

AGAPE HOUSE OF WORSHIP MIDWEEK BIBLE STUDY

Topic: *Lessons from the Rise & Fall of Saul*
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Text: *1 Samuel*
Date: *March 17, 2021*

Background

Saul, whose name means *asked*, was a charismatic king from the tribe of Benjamin whom God chose to lead the scattered nation of Israel, a collection of tribes with no central leader other than God, and no formal government. The son of Kish, Saul came from a wealthy family (**1 Sam 9:1**) and was good looking and tall: *“there was not a man among the sons of Israel more handsome than he, being taller than any of the people from his shoulder and upward.”* (**1 Sam 9:2**)

Before Saul’s kingship, Samuel the prophet was Israel’s religious leader but not a king, as Israel was loosely ruled by judges who presided over domestic squabbles. (**1 Sam 8**) The judges were not equipped to rule in times of war, which broke out quite often, principally with the Philistines, Israel’s sworn enemies. (**1 Sam 4**) Because of the constant threat of war and a desire to be like the surrounding nations, the people pressed Samuel to appoint a king to rule over them. (**1 Sam 8:5**)

Anointed as King

Though the people’s request for a king displeased Samuel, God allowed it. The people had rejected God as king, forsaken him, and served other gods. (**1 Sam 8:6–8**) So, God told Samuel to anoint a king as the people had asked, but also to *“warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them.”* (**1 Sam 8:9**) Thus, Saul was anointed by Samuel secretly as the first king of the United Kingdom of Israel (**1 Sam 10:1**) before being publicly selected by lot. (**1 Sam 10:17–24**)

The Good Period

Saul’s reign over Israel started peacefully, but the peace did not endure. One of the most consequential events in Saul’s life was the stand-off with the Philistines in the Valley of Elah, where a young shepherd boy named David killed Goliath. (**1 Sam 17**) With the exception of that incident of fear and uncertainty, Saul was a competent military leader. His rule was solidified by his victory at Jabesh-Gilead. As part of the triumph, he was again proclaimed king at Gilgal. (**1 Sam 11:1–15**) He led the nation through several other military victories and his popularity reached its pinnacle.

Rejected by God

A series of very serious blunders, beginning with an unauthorized sacrificial offering (**1 Sam 13:9–14**), started Saul’s decline. His downward spiral continued as he failed to eliminate all of the Amalekites and their livestock as God commanded. (**1 Sam 15:3**) Disregarding a direct order from God, he chose to spare the life of King Agag along with some of the choice livestock. He tried to cover up his indiscretion by lying to Samuel and, in essence, lying to God. (**1 Sam 15**) This disobedience was the last straw, as God withdrew his Spirit from Saul. (**1 Sam 16:14**) The break between God and Saul was one of the saddest occurrences in Scripture.

While Saul would be allowed to serve out the rest of his life as king, he was plagued by an evil

spirit that tormented him and brought about waves of madness. His final years were deeply tragic as he endured periods of serious manic depression. It was David who became the soothing influence on the troubled king by playing music that momentarily restored the king's sanity. (**1 Sam 16:14–23**)

Feud with David

The king initially embraced David as one of his own, but things changed as David became an astute military leader in his own right. A popular song of the day was "*Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands.*" (**1 Sam 16:7**) When Saul realized that God was with David, he sought to kill David at every opportunity. David succeeded in evading the numerous attempts on his life with the help of Jonathan, the king's son, and the king's daughter, Michal. Saul spent much time, energy, and expense trying to kill David rather than consolidating the gains of his earlier victories, and because of this the Philistines sensed an opening for a major victory over Israel.

Suicide

After Samuel's death, the Philistine army gathered against Israel. Saul was terrified and tried to inquire of the Lord but received no answer through the Urim or the prophets. Though he had banished mediums and spiritists, Saul disguised himself and inquired of a medium in Endor. He asked her to contact Samuel. Samuel appeared from the dead to remind Saul of his prior prophecy that the kingdom would be taken from him, and that the Philistines would conquer Israel and Saul and his sons would be killed. (**1 Sam 28**) Indeed, the Philistines defeated Israel and killed Saul's sons, including Jonathan. Saul was critically wounded and asked his armor-bearer to kill him so that the Philistines would not torture him. In fear, Saul's armor-bearer refused, so Saul fell on his own sword, followed by his armor-bearer who did the same.

Conclusion

1. Taking the anointing of God for granted can lead to a quick downfall. Saul was presumptuous with the anointing of God and things ended horribly for him. He lost his way, a once successful, great warrior died unceremoniously.
2. Do not expect everyone to be on your side when you are doing God's work. (See **Eph. 6:5-6**) Although most of the people gave their allegiance to Saul, there were some who initially disliked him. (**1 Sam 10: 27**) However, when those who despised Saul saw the Spirit of God at work in him, they completely changed their attitude. (**1 Sam 11:7**; See **Prov. 16:7, Rom 14:18**)
3. What should be of major concern to us in our walk with God is how we lead a just, holy, and righteous life, not whether people can hurt or destroy us. However, we can destroy ourselves by our own actions, just like Saul did. It was Saul's actions that led to his demise, he didn't fall by the sword of the enemy, but fell on his own sword. (See **Gal 5:16**)