

SAUL: GOD'S BEST BECOMES A REJECT

United Kingdom

1 Samuel 9 - 15

STRUCTURE

Key-persons: Samuel, Saul

Key-locations: Ramah, Gibeah, Jabesh, Gilead, Gilgal

Key-repetitions:

- Saul becomes king: anointed in private by Samuel (10:1); at Mizpah before the people (10:17-26); kingship confirmed at Gilgal (11:14-15).
- Samuel pronounces God's message: to the people (10:17-19, 25; 12:1-25) and to Saul (9:20; 10:1-8; 13:13-14; 15:1-3, 14-29).
- God rejected: Saul's dynasty (13:13-14) Saul as king (15:23).
- Positive things about Saul at the beginning of his kingship: he was handsome and tall (9:2); he was the best of the Israelites (9:2; 10:24); he was humble (9:21; 10:21-22); injustice made him angry (11:6); he did not seek revenge on those who had rejected him (11:12-13).
- Negative things about Saul after his kingship was established: He took credit for a battle won by Jonathan (13:3-4); he had no communication with Jonathan (14:1,17); he made a foolish curse (14:24); he ignored the well-being of his army (14:24, 29-31); he wanted to kill his son Jonathan (14:44); he partially obeyed God (15:3, 8-9); he built a monument in his own honor (15:13).

Key-attitudes:

- The Israelites feared the Philistines.
- When Saul was first presented and at the beginning of his kingship, he pleased the Lord, Samuel and the people.
- After Saul's kingship was established, he troubled the people, and displeased God and Samuel.
- Positive attitude about Samuel.
- Saul's humility at the beginning of his kingship, but his arrogant foolishness after his kingship was established.
- Jonathan's goodness and courage.
- Samuel grieved for Saul after God rejected him.

Initial-situation:

Samuel was a judge who led the Israelites to have victory over their enemies. When Samuel became an old man, he appointed his sons as judges, but they were dishonest. Israel's leaders requested that Samuel give them a king. They wanted a king just like the other nations. The Lord told Samuel to give them a king.

Initial-problem:

Saul went searching for his father's lost donkeys.

Final-situation:

The Lord was sorry that he ever made Saul king over Israel (15:34-35).

BIBLE STORY

Samuel and Saul

Kish, from the tribe of Benjamin, had a son named Saul. Some of Kish's donkeys got lost. His son Saul passed through the hill country searching for the donkeys.

As Saul climbed the hill to enter the town of Zuph, Samuel was coming toward him on his way up to the place of worship. Samuel saw Saul and told him, "I have a message from God for you." Then Samuel took a flask of olive oil, poured it on Saul's head, kissed him and said, "The Lord has anointed you leader over his people" (9:1-10:2).

Samuel summoned the Israelites to Mizpah and gave them a message from the Lord, "I brought Israel up out of Egypt. I delivered you from the power of Egypt and all the kingdoms that oppressed you. Now you have rejected your God. You have said, 'No, we want a king over us.'"

Samuel told all the tribes of Israel that God had chosen Saul of the tribe of Benjamin to be their king. But they couldn't find Saul, because he had hidden among the baggage.

They found him and brought him out. Saul was a head taller than anyone else. Samuel said to the people, "Do you see the man the Lord has chosen? He is the best. There is no one like him in the whole country!"

The people shouted, "Long live the king!"

Samuel explained to the people the rights and duties of the king. Then Samuel sent everyone to their homes.

Saul went to his home in Gibeah, accompanied by some brave men. But some troublemakers said, "How can this fellow save us?" But Saul kept silent (10:17-27).

Beginning of Saul's Kingship

About a month later the king of the Ammonites, went with his army and surrounded the city of Jabesh. The men of Jabesh pleaded, "Make a treaty with us, and we will serve you."

The king replied, "I will make a treaty with you on one condition: that I gouge out the right eye of every one of you."

Jabesh's town leaders replied, "Give us seven days so we can send messengers throughout Israel; if no one comes to rescue us, we will accept your terms."

Messengers came to Saul's place in Gibeah and reported what the Ammonites had threatened to do to the men of Jabesh. The Spirit of God came in power upon Saul and he burned with anger. He took a pair of oxen, cut them into pieces, and sent the pieces by messengers throughout Israel, proclaiming, "This is what will be done to the oxen of anyone who does not follow Saul and Samuel." Saul gathered three hundred and thirty thousand soldiers.

The next day Saul separated his men into three divisions; before sunrise they broke into the Ammonites's camp and killed them until noon. Those who survived were scattered (11:1-11).

People then said to Samuel, "Bring here those who did not want Saul as king and we will kill them."

But Saul said, "No one shall be executed today. On this day the Lord rescued Israel."

All the people went to Gilgal and reconfirmed Saul as king (11:12-15).

After Saul was reaffirmed as king, Samuel gave a farewell speech to Israel. He warned them, "If you and the king worship and obey the Lord and keep his commands; good! But if you do not obey the Lord, the Lord will fight against you, as he did against your fathers. You have committed a great evil, asking for a king. But do not turn away from the Lord. Serve the Lord with all your heart. Do not turn away after useless idols. Be warned: If you persist in doing evil, both you and your king will be thrown out" (12:14-25).

Saul was 30 years old when he became king. He was king over Israel 42 years (13:1).

The Philistines assembled to fight Israel, with three thousand chariots, six thousand men to ride in the chariots, and soldiers as numerous as the sand on the seashore. The Israelites saw that they were outnumbered and in deep trouble. Saul waited seven days, but Samuel failed to show up at Gilgal. The soldiers began to scatter. Saul said, "Bring me the whole-burnt-offering and the fellowship offerings." And Saul offered the whole-burnt-offering. Just as he finished, Samuel arrived. Saul greeted him.

Samuel asked, "What have you done?"

Saul replied, "My army was scattering; you did not come at the set time; the Philistines were ready to fight. I thought, 'The Philistines will come down against me and I have not sought the Lord's help.' So I forced myself to offer the burnt offering."

Samuel told him, "You acted foolishly. You disobeyed the Lord's commands. Only a priest can offer the burnt offering to the Lord. If you had obeyed him, he would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom will not endure because you refused to follow the Lord's command" (13:2-14).

One day, Saul's son Jonathan said to his armor bearer, "Let's go over to the Philistine outpost on the other side of the pass. It doesn't matter if we have many people, or just a few. Nothing can hinder the Lord from giving us victory."

The Philistines saw Jonathan and his armor bearer. When the Philistines came running up to them, Jonathan knocked them flat. His armor bearer right behind finished them off, bashing their heads with stones. In that first attack Jonathan and his armor-bearer killed about twenty men.

Panic struck the Philistine army; the ground shook. It was a panic sent by God.

Then Saul and all his men went straight to the battle. They found the Philistines in total confusion, even striking each other with their swords. Hebrews who had previously defected to the Philistines joined the Israelites to fight with Saul and Jonathan. The Israelites who had hidden in the hill country joined the battle. The Lord rescued Israel that day (14:1-23).

Saul bound the army under an oath, saying, "Cursed be any man who eats food before I have avenged myself on my enemies!" So none of the troops ate food all day. The army entered the woods. They saw honeycombs with the honey oozing out, yet no one took any, because they feared Saul's oath. Jonathan had not heard that his father put the army under oath. So he reached out the tip of his staff and dipped it into the honeycomb. He raised his hand to his mouth, and his eyes lit up with renewed vigor. A soldier spoke up, "Your father bound the army under a strict oath, saying, 'Cursed be any man who eats food today!' That is why the men are weak."

Jonathan said, "My father made a foolish mistake. How much better it would have been if the men had eaten food. We could have killed many more Philistines!"

Saul discovered that Jonathan had disobeyed his oath by eating honey. Saul was going to kill him. But the men challenged Saul, "Jonathan die? Never! He is responsible for saving Israel today! He fought against the Philistines with God's help!" The men rescued Jonathan (14:24-45).

King Saul constantly experienced victory over Israel's enemies (14:47-52).

Saul Rejected as King

Samuel told Saul, "The Lord Almighty says, 'I will punish the Amalekites for ambushing the Israelites who were coming up from Egypt. Now attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them as an offering to the Lord'" (15:1-4).

Saul took his army to the city of Amalek and defeated the Amalekites. He took Agag king of the Amalekites alive. Everyone else was killed under the terms of the holy ban. But Saul and the army made an exception for Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle. They destroyed all the weak or useless animals as decreed by the holy ban (15:5-9).

The Lord told Samuel, "I am sorry I made Saul king. He turned away from me and refuses to obey my commands." Samuel was upset, and he cried out to the Lord all night long (15:10-11).

When Samuel caught up with him, Saul said, "I carried out the Lord's commands."

Samuel replied, "Then why do I hear sheep bleating and cattle mooing?"

Saul answered, "The soldiers took them from the Amalekites. They saved the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the Lord your God, but we totally destroyed the rest as decreed by the holy ban" (15:12-15).

Samuel interrupted Saul, "Stop! The Lord sent you on a mission, saying, 'Go and completely destroy the wicked Amalekites under a holy ban.' Why did you disobey the Lord?"

Saul defended himself, "But I did obey the Lord. I went on the mission the Lord assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites under the terms of the holy ban. I only brought back Agag their king. The soldiers took the best sheep and cattle from the plunder to sacrifice to the Lord your God at Gilgal."

Samuel replied, "What pleases the Lord more: burnt offerings and sacrifices or obedience? To obey is better than sacrifice. Because you rejected the Word of the Lord, he has rejected you as king" (15:16-23).

Then Samuel ordered, "Bring King Agag of Amalek to me."

And Samuel cut Agag to pieces before the Lord at Gilgal (15:24-33).

Then Samuel left for Ramah, but Saul went to his home in Gibeah. Samuel never saw Saul again all the rest of his life. Samuel grieved long and deeply for Saul. The Lord was sorry that he ever made Saul king over Israel (15:34-35).

GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

1. What catches your attention in the story?
2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand?
3. Who are the main characters in the story?
4. What problems did the characters face?
5. How did the characters face their problems?
6. How have you faced similar problems?
7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you?
8. What does the story tell about God?

SPECIFIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What experiences did Saul go through to become king of Israel?
2. What were some of the positive things about Saul at the beginning of his kingship?
3. Why did God become displeased with Saul?
4. As God's spokesperson, what messages did Samuel give to the people and to King Saul?
5. How can you avoid Saul's situation of beginning by doing right but ending by doing wrong?

LIFE-LESSONS

1. People need to be reminded of the Lord God's great actions in the past, in order to have faith to trust him for their future. In their farewells, Moses (Dt 31), Joshua (Jos 24) and Samuel (1 Sm 12) reminded the people of the Lord's past actions, and they promised that the Lord would bless his people in the future, as long as they stayed faithful to him.
2. It is not enough to begin being faithful to God; one needs to remain faithful to the end. At the beginning of his kingship: Saul was the best of the Israelites (9:2; 10:24), he was humble (9:21; 10:21-22), injustice made him angry (11:6) and he did not seek revenge on those who rejected him as king (11:12-13). But after his kingship was established, He took credit for a battle won by Jonathan (13:3-4); he had no communication with Jonathan (14:1,17); he made a foolish curse (14:24); he ignored the well-being of his army (14:24, 29-31); he desired to kill his son Jonathan

(14:44); he partially obeyed God (15:3, 8-9); and he built a monument in his own honor (15:13).

3. The sinner usually makes excuses for his wrongdoing by shifting the blame to someone else. After Saul disobeyed God and offered a sacrifice himself instead of waiting for Samuel, he gave an excuse instead of admitting his wrongdoing (13:12-13). Saul shifted the blame to the soldiers for not obeying God's command to kill all the sheep and cattle (15:21). Beginning with Adam, the sinner seeks to make excuses and blame another for his sin. Adam shifted the blame to God and Eve (Gn 3:12). Eve shifted the blame to the snake (Gn 3:13). After Aaron made the golden calf, he shifted the blame to the people (Ex 32:21-24).
4. Worship and sacrifice must be offered to the Lord on his terms. Saul intended to sacrifice the best cattle to the Lord. He had good intentions; however, his delay in obeying the commanded destruction constituted flagrant violation of God's will (15:22). (See Ps 40:6-8; 51:16-17; Isa 1:11-15; Hos 6:6; Mk 12:32-33).
5. God demands obedience and not just participation in religious activities. God ordered Saul to destroy everything that belonged to the Amalekites. However, Saul spared the best sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the Lord. Samuel explained that it is better to obey God than to offer him sacrifices (15:22-23).