

KING SAUL

Saul, the son of Kish, was the first physical king over the nation of Israel. His life is one that is often seen as a failure due to his rejection of the commands of God. But even though Saul's life is often viewed in such a manner, there is another side of Saul that we fail to see, a side of him that even caused Samuel to mourn.

When Saul began his reign, he was described in words that denoted his humility and consternation concerning the duties that lay before him. In 1 Sam. 10:17-24, when "Samuel had called the people together unto Jehovah to Mizpah;" Samuel accused them of having "rejected your God, who himself saveth you out of all your calamities and your distresses; and ye have said unto him, Nay, but set a king over us." It was at this season that Saul was presented to the children of Israel, but where was he found? "he hath hid himself among the baggage." Here was a man described as being "higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward...whom Jehovah hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people?" Yet, his disposition was one of humility. Even when "certain worthless fellows said, How shall this man save us? And they despised him, and brought him no present." It is said of Saul that "he held his peace."

Saul was set to deliver Israel out of their oppression. When the Ammonites "came up, and encamped against Jabeshgilead...the Spirit of God came mightily upon Saul when he heard those words, and his anger was kindled greatly." Saul ultimately defeated the Ammonites. Upon their defeat the people said to Samuel, "Who is he that said, Shall Saul reign over us? bring the men, that we may put them to death." But, "Saul said, There shall not a man be put to death this day; for today Jehovah hath wrought deliverance in Israel." Saul was not a man given to vengeance.

Another event that describes Saul's devotion is noted in 1 Sam. 14. When Israel was doing battle with the Philistines, Saul, had "adjured the people, saying, Cursed be the man that eateth any food until it be evening, and I be avenged on mine enemies. So none of the people tasted food." Having been in such a battle the people were distressed. We could only imagine the hunger they must have endured. But yet, they were faithful to Saul's charge. However, "Jonathan heard not when his father charged the people with the oath: wherefore (when all the people came into the forest; and there was honey upon the ground') he put forth the end of the rod that was in his hand, and dipped it in the honeycomb, and put his hand to his mouth;" When Saul became aware that sin was among Israel, he said, "For, as Jehovah liveth, who saveth Israel, though it be in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die." And these words were not mere rhetoric for when it was found that Jonathan was indeed the offender, "Saul said to Jonathan, Tell me what thou hast done. And Jonathan told him, and said, I did certainly taste a little honey with the end of the rod that was in my hand; and, lo I must die. And Saul said, God do so and more also; for thou shalt surely die, Jonathan." Saul was of the disposition to slay his own son because of the sin he vowed to rectify. It was only as a result of the voice of the people that Jonathan was rescued.

Two events in Saul's life attributed to his loss of his throne: (1) 1 Sam. 13:5-15, when Saul was doing battle with the Philistines, he had been given instruction, by Samuel, to wait for him in Gilgal. Upon Samuel's delay, "Saul said, Bring hither the burnt-offering to me, and the peace-offerings. And he offered the burnt-offering. And it came to pass that, as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt-offering, behold, Samuel came:...And Samuel said, What hast thou done?...thou hast done foolishly; thou hast not kept the commandment of Jehovah thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would Jehovah have established thy kingdom upon Israel forever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue:" (2) Saul's dealings with Amalek: Having been instructed by Jehovah to "utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass." The scriptures reveal that "Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them: but everything that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly." Therefore, "Samuel said unto Saul, I will not return with thee; for thou hast rejected with word of Jehovah, and Jehovah hath rejected thee from being king over Israel."

The life of Saul, which seemed so promising, which could have yielded itself to God's glory, was to end in bitterness. It is said of Samuel that he "mourned for Saul."

Saul continued to serve as Israel's king until his death, and the death of his sons, by the hand of the Philistines: 31:8 "And it came to pass on the morrow, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, that they found Saul and his three sons fallen in mount Gilboa. And they cut off his head, and stripped off his armor, and sent into the land of the Philistines round about, to carry the tidings unto the house of their idols, and to the people. And they put his armor in the house of the Ashtaroth; and they fastened his body to the wall of Bethshan." ret