

THE LIFE OF KING SAUL.

The situation.

[1 Samuel 4 to 1 Samuel 6.](#)

The first chapters of the book of 1 Samuel record Samuel's life and work as the last of the judges of Israel but it basically ends at the end of chapter 7, though he is still involved, but in the background.

The nation of Israel had suffered for many years with the local nations, especially the Philistines. The sons of Eli the priest had taken the Ark of God into a battle, treating it as if a "*good luck charm*" and not the earthly throne of God. God was still on His heavenly throne but He decided not to protect His "furniture on earth." Israel was defeated and suffered considerable loss of life, the Ark was captured by the Philistines and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were killed. Eli, the priest, on hearing the news, fell back, possibly suffered a heart attack and died. The Ark remained in the possession of the Philistines for some years, during which God punished them and so they regretted having the ark. God was well able to protect His possessions, humiliating the Philistines in doing so.

The Jews call for a king.

[1 Samuel chap 7 to 11.](#)

The Ark of the Covenant has been returned to the Jews but it remained in the home of Abinadab in Kiriath Jearim in the area of Benjamin,

[1 Samuel chap 1 to 2;](#)

[Joshua 18:28,](#)

It remained there for the next twenty years and was not taken to Jerusalem until the reign of King David,

[1 Chronicles 15:1-28.](#)

However, the presence of the Ark in the Jewish territory did not solve their problems for the nation, God was still not really the center of their worship.

Samuel was now the religious leader and he realized that a new generation had arisen and they were looking for a change to the government of the nation. For many centuries Israel had looked to Jehovah as their King, but now the people wanted an earthly king just like the other nations. The leaders thought that the problems of Israel were due to them not having a visible leader, they ignored the fact that it was really due to their own attitude and behaviour to God and His worship.

Samuel knew that the nation would not succeed unless they still put God first and trust Him completely. He called for the nation to a meeting in Mizpah, a city in Benjamin,

[Joshua 18:26,](#)

There he challenged the people to turn back to the Lord. He also highlighted the problems of having a king, forced labour, conscription to the army, taxes, finally, the possibility of tyranny and dictatorship, the using of their power in a cruel and unfair way. Tithing was a common way of collecting tax by the king in many eastern countries, Once they had chosen to have a king then there would be no turning back.

The leaders of the young men expressed the desire to be like the other nations, they seem to think a king would be better for their defence. We must note that it was the ultimate plan of God for there to be a king of Israel, a divine plan to anoint His king in His time.

Idolatry had been the main sin of Israel for many years, it was present way before they entered Egypt, [Genesis 35:2](#), after Egypt they often took up the idol god's of the local nation's, [1 Samuel 7:3,4](#). Now, following Samuel's message, the people put away their false god's and made Jehovah God the center of their life, at least for a while.

When Saul became king, Samuel had to retire into the background, he had no real position of authority or power any more. This could have had a terrible effect on Samuel but he accepted the decision of God to appoint an earthly king, effectively removing any priesthood from the position of power. Samuel bowed to the will of God and the will of the people, accepting the situation but still he functioned as the earthly representative of God.

A Benjamite, a mighty man of power, had a son, whose name was Saul.

[1 Samuel 9:1ff.](#)

"Now there was a man of Benjamin, whose name was Kish, the son of Abiel." He had a good looking son whose name was Saul. We are now introduced to the future king. *"There was not a more handsome person among the children of Israel. From his shoulders he was taller than any of the people."* We first meet Saul as he is looking for lost donkeys, he had no interest in a position of power, he did not even recognize Samuel when they met. However, he came from a wealthy family and he had an appearance which made him stand out amongst the people.

We are told that he had made an extended tour searching for the donkeys, after arriving at the land of Zuph, Saul decides to give up and return home but his servant said *"Look now, there is in this city a man of God, all that he says surely comes to pass, let's ask him,"* so they head for the city.

As they approached the city they met a young woman going to get water from the well, she told Saul where to go to meet the "seer," Samuel. God had already told Samuel, *"Tomorrow about this time I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin."* God was already working out His plan, He has chosen His man to take the earthly position of king, he ignored any thoughts or desires of the elders and the kind of king they wanted.

Saul and Samuel meet.

[1 Samuel 9:18-27.](#)

Samuel is sitting at the town gate, Saul does not recognize him and asks where the "seer" lives. Samuel identifies himself and tells Saul he knows all about the animals, they have been found, Saul is to now go up before him, a sign of respect, to *"the high place,"* (as the temple had been destroyed 'the high place' is now referring to the place used for worship of God). Saul is still full of modesty and humility as Samuel takes Saul into the area set aside for the sacrificial feasts, which were part of the worship and offerings to God. Samuel gives Saul a position of respect in the dining area and the cook was instructed to give a priest's portion to Saul, yet Samuel gives no reason for this treatment.

After the meal Saul and Samuel probably talk about the state of Israel, the religious and political situations, the need of leadership in both areas. Saul probably sleeps upon the top of the house and departs the next morning for home, as they walked through the city Samuel tells the servant to go on ahead as he wants to show Saul the instructions from God.

Saul is anointed.

[1 Samuel 10:1-16.](#)

Samuel now anoints Saul privately, no witnesses, God has *"anointed you to be captain over his inheritance,"* then Samuel kissed him, as a sign of his personal affection for Saul. Anointing was a common practice amongst the nations, initially they used animal fat, possibly though the power of the animal came on the person, later they used olive oil. However, to a Hebrew, anointing signified that the power of God had been placed upon the person. Samuel now gives Saul signs that this action was of divine nature, that his call to be king was from God.

Saul, as he makes his way home, meets various people with messages and finally comes upon a company of prophets, at this point *"the Spirit of the LORD comes upon him,"* power to take on the responsibility of king, *"God gave him another heart,"* as part of this Saul prophecies, so people asked *"is Saul also among the prophets?"*

The tribe of Benjamin.

Benjamin was a favourite son of Jacob and the only son to be born in Palestine, the tribe of Benjamin was also a small tribe in the number of people.

The people at Mizpeh.

[1 Samuel 19:17 to 10:27.](#)

Samuel calls the people of Israel to a meeting at Mizpeh, this place has been used as a national meeting place on several occasions. Samuel brings a message from the Lord, reminding them of His previous protection but *"you have this day rejected your God for a king."* God told Samuel to line up the tribes by

name, as each tribe came forward Samuel received some indication from the Lord until the tribe of Benjamin was chosen, possibly by use of the Urim and the Thummim from the breast plate which can produce a "yes" or "no,". God was doing the choosing, now each family of the tribe of Benjamin comes forward and *"the family of Matri was taken, and Saul the son of Kish was taken,"* but they could not find Saul, but God knew where he was, Saul was hiding in the baggage of those present. This action by Saul should have been a warning, God had called him to His service but he was trying to avoid the job and responsibility, he failed to submit to be the King of kings.

Saul is brought before the people, *"he was higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward."* Samuel said *"See him who the LORD has chosen, that there is none like him among all the people?"* The people accept Saul as king and then Samuel wrote the constitution, the rules of the kingship. This king was not to govern in his own right nor govern for his own glory, he was still subject to Jehovah, the Supreme King. The scroll was stored in Mizpeh, it would be interesting to know the contents but the scroll has never been located, at the time of writing.

There is a record of an objection by *"the children of Belial."* Why did these have doubts about Saul? He possibly had no qualifications for this new position but their attitude was really defying the man chosen by God.

Saul, King of Israel

We do not know too much about Saul except in [1 Samuel 14:49,50](#), we are given details of his family. As for the character of Saul, we can only make an assessment based upon the information given in the Scripture, he was a man in his prime of life, he had a young son, Jonathan, it is believed, at the time of his appointment. It appears that Saul was never really affected by religion, Jewish or otherwise. He never appears to have ever really had the *"fear of God,"* though he sometimes appears to be careful with his behaviour and often moved to please God. This behaviour is common with many characters in the Bible, Samson for example did not serve God in his actions, he had faith but was often guided by personal desires. Solomon was corrupted by the riches that God had blessed him with. This must be a warning to people that a life lived apparently close to God can still be a life of unbelief.

The Biblical record of the history of his life shows that Saul would often receive his instructions from God but then adjusted them to suit his own desires, often he turned a deaf ear to the most simple of instructions, he often did not believe the information given. He did however develop a hard heart against any person who attempted to be gracious to him. Unfortunately, this behaviour resulted in him suffering from fear in many aspects, he was afraid of many of the enemies of Israel,

[1 Samuel 13:11](#)

[1 Samuel 28:5.](#)

He was very scared of the people of Israel,

[1 Samuel 15:24.](#)

He was especially scared of two people, Goliath,

[1 Samuel 17:11](#)

And David, [1 Samuel 18:12.](#)

Saul was physically blessed, he was of an attractive appearance, but it appears that the Spirit of God only came upon him for specific acts, this never changed his heart to worship God. God gave him the ability to take up the position as king of Israel,

[1 Samuel 10:9,](#)

He went from a farmer to king and statesman, but did he really know the Lord after Samuel anointed him as king? This tells us that God will always provide the abilities for any task or job for anyone He has been called to service.

This does make us ask a question, if the Saul was apparently so unsuitable for the position as the first king of Israel why did God chose him?

The Ammonite incident.

[1 Samuel 11:1-14.](#)

We suddenly find a change of location with no immediate indication of why. Jabesh-Gilead and the nation of the Ammonites were located East of the Jordan. The Ammonites lived a Bedouin life near Gilead, they are related to Israel through Lot,

[Genesis 19:36-38.](#)

The terrible threat of the removal of the right eye was to disable a man in fighting, since the left eye was covered by their shield. The savage characteristics of the nation of Ammonites is confirmed in [Amos 1:13](#). From verses 3,4 of the record we see that Saul has not yet demonstrated his new authority and has apparently returned to the life as a farmer, so these events are forcing him into making a decision as the king of Israel. His action was as a result of the Spirit of God which came upon Saul on hearing of the threat. The severe threat of Saul if people did not respond to his message his new power must have "put the fear of the LORD on the people," and they responded to the call for help by Gilead.

Saul used the idea of Gideon, [Judges 7:16](#), he split the people into three companies then by moving his men over night to the sleeping Ammonites camp, he surprised the Ammonites *"and slew the Ammonites until the heat of the day: and it came to pass, that they which remained were scattered, so that two of them were not left together."* - *"and Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly."* The next recorded event involved [Samuel](#), he was reflecting with, a different response to the appointment of Saul.

[1 Samuel 13:1ff](#).

Verse 1: The Hebrew used on the original text is a problem to translate, numbers are possibly missing, in fact some copies of the Septuagint have the number "thirty." included.

At the time of his appointment we are not told the age of Saul but that he was only a young man,

[1 Samuel 9:2](#).

In [1 Samuel 13:1 1ff](#) we are told that Saul has a son in charge of an army, so Jonathan by then must be at least 20 years old.

Finally, according to [Acts 13:21](#) he ruled for forty years.

War with the Philistines.

The Philistines have always been a problem for Israel, it was due to their threatening behaviour that the people wanted a king to lead them. Saul and Jonathan were in charge of two large groups of soldiers. Michmash is a village nine miles north of Jerusalem, probably the modern Mukhmas, Geba was a town in Benjamin, about seven miles north of Jerusalem. 'Gibeah' usually means 'hill' but can be used as a name for a village on a hill, this is where we find Jonathan and his men.

Saul does not appear to be planning a major attack on the nation of Philistine, his army was too small, however, Jonathan had other ideas, he now attacks the nearby Philistine garrison in Geba, when the Philistine leadership heard of it, they assembled a great force at Michmash. The Philistine's were very well armed with chariots and many soldiers, it is thought that the number "thirty thousand chariots" is far to large for the time,

Compare [Exodus 14:7](#);

[Judges 4:13](#);

[2 Chronicles 14:9](#).

As the Philistines assemble their army Saul called for the people to go to Gilgal to ask for the favour of God on the coming battle.

When the Israelites saw the Philistine army they were so scared that they hid, *"in caves, and in thickets, and in rocks, and in high places and in pits."*

Verse 8 seems to present a chronological problem. Reference to [1 Samuel 10:8](#), following the anointing of Saul as king he was instructed to go to Gilgal and wait for Samuel seven days, who was then going to make a sacrifice. The events of [1 Samuel 13:8](#) seems to be a continuation of the same event as Saul is waiting for Samuel at Gilgal. Samuel was delayed for some reason, perhaps it was to test the obedience of Saul to instruction.

Saul now had a problem, his army was rapidly disappearing due to fright and he wanted to get the blessings of God before he attacked, so He makes the offering himself. Just as Saul ends the offering, Samuel appears. Saul tried to make out a good reason for his action, he made no effort to confess his sin, [1 Samuel 13:9-12](#). Samuel responded by reprimanding Saul for his disobedience, not for making the sacrifice, he had been told to wait until Samuel arrived. Samuel then gave Saul a message from God that his reign would not be passed onto his descendent's, the Lord will find another king who would seek His will. Samuel now leaves Saul for Gibeah of Benjamin leaving Saul and his small army of six hundred to deal with the Philistines.

[1 Samuel 13:19-23](#) tells us that the Philistines had full control of the manufacture of iron tools and weapons, only bronze weapons would be available to Israel. As a result the Philistines were able to punish Israel to the north, west and south of their camp.

Jonathan's action of Faith

[1 Samuel 14:1-23.](#)

Saul is relaxing in his capital, Gibeah, but his son Jonathan has other ideas, he is making plans to attack a Philistine stronghold near Michmash, without telling Saul. Ahiah, the LORD'S priest in Shiloh, a descendent of Eli, comes to Saul wearing the ephod. The "Ephod" was a priestly item of clothing, See [Exodus 28:4-14](#);

[1 Samuel 2:28](#);

It was worn when they wanted to consult the Lord using the breastplate *"And thou shalt put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim."* We are not told what the Urim and the Thummim are physically, it has been suggested that they may be discs or stones marked "yes" and "no," the priest depended upon God to give a divine response to a question as he removed either Urim or the Thummim from the breast plate without looking.

Jonathan and his armour bearer plan to attack the Philistine garrison with the help of the Lord, he has recognized that the Lord is not limited by the abilities of the people's power or abilities. *"Come, and let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised: it may be that the LORD will work for us."* The assault was not really a risk for in verses 9-10 we see that if the Philistines invited the two to approach then this was a sign from God for them to proceed, the invitation was a sign of the Lord's will. The two warriors were now able to climb to the Philistine garrison and attacked and destroyed the twenty or so Philistines in the garrison,

[1 Samuel 14:14,15](#). The occurrences of a divine earthquake during the attack increased the confusion in the Philistine camp.

Saul's action in battle.

[1 Samuel 14:16-52.](#)

Saul's spies see all the confusion occurring in the Philistine camp, they noticed that Jonathan was missing. Saul calls for the priest Ahiah to bring the "ark" and to seek the will of God on his next action. (Some translations have "ephod" for the word "ark," this makes better sense as the ark was at Kiriath-jearim, [1 Samuel 7:2](#).) After calling for the priest to seek the will of God, Saul cancelled the instruction, he did not consult the Lord. Again a lack of patience and desire to do it his way. Saul ordered his men into battle and by means of a divine action they were able to have a victory over the Philistines.

Saul so wanted a victory that he failed to take care for his army, he ordered that they should not eat until full victory was achieved, this action weakened his troops and their ability to fight and was nearly to cost the life of Jonathan who had not heard of the order.

The slaughter of the Philistines continued until they had reached Aijalon from Michmash, about eighteen miles. The Israelites were so hungry by then that they killed the Philistine livestock they had captured to eat without first draining the blood,

[Leviticus 17:10-14](#).

This action had involved the people in breaking God's ceremonial law. Saul realized the terrible sin of the people, he built an altar and sacrificed the animals as an offering to avoid the judgment of God on the people. This action of sacrificing by Saul was not apparently restricted to the priests at the time. Saul must have built other alters as it recorded *"the same was the first altar that he built unto the LORD."* However, the problem did not end at this point.

Saul wanted to finish off the Philistines, but he decided to asked for confirmation from God,

[1 Samuel 14:36,37](#).

But God did not respond. Saul realized that there must be something wrong and asked for God to reveal why? So they cast lots, the first was between the people or Saul and Jonathan, the people escaped. *"Saul said, Cast lots between me and Jonathan my son."* Jonathan was chosen. Jonathan has to admit to eating the honey against the order of Saul. Saul now realized how stupid his order was, but as king he cannot ignore that his own son was guilty, he has to carry out his order to kill anyone who had eaten. But the people thought otherwise, *"Shall Jonathan die, who hath wrought this great salvation in Israel with the blessing of God?"* Saul was humiliated by his wrong attitude and leadership, he realized his stupidity and did not attack the Philistines that day.

Jonathan was rewarded by God for his faith. It was a great day for Israel on the battlefield with Jonathan declared as the hero throughout, but not for Saul, only humility.

Saul's military achievements.

[1 Samuel 14:47-52.](#)

We find a brief summary of Saul's achievements, he expanded the kingdom to the South (Edom), East (Ammon and Moab), North (Zobah) and finally West (the Philistines). Saul gathered an army to himself and defended the young nation of Israel.

Saul's second rejection due to disobedience.

[1 Samuel 15:1-35.](#)

The war with the Amalekites was the final point of failure between Samuel and Saul and resulted in the rejection of king Saul by God.

Israel and the Amalekites, were descendants of Esau,

[Genesis 36:12.](#)

They were ancient enemies of Israel. The Amalekites were under already under divine judgement,

[Deuteronomy 25:19.](#)

This judgement was about to be carried out under Saul.

Through Samuel, God commanded Saul to *"Go and smite Amalek, and 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,"* verse 3. This may seem very severe but the command comes from a pure and just God and was the execution of sin judgement.

The Kenites, who were friends to Israel, were warned to leave the Amalekites, the war covered Northwest Arabia, Havilah to the east border of Egypt, Shur. The Amalekites were soundly defeated and destroyed but Saul spared the king, Agag and kept the best spoil, violating the order from God, verse 9.

God spoke to Samuel, He is sad and full of grief at the sinful rebellion of Saul, it does not show that He can change His mind in nature or plans.

(compare [Genesis 6:6,7;](#)

[James 1:17](#))

"Saul is turned back from following me, and has not performed my commandments." When Samuel heard this he was very unhappy, and prayed all night. He seeks out Saul, eventually Samuel locating him at Gilgal. When Samuel initially challenges Saul on his actions, Saul responds with a lie, verse 13, but Samuel can hear the animals, then Saul blames the people, they wanted to sacrifice the animals, verse 15. Samuel tells Saul that God wants obedience not the sacrifices of animal, disobedience is putting yourself before the Lord. Samuel declares that *"Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has also rejected you from being king."*

Saul now realized the effect of his action, *"I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD, and your words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice."* He is still blaming others. As God had rejected Saul, Samuel now feels that he should depart also from Saul, as he turns away Saul grabs Samuel's robe, which is torn, a picture that God had torn the kingdom from Saul. Saul is so concerned that Samuel is leaving that he asks Samuel to help him worship the Lord, which Samuel graciously does. Did Saul really repent or was he frightened of the judgement and disgrace?

Samuel ends the life of king Agag indicating it was in obedience to the Lord's command and judgement.

Although Saul was to remain in power for some time, he was no longer the choice of God. The text of this page appears to indicate that Samuel never saw Saul again, though [1 Samuel 19:24](#) seems to suggest that God was still using Saul and he did meet Samuel at Naioth in Ramah.

The remainder of the life and reign of Saul is associated with the life of David, Saul has been rejected by God but the man chosen by God as the future king is already on the scene as the young man David. The remainder of 1 Samuel shows God preparing David for his future position, protecting him from danger and revealing him as the man of God's favour.