his heart attitude: 'Against you, you only have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight.' He is no old covenant man of outward ritual, ('You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering'); but a man of the new covenant written on the heart ('Create in me a clean heart, O God').

Saul's sin was a deep radical sin of disobedience to God of which he never really repented. David fell to the weakness of his flesh, but his repentance not only brought him God's forgiveness, but also blessing to the millions who read Psalm 51 to this day.

### **Epilogue**

Three times at least, with different terminology, the Scriptures tell us of the way of death (and the way of life). In Proverbs 'There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the ways of death.' This verse occurs twice for emphasis (14:12 and 16:25). In Matthew 'Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those that enter by it. For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those that find it.' (Mat 7:13). In 2 Corinthians '... servants of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life' (2 Cor 3:6).

The way of Saul seemed right to him, but it led to death and destruction. It was the broad way of the crowd and it was old covenant.

David's way often seemed wrong. It seemed crazy to take on Goliath. His men must have thought him mad when twice he spared Saul. Often he had to walk alone. He was a man of the new covenant of personal communion with God and he trod the narrow way which leads to life.

If we want life like David, Jesus is its source. He came that we might have life, and have it abundantly. Let us go to Him and drink, that in us there may be a well of water springing up to eternal life and that out of us may flow His rivers of living water.