

A NATION RULES - ISRAEL'S EARLY MONARCHY

Study 1

Saul - Rejected by God

Read

1 Samuel chapters 13 & 15

In studying the early Monarchy of Israel we have seen that Saul was made king as the result of the request of the people. We have noticed also that he was of kingly stature, but he lacked the heart of a king. Although Saul possessed great potential as the nation's leader, it was never realised. In this study we shall notice that God REPENTED that He had made him king. (1 Samuel 15: 11) Eventually Saul is REJECTED altogether and God turns to David for Israel's king.

We have already looked at **chapter 13**, but we will look again at Saul's behaviour to get the reason for the beginning of his failure. The act of sacrificing without the presence of Samuel may seem almost insignificant. We could also excuse Saul, maybe, on the grounds that the outcome of the battle was in jeopardy while he waited for Samuel. Yet there is something which makes the picture look completely different. It is the fact that the commandment of God was at stake. Whatever other issues came into the matter, Saul broke faith with Samuel and with God. The word of God was dishonoured. **"You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God which He commanded you."** (13: 13) No king of Israel could afford to disregard God's law without reaping the dire consequences. Look back to **Deuteronomy 17: 18-20** and you will see how vital this matter of disobedience to God's law was, relative to the establishment of a king and the kingdom.

Worse was to follow in Saul's life. **Chapter 15** is a sad story and highlights, again, the king's true nature. God instructs Saul to absolutely destroy AMALEK, the relentless enemy of Israel. It was to be utter destruction. (verses 2-3) There was to be no question asked and all had to be destroyed. The enmity of Amalek towards Israel goes back to very early days. Look back to **Exodus 17: 13-16**, and you will see how the Lord viewed Amalek. There was to be continual war with them. Saul was instructed to further this conflict.

We can notice the WAY he went about it. He had all the resources necessary to accomplish the conquest. He began well by destroying all the people. Then came the failure. He spared some of the spoil and King Agag he kept alive. This action was in direct disobedience to God's Word. There was no excuse for his behaviour; his disobedience was deliberate. We have here another proof of the unfitness of Saul to be king - the leader of God's chosen people. (15: 59)

Notice how Samuel reacted to the event. The prophet had foreseen trouble and might well have relished Saul's downfall. Instead he went home grieving and (15: 11) tells us that he cried all night long before the Lord. Then he

CONFRONTS Saul with his misdeeds. We see how wrong Saul was. He blames the people first of all, **"the people spared the best of the sheep and the oxen"**. (verse 15) Then he excuses himself by saying that he kept them for sacrifice. (15: 15) Here is weakness and failure together. Samuel says something that is at the very heart of this lesson, and becomes a major theme of later prophets. **"Has the Lord as great 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"**. (15: 22) There is no doubt that this over-ruled all the reasons Saul advanced for his actions. It presents to us a picture of great sadness as Samuel vindicates his words by putting Agag to death.

The lesson for us is clear - OBEDIENCE is vital for the blessing of God. Firstly it makes evident our ATTITUDE to God's Word. People who despise God's Word will never obey it. Also, those who never listen to what He says will never know how to obey. I wonder - is your attitude to God's Word of such character that everything you believe He says to you, you readily obey? Such an attitude is essential if you want His blessing. Secondly, obedience demands ACTION. We cannot be negative about it. Saul's actions revealed his disobedience. When Samuel came all the evidence was there. It is not enough to say we obey - we must do what God says. **"Whatever He says to you, do it"**. (John 2: 5) This advice of Mary is excellent. Lastly, obedience must be ABSOLUTE - there can be no half-measures. Saul was willing to go so far - but not all the way. We cannot please ourselves about obeying God. Remember, the Lord Jesus wants you to be completely committed to obeying all that He has to say to you.

As we end this lesson let us notice that Saul's history is a story of a downward path. He went from bad to worse. Samuel makes the position very clear to Israel's first king. 15: 28 is a terrible verse. **"The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today."** We could trace the way of the rejected king to the time when he is killed on the battlefield. He spent a number of years hounding David, seeking to destroy the Lord's chosen king; possibly with the thought, that by doing so, he himself would continue as Monarch. Read **chapter 28** carefully and you will see where Saul's disobedience eventually led him. 28: 18 indicates that the disobedience in regard to Amalek was mainly responsible for his downfall. Now he commits the unpardonable sin of seeking guidance from evil spirits and witches. The Lord had left him. In his rejection we see the sad results of disobedience. Instead of prosperity and greatness which could have been his, we see absolute failure. Let us take warning.

Study 2

David - Anointed of the Lord

Read

1 Samuel chapter 16

There is something fascinating about any study of the life of David. There is a beauty and singleness of purpose about his character. Perhaps it is because his way of life is such a contrast to that of King Saul. It must be said right away that David was not without his faults. As always, Scripture is faithful in its record. When he made mistakes, as he sadly did, they are recorded in detail and very severely condemned. God hates and condemns sin whether it is in Saul, in David, or in us. God has no favourites. But you will notice that it is a matter of HEART. As you study David's life, you will realise this all the way through. He was a man after God's heart - and he was a king indeed.

Chapter 16 is a chapter of CRISIS - we will study it in some detail. Let us divide it into three parts:

1. SAMUEL AND SAUL - verses 1-4

Samuel was deeply grieved over Saul's failure. He mourned for Saul and seemed reluctant to abandon him. **15: 35** tells us that Samuel never saw Saul again, yet he seemed to cling to the people's choice. God takes him to task about this. It is obvious that God had someone else in mind following His rejection of Saul. Samuel was slow to move into the path of God's purpose. **Verse 2** seems to suggest fear of Saul. In the light of Saul's subsequent attitude to David it could well have been that his fears were justified. Yet great man as Samuel was and an accepted prophet of the Lord, he did not readily enter into God's thoughts for Israel's kingdom.

2. SAMUEL AND DAVID - verses 5-13

In these verses we have the anointing of David as king. For interest's sake, notice how Samuel went about the business of meeting David. He was conscious that he was leaving himself open to Saul's anger. The only way that he could visit the home of Jesse safely was by conducting a sacrifice. Notice the power that Samuel had as God's prophet in the land. He was known as a representative of God's purity and righteousness. It was good for Israel to have such a man in their company, who stood for God's interests.

Jesse had eight sons. As the inspection began they all passed before Samuel. He carefully assessed their qualities. What kind of man was God looking for? It could well be that Samuel still had the failure of Saul before him. He nearly made the same mistake in his judgment that the people did in choosing Saul. **Verse 7** is vitally important in this context. The Lord had to speak to Samuel about it. Outward attraction and power was not what God was impressed with. **"I have refused him"**, said God about Eliab. God's inspection penetrated deeper than the outward. **"The Lord looks at the heart"**. I wonder how often we make the mistake that Samuel did? Outward attractiveness fascinates us often. God is not impressed. It is the inward part of our lives that matters most. **"Keep your heart with all diligence for out of it spring the issues of life."** (**Proverbs 4: 23**) These are important words in our study of David's life.

When David was eventually called there was no doubt as to what Samuel should do. Outwardly he was fresh and good to

look at. And inwardly he was wholesome and true - the very man whom God was seeking. **"Arise, anoint him, for this is the one."** (**verse 12**) - the Lord gives the clear message!

Let us think about this seriously. We are so often taken in by outward appearances. Worse than this, there are times when we try to take other people in - we are not genuine in our testimony. Perhaps we want them to think that we are better than we really are. Let us be careful - God looks on the heart. It may be you have read this before in our lessons. We have certainly said it often, because it is important. David was a man whose heart was right with God and whose motives were pure. God loved him and used him mightily in His kingdom. Make sure your heart is right! Thus David was anointed king of Israel, and with the anointing came the Spirit's power. **(16: 13)** This time there was no mistake. He was taken from keeping sheep to eventually rule over the kingdom of Israel. He was to be Israel's greatest king. But God chooses His man and prepares him long before he becomes a national figure. Think about this too in a present-day context.

3. DAVID AND SAUL - verses 14-23

We must notice two very important things that are said - one about David and the other about Saul. About David we read **"the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward"**. (**verse 13**) Something great began in his life which completely changed its course. Now notice what is said about Saul, **"But the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul"**. (**verse 14**) This makes sad reading. When the Spirit of God left Saul, evil forces took charge. Saul is at the mercy of his own ungovernable temperament. His disordered mind plunges him into black depression and violence. To the observer, Saul is **"possessed"** by a spirit sent by God to punish him. Thus Saul's disobedience and refusal to submit to God's will eventually brought a way of life that was totally evil. It is always dangerous to choose an evil path. We never know where it will lead.

This is where we see David and Saul brought together. Music could push back the depressive shadows for Saul, and so Saul's need becomes David's opportunity. David's business was to soothe Saul's tortured mind with music, and at first Saul loved David greatly. (**verse 22**) But he could never accept that his place would be taken by God's man. The strife was soon to begin that would drive David into rejection. How serious the matter was for Saul! It was impossible for him either to accept or get the better of a man who was under the power and influence of the Spirit of God.

Study 3

David and Goliath

Read

1 Samuel chapter 17

In the story of David's encounter with Goliath we have an event which has fired the imagination of old and young alike. Artists have painted pictures to depict the battle. Poets have described the event in poetry and it has been a story-teller's paradise. Have you ever wondered why? Humanly speaking, David was interfering in a matter which he should have left alone, and his older brothers were quick to tell him that. He was being a 'busy-body'. (**17: 28**) But from God's point of view and the needs of the nation of Israel it proved a critical turning point in the events of the day.

Look at the SETTING of the event given in **verses 1-11**. The Philistines had established their camp on a mountain on one side of the valley and the Israelites on a mountain on the other. Note **verse 3**, there was a valley between them. It is evident that although Saul had been in conflict with the Philistines for quite a while, little headway had been made. The Philistines were dominating in their attacks, and their strength in battle terrified the Israelites. Then came the CHALLENGE of the CHAMPION. The mighty giant defied Israel's ability to fight. **"Choose a man". (verse 8)** It is interesting to notice that the issues of RELATIONSHIP are to be settled in a contest between Goliath and a selected warrior of Israel. In his arrogant challenge the giant set the issues clearly. If Goliath won, Israel became enslaved. If Israel's man won, then the Philistines would submit.

Sadly, all inclinations toward resistance seem to have vanished from the king and the army as they listened to the challenge. **(verse 11)** We see a DEFIANT champion and a DISPIRITED Israel. This is the setting for the story.

Verses 13-39 are interesting, for they show us how David STEPS into the picture. He is sent to his brothers with a dual purpose: to carry refreshments and to see how the battle fared. He needed no second bidding. Leaving his sheep with a keeper, he sets off early in the morning and subsequently arrives at the scene of the battle. Notice the words spoken to David in **verse 25**. Fear is betrayed in the words of those who relate the giant's activity. Great rewards are offered to the man who will defeat him.

It is good to notice the spirit of David as he studies the situation. It is the reaction of one who has God's interest at heart. He puts the matter in its right perspective. **"Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" (verse 26)** It is very true, and a lesson that we can learn, that people who have God's interests at the forefront of their lives will always see things as they should be viewed. Saul and the armies had lost sight of God, and therefore the giant looked terribly big. But David saw how great God was; thus the giant got smaller and smaller. **"If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8: 31)** David speaks out, **"Let no man's heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine."** **(verse 32)** We all love David for his courage. Saul, looking at the outward appearance, sees a youth, inexperienced and powerless. But God, looking on the heart, saw in David a mightier man than Saul, and David is soon ready to meet the giant. Study this carefully. Especially consider how David's COURAGE showed up Saul's COWARDICE for what it really was. Surely Israel needed a new LEADER.

Verses 40-51 give us the SECRET of David's victory. It is a study of trust in God. David knew that humanly speaking he stood no chance of victory. Goliath was formidable in every way; ten feet tall, fully armed and mailed, and a man of war from his youth. And let us realise this, that in the warfare that faces every Christian, Satan's power is too much for human might. Yet again notice that one smooth stone from the sling of David brought the giant down. What was the secret? David gives the answer in **verse 45**. **"I come to you in the name of the Lord of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied."** God and one stone with a boy-shepherd was more powerful than all the might of the giant. For David's time in the hills alone with his sheep and his God had taught him faith - and deadly accuracy with the sling. Thus David's trust now was in his

God and He did not fail him - the victory was assured. The giant didn't stand a chance! **(17: 49-50)**

Look at the SEQUEL; **verses 52-58**. The defeat of Goliath marked a turning point in the war of the Philistines with Israel. When they saw that their champion was dead the Philistines scattered and fled. There was a great victory that day. God has answered all the arrogance and defiance of evil Goliath, through David, the man whose heart was right with Him. Israel began to enjoy liberty - a liberty which, in the later years of David's reign, was to be extended. The chapter ends with David being presented to Saul - carrying the head of the Philistine. The TRIUMPH of TRUST in God.

Let us end our lesson by thinking how David is a picture for us of the Lord Jesus. Just as David went from the mountain-top down into the valley to meet Goliath - the evil giant - so the Lord Jesus came from Heaven and went down into the valley of death at Calvary to do battle with Satan. He conquered Satan just as David defeated Goliath. Then just as the people enjoyed the victory of liberty through David's triumph, so in the triumph of the Lord Jesus, Christians are set free from the bondage of sin. Think further of all that this picture means. **(See Colossians 2: 13-15)**

Study 4

David and Jonathan



1 Samuel chapters 18 - 20

The passage you have read for this lesson tells one of the most beautiful stories in the whole of literature. It is the story of the friendship of David and Jonathan. We are presented with the facts of a love that was pure and genuine. Some modern writers have cast doubts upon the purity of the love between these two men, suggesting that it was something warped and twisted. It was nothing like that. Jonathan was Saul's son and the heir to the throne. but he recognised in David the Lord's own anointed king. The bond of love deepened between them as time went on. As its strength was tested, so it became the stronger. To David, as he experienced the chill of Saul's hatred. it was something warm and precious, bringing comfort and strength in the hour of adversity.

The story begins with an encounter of APPRECIATION. **Chapter 18** introduces the friendship. Note how deep the feeling between them was. **"The soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David and Jonathan loved him as his own soul". (verse 1)** The triumph of David first attracted Jonathan but then he was captivated by his character. Jonathan the warrior and heir to the throne, lays his weapons at the feet of David. **(verse 4)** He ABANDONS himself, making a bond of faithful friendship with him. There is nothing more wonderful than a love built upon mutual respect and affection. There are very few friendships which compare with the depth of that of Jonathan and David.

It is again good to compare David here with the Lord Jesus. There is so much that is attractive about our Lord and it is good when, like Jonathan towards David, we become so closely involved with Him that we love Him deeply. Jonathan's love for David was the love of SURRENDER. He laid everything at his feet - symbolically surrendering even his right to the throne to David. To really get the best out of Christian living we need to have this depth of

relationship with Christ. Paul knew something about this. He said in **Philippians 3:8** . “ *I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.*” Jesus was everything to him - the GAIN and the GOAL of his life. Here is a vital lesson we can learn from this story of friendship.

Woven into the story of Jonathan's love, is Saul's hatred of David. **Chapter 19: 1** tells us that Saul instructed all his servants that they should kill David. Here was a test of Jonathan's LOYALTY. He delighted much in David, we are told in **verse 1**. This is a lovely sidelight on the meaning of his love. It brought enjoyment and delight to him. Jonathan did not fail. He pleaded with Saul for David's life. We must notice here that the popularity of David with the people intensified the envy and hatred of King Saul. The women sang his praises as he returned from his victory over Goliath. (**18: 6-7**) We are told in **chapter 18: 14-16** that he behaved himself wisely among the people and the Lord was with him - more than this - “*all Israel and Judah loved David.*” Quite understandably, Saul was afraid and he was determined to get rid of the danger of such a popular man. How wonderful it is to see Jonathan risking his own life to plead for David. This is how our own love for the Lord Jesus should be, in some ways. There are times when we have to stand for Him and be loyal to Him among those who really hate Him. It is good when we can act as Jonathan did.

Our third passage **Chapter 20** gives us an insight into the COST of Jonathan's LOYALTY to David. It is quite a sad chapter to read. Notice the desperation in David's words in **verse 1**. “*What have I done?*” Saul's hatred of him was inexplicable. So it is that the test of Jonathan's love is described. It is obvious that association with David endangered Jonathan's own life. “*Saul cast a spear at him to kill him.*” (**20: 33**) David's absence at the new moon feast gave evidence of Jonathan's protection and loyalty. Read the chapter carefully. There is so much in it that tells of the depth of the love that existed between these two men. The climax of separation comes when David goes his way into rejection and Jonathan goes back to Saul. **Verses 41-42** are perhaps the saddest verses in the whole of the history of the kings of Israel.

Perhaps we can ask why such a story as this is given so much place in the history of the Monarchy. There is no doubt that Jonathan's activities out of love for David saved David's life. But there is a deeper reason. In the dark scene of hatred it is good to have the light of such a deep and sincere love. The portrait of Saul's hatred for David would be even more terrible if we were not told of the comfort David gained from Jonathan's friendship. Notice how he describes it after Jonathan had been slain in battle. “*Your love to me was wonderful, surpassing the love of women.*” (**2 Samuel 1: 26**) The years of rejection were made more bearable as he thought of what Jonathan's affection meant to him. The bond between them was made all the more amazing by the fact that, humanly speaking, David was destined to rob Jonathan of the throne. Thus here David looks back on his friendship with Jonathan as one of the best things in his life.

Now apply this to the experience of the Christian. Those who hate the Lord Jesus will, to some extent, hate His followers. This has always been true. Yet love for Christ is

a two-way relationship. He values our love just as we enjoy His. He has said that “*if we endure we shall also REIGN WITH HIM.*” (**2 Timothy 2: 12**) God is no man's debtor. See also **1 Corinthians 2: 9; 2 Timothy 4: 8 and James 1: 12.**

Questions

Study 1: SAUL - REJECTED BY GOD

1. Why was Saul's failure to wait for Samuel so significant?
2. What was the attitude of God towards the Amalekites and why was this so?
3. What proof have we in **chapter 15** of Saul's unfitness to be leader of Israel?
4. How far should we go in our obedience to what God says?
5. Why do you think that obedience to God's Word is so important in Christian living?

Study 2: DAVID - ANOINTED OF THE LORD

1. What was the essential difference between Saul and David in their attitude to SIN?
2. Why was Samuel apparently slow to move into God's purpose?
3. God looks on the heart! Say in your own words what you understand this to mean.
4. “*The Spirit of the Lord came upon David.*” What difference do you think this made to him?
5. How can you be sure that your heart is ‘*right before God*’?

Study 3: DAVID AND GOLIATH

1. What does David's initial reaction to Goliath's challenge tell us about him?
2. What did David say to Saul and his men which showed that he put things in their right perspective?
3. How did: a) Saul, and b) God, view David as he offered to take up Goliath's challenge?
4. How was Goliath defeated, and how was David victorious?
5. In what way is David a picture of the Lord Jesus?

Study 4: DAVID AND JONATHAN

1. a) In what words do we learn of the DEPTH of Jonathan's love for David?
b) How did Jonathan show his love and respect for David?
2. How much did Jonathan's loyalty to David cost him?
3. Why did David value Jonathan's love so much?
4. Why can we as Christians be confident that our love and loyalty to the Lord Jesus will be fully appreciated by Him, no matter what it costs us?
5. What aspects of the relationship between the Christian and the Lord Jesus are illustrated in this study?