

## LESSON TEN

# KING SAUL

### **A. THE PEOPLE'S CHOICE:**

The people had requested a king that they might be like the other nations around them and God gave them a man according to their own choice. The man that God chose for them was Saul, son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin. Benjamin was one of the smallest tribes, situated between two of the largest tribes: Judah and Ephraim. Having a man chosen from Benjamin would prevent jealousy arising from either Judah or Ephraim.

Saul was tall and of striking appearance, none in Israel being a goodlier person than he (I Samuel 9:2). He was also very humble and timid when he was a young man.

His father sent him with a servant to search for some lost asses. When he came to Ramah to seek the advice from the prophet Samuel, he was told that the animals had been found and then the astonishing fact that he was actually to be Israel's first king. Saul was invited to a feast where a special portion had been prepared for him. Early the next day Samuel went to the edge of the city with Saul and there he anointed him and proclaimed him captain over God's inheritance (I Samuel 10:1). Samuel gave him three signs that Saul would experience as he traveled. He would meet two men who would tell him that the lost asses had been found. Then he would meet three men having goats, bread and wine, who would give him two loaves of bread and thirdly, he would encounter a company of prophets. He was to join the last party of the prophets and the spirit of the Lord would come upon him and he would prophesy and he would be turned into another man.

Samuel now summons representatives of the tribes to meet with him at Mizpeh and he went through the procedure of choosing tribes and families until he came to the tribe of Benjamin, to Saul's family and finally to Saul himself. When the people looked for Saul, Saul had hidden himself among the wagons and baggage. He was summoned and when the people saw his kingly stature, they accepted him with shouts of approval. It is here that the people shouted: "God save the king." (I Samuel 10:24).

### **B. A PROMISING BEGINNING:**

An opportunity soon arose for Saul to establish himself as king. The Ammonites, who had been defeated by Jephthah, some 40 years earlier, now attacked the city of Jabesh-gilead across the Jordan. These people sent for help and their appeal came to Saul's attention. Saul butchered a yoke of oxen and sent pieces to all the tribes. Three hundred and thirty thousand men responded to this appeal. From this group, Saul selected three army contingents, which he led against the Ammonites, winning a decisive victory. From this, the Israelites now fully accepted him as king. The formal ceremony was conducted at Gilgal with Samuel leading the proceedings. Saul was crowned as first king amidst an offering of sacrifice and rejoicing.

Saul began his reign in a most promising manner. His government was simple, and he did not demand too much from the people. He established his capital at Gibeah, his own hometown. The Bible records the name of one officer, Abner, captain of the army, who was a cousin of Saul. Saul began his reign in a most promising manner.

**C. THE FIRST REJECTION: (I Samuel 13:1-14).**

The Philistines gathered a tremendous force of 30,000 chariots, 6,000 horsemen, and many foot soldiers, and camped at Michmash, just four miles northeast of the capital, Gibeah. This brought great terror to the Israelites. Saul quickly assembled a force at Gilgal to withstand them, and waited for Samuel to come and offer a sacrifice prior to the engagement. Having waited seven days the impatient Saul assumed the priestly office and offered up a burnt offering himself. Saul was guilty before God of entering the priestly office. He had been anointed king but not priest. Through Samuel, God announced that for this act the kingdom was to go to another. Here we see where a considerable change was beginning to take place in the character of King Saul.

**D. THE SECOND REJECTION: (I Samuel 15).**

The second rejection came as a result of Saul's battle with the Amalekites. For a number of years Saul had been quite successful in battling the enemy that was ever pressing against Israel. Then came the battle with the Amalekites where Saul proved disobedient and lost the kingdom.

Amalek was a grandson of Esau. He and his descendents were always at enmity against the people of the Lord. As Israel traveled through the wilderness, they approached from the rear and smote the feeble Israelites. Because of this, the Lord gave command that after the people of Israel entered and settled in Canaan, they should exterminate the Amalekites. The time came that this should be done.

Samuel gave Saul specific instruction regarding the battle, that he was to destroy the people and all their livestock. Saul won the battle, defeated the foe. However, he disobeyed in sparing King Agag and some of the finest sheep and oxen. He explained to Samuel that the animals were for sacrifice. Samuel rebuked him and said that God desired obedience more than sacrifice. Samuel then killed Agag with his own hands.

This incomplete obedience is a type of uncontrolled flesh. A lesson that we all should learn from this is that incomplete obedience is disobedience.

**E. POSSESSED OF AN EVIL SPIRIT:**

Saul let disobedience rule in his heart until finally an evil spirit took possession of him. This teaches us how that once a man takes a step away from God, he quickly can go from bad to worse. With Saul it was first pride, presumption and then it was an act of disobedience. Now extreme jealousy regarding David took over in his life, and he began to seek to take the life of David.

With this jealousy came an evil spirit that took possession of him. The spirit of the Lord departed from his life and periods of severe depression came upon him. These periods of depression may have been partly due to the fact that he knew that the Lord had rejected him.

**F. AN ATROCIOUS ACT:**

One of the most terrible things that king Saul did was that he slew 85 of the Lord's priests and destroyed the city of Nob. He did this in his anger and jealousy of David.

Abiathar the high priest had given David some of the shewbread that had been taken from the altar, and had given him the sword of Goliath. Doeg, an Edomite, which caused Saul to react in

a fit of insane jealousy, had passed on this information to Saul. This was the most atrocious act of his entire life.

#### **G. THE WITCH OF ENDOR:**

The final battle with the Philistines came at Mount Gilboa. The Philistines encamped at Shunem near Mount Gilboa. Saul moved to meet them and took up quarters in that mountain. Fearing the coming encounter, he sought information on its outcome from God but was not answered by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets (I Samuel 28:6). In desperation he visited a witch who dwelt at Endor.

Saul would not pray at first. At last he could not pray. He rejected God at first—finally God rejected him. He could not hear from God. The future frightened him. The power of his enemies haunted him. The person, who gets so far from God that he cannot hear from Him, will go to any source in order to get an answer.

God permitted Samuel to appear to pronounce Saul's final doom. Saul's words to Samuel were: *"God has departed from me and answereth me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams, therefore I have called thee, that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do."* What was Samuel's answer? It was doom because of sin. He pronounced the judgment of God.

It should be noted that since the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the location of paradise has been moved and in this New Testament day it is impossible to call back the spirit of one who dies in the Lord.

#### **H. A TRAGIC DEATH:**

Saul had begun his reign in such a promising manner but the end could not have been more tragic. The Israelites were completely defeated by the Philistines at Mount Gilboa, and Saul and his three sons were slain.

Saul was wounded; then he attempted to commit suicide and fell on his own sword. As he lay there in agony, an Amalekite young man came, finished slaying him, then taking his crown and bracelet. It should be noticed that this young man was an Amalekite, one of those whom Saul had saved in his act of disobedience, which caused him to lose his crown.

We should not finish the story of Saul without noting the reaction of King David towards this Amalekite. Even though Saul had sought David's life for years and had failed God in such a miserable manner and had been rejected by God, yet David slew the Amalekite with these words, *"How wast thou not afraid to stretch forth thine hand to destroy the Lord's anointed?" (II Samuel 1:14)*. This should cause us today to be very careful how we lay our hands upon the anointed of the Lord.

