

him. Saul replied, “Because I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come within the appointed days, and that the Philistines were assembling at Michmash, therefore I forced myself and offered the burnt offering.” Saul did not understand that it is always better to wait on the Lord for guidance than to go ahead without Him. What appeared to be valid excuses did not change the fact that Saul had disobeyed God. For this he would lose the kingdom. God had already found another man, one after His own heart. The severity of God’s judgment on Saul must be seen in the light of god’s holiness. God was looking for a “man after His own heart” – a man with unflinching devotion and faith. Saul was not that man, for although Saul took his circumstances seriously, he didn’t take God seriously. As a result of his disobedience, God took the royal line away from Saul and gave it to another, the shepherd boy David.

After making the sacrifice, Saul led his army of six hundred soldiers from Gilgal up to the hill country, where he made plans to confront the philistines. The philistines had rallied at a strategic place near Michmash, and the upcoming battle seemed hopeless for Israel.

With great courage and faith, Jonathan and his armour bearer slipped away from the Israelite company to attack the philistines. This was not a suicide mission. The attack caught the philistines by surprise and they ran in all directions. Seeing their confusion, the Israelites mustered their strength and routed the fleeing enemy. It was a miraculous victory.

Now the men of Israel were hard-pressed on that day, for Saul had put the people under oath, saying, “Cursed be the man who eats food before evening, and until I have avenged myself on my enemies.” So none of the people tasted food. Saul made a rash, foolish vow that dampened the spirits of the people and almost sentenced his son to death. Unaware of the oath, Saul’s son Jonathan found some honey and ate it. Fortunately for Jonathan, the people intervened and rescued him from his father’s irrational stubbornness. Saul, however, never admitted that he had made a mistake. His foolishness reveals another crack in his character. How much better it would have been for him to humbly admit the rashness of his vow that would have won the respect and support of the people!

Although the Lord had moved Saul out of the royal line, in His mercy He gave him another chance to regain favour. Through Samuel, the Lord

gave Saul clear instructions to punish the Amalekites for their attack on Israel centuries earlier¹. Saul won the battle, but he took matters into his own hands. Instead of total annihilation, he spared a few of his great victory, namely king Agag and the livestock. Then on his way back there appeared Samuel. All smiles and sunshine, he said, “Blessed are you of the Lord! I have carried out the command of the Lord.” In light of his disobedience, Saul should have been on his knees begging for forgiveness. Instead he lied to Samuel. He had not carried out the command of the Lord and Samuel immediately confronted him on his deception. However, Saul was never short of excuses. He put the blame on the people. How pitiful! Saul had convinced even himself that he had done the right thing. He said “I did obey the voice of the Lord.” But the truth revealed his sinful heart.

Samuel issued God’s sentence of judgment. “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... Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has also rejected you from being king.”

Rejected! Saul had heard that before (13:14). Saul finally tumbled down to the ground. How could he have been so blind to his sin? Again in this case, though he took the people seriously, he did not take God seriously. He made a show of repentance and pleaded with Samuel not to abandon him. He even tore the prophet’s robe when he tried to leave. This was a sign that the kingdom would be torn from Saul and would be given to another man.

After accompanying Saul to worship the Lord, Samuel called for Agag to be brought forth. He then hacked him in pieces with the sword. Samuel carried a burden the rest of his life because of Saul’s failure.

After such a series of setbacks, the passage of time did nothing to correct Saul’s downward journey, absorbed as he was with his own selfish interests. In flouting God’s clear directives, he caused dismay to the

¹ When Moses led the people from Egypt to Sinai, descendants of Esau the Amalekites ruthlessly attacked the young nation. With God’s help Israel won the battle, but God promised to “utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.” (Exodus 17:8-16)

prophet Samuel, and incurred the wrath and judgment of the Lord. The Lord requires total obedience, and attaches no particular merit to what is performed in partial obedience. After all, partial obedience is better described as partial disobedience!

Questions:

1. The desire for a king by the children of Israel was vil in the sight of the Lord. Why?
2. Where did Samuel meet Saul?
3. How was Saul appointed as the king of Israel?
4. What was the first failure in the king Saul's life?
5. What caused the kingship to be taken away from Saul?

Lesson – 2

Saul (Contd...)

(1 Samuel 16, 17)

And Samuel said to him, “See? The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to someone else—one who is better than you. And he who is the Glory of Israel will not lie, nor will he change his mind, for he is not human that he should change his mind!” Then Saul pleaded again, “I know I have sinned. But please, at least honor me before the leaders and before my people by going with me to worship the Lord your God.” (1 Samuel 15:28-30)

“People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at a person's thoughts and intentions.” (1 Samuel 16:7)

After Saul's further rebellion against the Lord and his subsequent rejection, Samuel was commissioned to seek out the one who would succeed Saul on the throne of Israel. He was to go to Bethlehem and anoint one of the sons of Jesse to be king. God had permitted the people to have the king of their choice. Now that their mistake in choosing him had been clearly manifested, God proved the superiority of His own wisdom in raising up a king who would come in fulfillment of His perfect will. David, son of Jesse was singled out by the Lord and anointed by Samuel. The anointing was accompanied by the coming of the Spirit of God mightily on the young shepherd boy.

As David was invested by the Spirit, the same spirit left Saul. About this time he became afflicted by an evil spirit. When he commanded that a musician be found, his servants suggested that the king find someone gifted in music to calm him. David's name was suggested and Saul sent for him. The Holy Spirit empowered David to drive away the evil spirit that overwhelmed Saul. Saul liked David so much that he made him his personal armor bearer.

After sometime, Israel was again in trouble at the hands of the philistines. The armies were drawn up on opposite sides of the valley of Elah. A giant by the name Goliath came out of the Philistine camp daily for forty days, challenging the armies of Israel to send him a worthy oppo-

ment. Goliath was about nine feet nine inches tall and wore at least 175 pounds of armor. David heard of Goliath's taunting words when he reached the camp of Israel having been sent by his father with provisions for his brothers. He asked what would be done for the man who silenced this Philistine giant. Eliab, his oldest brother rebuked him when he heard this. But David persisted in checking into the prizes that awaited the man who would kill the giant. Saul soon got word that a young man had been found to fight for Israel and David was brought before him. When he saw David, he doubted about the boy's ability. But David had already known the power of God working through him when he defended his flock against the lion and the bear. Seeing his courage and determination, Saul gave his own armor, but David did not wear it as it was a big hindrance to him. Instead, he went forth armed with five smooth stones, a sling, a staff, and the power of the Living God! Reluctantly Saul agreed and David slew Goliath and brought back his severed head in triumph.

After David's victory over Goliath, Saul brought him into his palace once again, this time as a commander of his army. At that time, a deep and lasting friendship sprang up between Jonathan, Saul's oldest son and David. So close was their friendship that Jonathan, though heir apparent to the throne of Israel stripped himself of his own royal apparels and placed it on David. His victory was celebrated in song by the women of all cities of Israel: *Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands.*

Saul became jealous and so enraged was Saul at the diminishing of his glory that he, inspired by the demonic spirit tried to kill David thrice by his spear. But God delivered David and gave him even greater popularity. Again when Saul sent messengers to kill David at his house, Michal, Saul's daughter and David's wife knew of the plot and helped him to escape.

David fled to Ramah to see Samuel. Three times Saul's messengers failed to catch David because, when they came near the prophets who were with Samuel, they themselves began to prophesy. Later, when Saul himself went after David, he too was gripped by the power of God. While God held Saul prostrate on the ground all day and all night, David escaped.

Jonathan tried to bring reconciliation between Saul, his father and David, his friend. When Jonathan approached Saul on this matter, Saul flew into a rage, accusing Jonathan of befriending the man and he even tried to pin his own son to the wall. When Jonathan informed David of Saul, his father's intentions by an appropriate sign, he fled and went to find shelter with Ahimelech, the priest at Nob. Hungry because of the tiresome journey, David asked the priest for bread. But all that was available was showbread, the holy bread used in the tabernacle for worship. The priest offered it to David. At that time, Doeg, a servant of Saul was detained before the Lord in Nob. He observed Ahimelech's collaboration with David and carried the report back to Saul. Meanwhile, David made a request to Ahimelech for weapons. Goliath's sword which had been kept there, was produced and David eagerly took it.

When Doeg told Saul how Ahimelech helped David by giving him provisions and inquiring of the Lord for him, he summoned the priest and his family. In his anger, Saul did not listen to reason but commanded his servants to slay the priests. They hesitated to carry out his order. But Saul commanded Doeg to do this heinous work for him. Doeg fell on them swiftly and slew eighty five of them who wore linen ephod. He also attacked Nob, Ahimelech's city, and killed all the inhabitants and livestock. Only Abiathar survived; he fled to David and told him what had taken place.

David continued to flee with his six hundred men. The Philistines were robbing the people of Keilah of their grain supply at that time. David sought God's will before he attempted to deliver Keilah. Guided by the Lord, he fought against the enemy, saved the town, and captured a large amount of livestock. When Saul heard that David was in Keilah, he decided to catch him there. David found out about the plot and asked the Lord for guidance. Through Ephod which Abiathar had brought and through Urim and Thummim¹, God revealed that the people would betray David. Surely, the people repaid David's kindness by betraying him! David withdrew with his 600 men to the Desert of Ziph. There again the Ziphites betrayed him and he escaped to the desert of Maon.

Finally Saul caught up with David at En Gedi and nearly found him. However, the Lord had other plans and it happened that Saul's life was in David's hands as the king went to relieve himself in the same cave where