

Christian Educational Ministries

The Unrepentant King

by: Ronald L. Dart

Everybody's favorite king in the Bible is David, of course, but you really can't, I don't think, understand David, who he was, and what he was, and where he fits in the middle of things without understanding a man named Saul.

David was not the first king of Israel. He was the second. He followed on the heels of a man who was a failure, in the simplest terms. Why he was a failure, how he became a failure how his life played out is of singular interest. And it is in that life and in those events that some principles, I think that are among the most important that you will ever learn in your life, can be told and illustrated and laid out for you.

The last verse in the Book of Judges says this:

Judges 21

KJV

²⁵ In those days there was no king in Israel. Every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

Now, virtually every time I have heard that scripture cited (and I heard it cited many times over the years) it is cited in a negative sense. It is cited as though the absence of a king in Israel allowed anarchy. That since every man was able to do what was right in his own eyes, the people inevitably went out and did what was wrong. I have long felt that there was a problem, though, with that interpretation, and I'll explain what I mean. That fact that there was no king in Israel was precisely what God wanted. This is overlooked by many people. He never intended for Israel to have a king. What he wanted them to have was maximum freedom.

If you read it this way: "In those days, there was no dictator in Israel. Every man was free to do the right thing as he saw it." Now does that sound different to you? Because, in truth, that is the sense of this verse. I think what he is saying is: "In those days there was no king in Israel. Every man was free to do the right thing according to his likes." That's a different view.

Now, during the period of Judges, Israel had enormous freedom, not just religious freedom. There was very little government, as such. And what government there was, was family. It was patriarchal. We would use the word tribal, but I don't think that really conveys, in English, the circumstances of family in Israel: the greater family, the larger family, when heads of families governed their own families. Families stayed close to each other. The transportation that we have today makes it possible for people to be worlds away. In those days people didn't move that far. A big move was a mile down the road. It was not that big a deal. Families were close. The abuses that would call for the police today were handled then by two big, burly brothers. You follow me. You just enforced it yourself. You went and made things right with your neighbor yourself. You did what you needed to do. If your sister had been abused or knocked around by some big

guy then you'd send your brothers down there and take care of it. You didn't need a king, didn't need a police force or anything. Families took those things in their own hands.

Protection from external enemies, that is from the nations round-about them was provided by God as long as Israel trusted Him and obeyed. You and your family and your people up and down the landscape trusted God and obeyed God. You didn't have to worry about a standing army. Everyman sat under his own vine and his own fig tree. (A condition, by the way, which prefigures the millennium.) When, about the millennium, it says that every man will sit under his own vine, under his own fig tree, it's talking about people having their own land, their own place, and having freedom to enjoy their own place.

The trouble in the period of Judges (and there was plenty of it) was not because of their lack of government. It was because they forgot God. If you doubt that just read the book of Judges. Go back through it again and look for what the Bible says is the cause for their continued difficulties, troubles, and trials. Because it's a story of them forgetting God and Him raising up a judge and performing miracles to deliver them and then them coming back to God. And then them forgetting God again and Him selling them to their enemies. Let them have them again. If you don't want God in your life God won't be in your life. He'll go somewhere else and be somewhere else.

Samuel was the last great judge. He was apparently an Ephraimite. He was not a Levite, not a priest. His birth was a miracle. God spoke with him as a child, and worked with him, led him all of his life. Ironically though, it was a weakness of Samuel that led to the appointment of the first king and the confusion that arose as a result of that and a great deal of the wrong things that happened in Israel subsequent to that time grew out of this. It was inevitable, I suppose, but it nevertheless was a weakness of his.

The story begins in 1st Samuel, the 8th chapter. Here begins the tragic story of King Saul. Yeah, it begins all the way back here.

1 Samuel 8

¹ And it came to pass, when Samuel was old, that he made his sons judges over Israel.

² Now the name of his firstborn was Joel; and the name of the second Abiah: they were judges in Beersheba.

³ And his sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgement.

Now in this you get a small clue as to the role that judges played. They were judges. They were the supreme court of Israel. They were to sit and hear cases as they came down. And so when someone would come down to have their case heard, they might find out that one of Samuel's sons was hearing the case, and that the opposition had already paid him off. So they go into court. They all make their case. But they're wasting their time. They might as well forget it because Samuel's son had been paid off and was perverting judgement. Bribes were common.

⁴ Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah,

⁵ and said unto him Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways [...]

”We have a lot of confidence in you. You’ve been around a long time, but you’re getting old. You’re going to die. Your sons aren’t doing this.”

⁵ [...] now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.

⁶ But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us And Samuel prayed unto the LORD.

⁷ And the Lord said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.

Now what does that tell you? It tells you that Israel had a king. The king was God. He wanted to be their king. He did not want them to have another king. He wanted no one between Himself and the people of Israel. He would be their protector. He would take care of them. Their problem was not the lack of government. Their problem was the fact that they forgot God, rejected him, and wouldn’t have His leadership.

And when the elders came to Samuel, God said “Don’t be dismayed about this. It’s not *you* they have rejected; it’s *me* they have rejected. They do not want me to reign over them. They want somebody else to reign over them.”

When I read that I thought...there is, among some people, it seems to me, a preoccupation with government. A lot of people today are very worried about the kind of church government they are going to have, the kind of church organization. It’s almost as though people are afraid to be without a government. And I ask myself, “Are they afraid to be without a government or are they afraid to be solely under God’s government?” Think that one over for a while. Is it a lack of government they’re afraid of or is it God’s government that they’re afraid of? That they don’t want to quite trust, or that they’re uncomfortable about. And so make us, shall we say, an apostle to lead us so we don’t go astray, scattered like sheep without a shepherd People worry about governments and how they are going to govern.

Anyway, God says they have not rejected you, they have rejected Me when they want this king.

⁸ According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee.

There’s not a thing new in this.

⁹ Now therefore hearken unto their voice [...]

“But I want you to do something.”

⁹ [...] howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and shew them the manner of the king that shall reign over them.

Now, I don't want you to misunderstand something at this point. The king that was going to be given to reign over them was not going to be a bad person. When He says "I want you to show them the manner of king..." He is not saying "I'm going to give you a king who's going to be a rascal, who's going to take advantage of you." That's not what he's saying (as will become apparent as we study our way through this). But what he wants to show them is how it's going to work when you have a king over you. This is what He wants them to understand.

¹⁰ And Samuel told all the words of the LORD unto the people that asked of him a king.

¹¹ And he said, This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and some shall run before his chariots.

He will have to have a palace guard. He'll have to have horsemen. He'll have to have runners. He's going to begin building an administration right off the bat.

¹² And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties; and will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots.

OK. We're going to need agricultural lands for him, to feed all his guests and take care of all his needs, and he's going to need a standing army. You want a king to defend yourselves against the nations roundabout. You're not going to trust God. You're not going to have angels on horseback. You're not going to have chariots of fire roundabout you. You're not going to have all that. So your king is going to need weapons of war, chariots, horsemen, drivers, workers. Right? You're going to have to have all these things in order to support this king that you want to protect you.

¹³ And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers.

¹⁴ And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants.

Yeah, he'll confiscate the fields you've got. He'll come in and declare eminent domain and say "It belongs to me, doesn't belong to you anymore." Give you what he thinks it is worth (which probably isn't very much) and he'll turn it over to one of his favorites.

¹⁵ And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants.

We would be so lucky if our king only took 10% of all that we've got.

¹⁶ And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young

men, and your asses, and put them to his work.

¹⁷ He will take the tenth of your sheep: and ye shall be his servants.

Does this sound far-fetched to you? Do you know how long this year you have been working for yourself and how long this year you have been working for the government? When is taxpayer's day? May? Or is it June now? Which means you have been working this year less than a month for yourself. The rest of the work this year you did for the government. It's the cost of government. It's what you have to do. You want all these roads? You want all this regulation? You want armies? You want protection? You want an air force, a navy, your ships safe from plunder by pirates? You want all that stuff, you're going to have to pay a government for it. You'll work from the first of the year to the first of June to pay for all of this. It's part of what goes on.

¹⁸ And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you[.]

Boy, is that ever true. Israel cried then and we cry now. Tune into talk radio any time you want to and most of the talk is moaning and groaning about government, isn't it? You can find three hours a day, at least, on KWS in this area when Rush Limbaugh is on. The 3 hours is mostly about the state of government

¹⁸ [Y]e shall cry out in that day because of your king [...] and the LORD will not hear you in that day.

¹⁹ Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us;

²⁰ That we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles.

I guess they decided it looked like a good deal.

²¹ And Samuel heard all the words of the people, and he rehearsed them in the ears of the LORD.

²² And the LORD said to Samuel, Hearken unto their voice, and make them a king. And Samuel said unto the men of Israel, Go ye every man into his city.

Well, here begins the tragic story of King Saul. This is where she starts.

Saul had gone out looking for his father's asses. They had become lost, so he went out looking for them, and the story begins to develop in Ch. 9. Poor Saul was destined to failure right from the very beginning. He was destined to failure not because God made it so. The fact is that every single king of Israel or Judah was a failure in the end because the very idea of a human king was flawed from the start. Saul, David, Solomon, Rehoboam, Jeroboam, the whole sad, sorry lot of them were destined to failure from the day they were anointed king until it was all said and done. Sure, some were better than others but they didn't solve the problem. They didn't solve anything

because in the end the nation finally went captive.

In fact, their kings tended to be a reflection of the people of their own time. It is said that we get the leaders we deserve, and I suppose there is some truth in that. There is something in man that yearns for government, yet government is the source of most of the loss of man's freedom. And yet we still want it.

Don't look for someone to blame in all this. Don't blame Saul. Don't blame anybody. It's built into the nature of the beast. Some time ago, a prominent preacher drew a distinction between David and Saul. He said that David was selected by God to be king, but Saul was selected by the people to be king. Now, I don't know why he said that, but it is sharply and clearly at variance with the record. The story is in chapter 9. Saul is out looking for some lost animals and decides to consult Samuel who he calls "the seer" as to where they might be. He was a seer, so maybe he's seen them.

Now in I Samuel 9:15 we find this:

15 Now the LORD had told Samuel in his ear a day before Saul came, saying,
16 To morrow about this time I will send thee a man out of the land of Benjamin, and thou shalt anoint him to be captain over my people Israel, that he may save my people out of the hand of the Philistines: for I have looked upon my people, because their cry is come unto me.

They're fed up with the rule of the Philistines. They want liberty. They want to get out of this. OK. Who sent Saul up to him? God did. God sent him. God told Samuel he's coming and to anoint him as captain over the people.

17 And when Samuel saw Saul, the LORD said unto him, Behold the man whom I spake to thee of! this same shall reign over my people.

Who selected him, the people? No, God. God selected him. The people didn't know who he was, or where he was, or anything about him.

18 Then Saul drew near to Samuel in the gate, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, where the seer's house is.

He's talking to Samuel and he doesn't know who it is.

19 And Samuel answered Saul, and said, I am the seer: go up before me unto the high place; for ye shall eat with me to day, and to morrow I will let thee go, and will tell thee all that is in thine heart.
20 And as for thine asses that were lost three days ago, set not thy mind on them; for they are found. And on whom is all the desire of Israel? Is it not on thee, and on all thy father's house?

²¹ And Saul answered and said, Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? [...]

Now that's qualifying, in the way God looks at things. Smallest tribe, smallest family. This is where He looks to find people He wants to use.

²¹ [...] wherefore then speakest thou so to me?

I'm nobody!

²² And Samuel took Saul and his servant, and brought them into the parlour, and made them sit in the chiefest place among them that were bidden, which were about thirty persons.

²³ And Samuel said unto the cook, Bring the portion which I gave thee, of which I said unto thee, Set it by thee.

²⁴ And the cook took up the shoulder, and that which was upon it, and set it before Saul. and Samuel said, Behold that which is left! set it before thee, and eat: for unto this time hath it been kept for thee since I said, I have invited the people.

So he had set it aside and said, "Have it. This is for you. It's the best piece of meat here."

²⁵ And when they were come down from the high place into the city, Samuel communed with Saul upon the top of the house.

²⁶ And they arose early: and it came to pass about the spring of the day, that Samuel called Saul to the top of the house, saying, Up, that I may send thee away. And Saul arose, and they went out both of them, he and Samuel, abroad.

²⁷ And as they were going down to the end of the city, Samuel said to Saul, Bid the servant pass on before us, (and he passed on,) but stand thou still a while, that I may shew thee the word of God.

The servant went on his way and here stands Samuel and Saul. Now there is not one word anywhere, in anything we have read up to this time that gives any impression that this man was selected by anyone except God. Right? God picked him. Now God did not pick him in order to set a booby-trap for Israel. He picked a good-hearted guy. He picked a good man. He picked a humble man. Because, at this stage of his life, Saul was not impressed with himself. He's a big guy, head and shoulders above the people that stood around him.

If you're going to be a king in the ancient world, normally you need to be big to fight. That's what the kings had to do; fight. They fought at the head of their armies, not back in a bunker somewhere. OK? So this is a fighting man, a big man, a capable one. But apart from that he was a humble man.

¹ Then Samuel took a vial of oil, and poured it upon his head, and kissed him, and said, Is it not because the LORD hath anointed thee to be captain over his inheritance?

² When thou art departed from me to day, then thou shalt find two men by Rachel's sepulcher in the border of Benjamin at Zelzah; and they will say unto thee, The asses which thou wentest to seek are found: and, lo, thy father hath left the care of the asses, and sorroweth for you, saying, What shall I do for my son?

³ Then shalt thou go on forward from thence, and thou shalt come to the plain of Tabor, and there shall meet thee three men going up to God to Bethel, one carrying three kids, and another carrying three loaves of bread, and another carrying a bottle of wine:

A very specific group of people.

⁴ And they will salute thee, and give thee two loaves of bread; which thou shalt receive of their hands.

⁵ After that thou shalt come to the hill of God [...]

There is all this very specific detail being given.

⁵ [...] where is the garrison of the Philistines: and it shall come to pass, when thou art come thither to the city, that thou shalt meet a company of prophets coming down from the high place with a psaltery, and a tabret, and a pipe, and a harp, before them; and they shall prophesy:

He was to encounter a platoon of singing guys. A school of prophets, on the road, with musical instruments singing at the top of their voices, prophesying.

⁶ And the Spirit of the LORD will come upon thee, and thou shalt prophesy with them, and shalt be turned into another man.

Isn't that interesting? This humble young man, this big, strong, strapping fellow was not very impressed by himself at all, was selected by God, was anointed to be king over Israel. And not only that, he was converted. Listen to what it says.

⁷ And let it be, when these signs are come unto thee, that thou do as occasion serve thee; for God is with thee.

God gave him every break. God was not opposed to him. He was not against him. God was opposed to the idea of a king. But once He decided to do it, He gave it the best that could possibly be given. Now understand that and know it. This is not a booby-trap. God wasn't in the business of jerking the rug out from under them. OK.

⁸ And it was so, that when he had turned his back to go from Samuel, God gave him another heart: and all those signs came to pass that day.

God gave him another heart. I don't know if you realized that before, but Saul was a converted man. He was just as converted to begin with as King David, whom we all love, and admire, and praise to the high heavens, and call "a man after God's own heart" because God said he was. I think this is really very interesting. What went wrong with Saul went wrong not because he was a bad person. He was not evil. The spirit of God was upon him, and he was converted. He was not a bad man. He was a good guy. What went wrong, then? How did it get messed up? Where did he go astray? And what is the difference between Saul and David, whom we come to know, and love, and appreciate, who wrote so many psalms in the Bible?

What's out there we're missing somehow in these two men? Why is one of them good and the other one bad? Well, it's in 1 Samuel 15 that things begin to go wrong. This is not an unfamiliar story, but I think we need to review it, to analyze it, and think about what happens here and the lessons that result from it.

1 Samuel 15

¹ Samuel also said unto Saul, The LORD sent me to anoint thee to be king over his people, over Israel: now therefore hearken thou unto the voice of the words of the LORD.

God has some very specific things which He intends for you to do.

² Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt.

Now we're going way back to a time when there was a nation that dealt treacherously with Israel when they came out of Egypt, and God said He was going to deal with them. There was a prophecy made that He was not going to forget it. That it was going to come home to roost on them.

³ Now 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.

This is one of those passages of scripture that people find so difficult to understand. And I don't know that I can even explain it to you. It's hard for me to imagine a people who had become so corrupted that there was no longer, really, any hope for them at all. That's what's suggested by this. That their society, their civilization... Take Sodom and Gomorrah, for example. God cauterized the surface of the Earth where those 2 nations were. I don't know what kind of disease, sickness, mental sickness, perversion that would be passed on. They tell us that these things get passed on from generation to generation, not only physically, but psychologically. So who knows? But God in His wisdom said it is time to get rid of Sodom and Gomorrah; to just burn them off the face of the Earth.

Now the time has come to deal the same way with Amalek, and so he gives Saul the commandment to go do it.

⁴ And Saul gathered the people together and numbered them in Telaim, two hundred thousand foot soldiers and ten thousand men of Judah.

A big army, isn't it?

⁵ And Saul came to a city of Amalek, and lay in wait in the valley.

⁶ And Saul said to the Kenites, "Go, depart, get down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them. For you showed kindness to all the children of Israel when they came up out of Egypt." So the Kenites departed from among the Amalekites.

They got up and they got out of there.

⁷ And Saul attacked the Amalekites, from Havilah all the way to Shur, which is east of Egypt.

⁸ And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive [...]

He wasn't supposed to do that. He wasn't supposed to do that at all.

⁸ [...] and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword.

⁹ But 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 every thing that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly.

Now, in the ancient world, it was customary when you defeated a king that the king was not necessarily killed. It was far preferable, in fact, to take the king captive and hold him for ransom. You get hints of this, in fact, in some of the wars in Europe between the English kings and French kings and how kings were often held for years in ransom and they would go up and down Britain, in the churches, raising money to put together this huge ransom to pay the Germans, who were holding him captive. This was commonly done in the Middle Ages; I suspect the same sort of thing was done back then. Agag could have been worth a lot alive. He wasn't worth very much dead.

1 Samuel 15

¹² And when Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning, it was told Samuel, saying, Saul came to Carmel, and, behold, he set him up a place, and is gone about, and passed on, and gone down to Gilgal.

¹³ And Samuel came to Saul: and Saul said unto him, "Blessed be thou of the Lord: I have performed the commandment of the Lord."

“I have performed the commandment of the Lord.” Now did he believe that or was he lying to Samuel? I don’t know any way that you and I can determine if he believed it. But a lot of times people manage to find a way of convincing themselves that what God says isn’t that important. and they do what they please, regardless of what God says. There’s a little lesson, right here, in that.

14 And Samuel said, What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?

Where did all these animals come from if you did what I said to do?

15 And Saul said, “They have brought them from the Amalekites [...].”

That’s the first step in equivocation. “They brought them. I didn’t bring them.” “It wasn’t me it was ‘they’”. Who’s “they”? The people, his army for whom he was responsible. It’s absolutely inexcusable for a commander to shed blame onto his subordinates. Absolutely inexcusable. If it’s wrong in his command it’s his responsibility and Saul stated dodging responsibility right from the word “go”.

15 ‘[...] for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed.

Now, did they really spare them to sacrifice to the Lord, or was this an adjustment? That they made an excuse saying “Oops, I know, we saved them to sacrifice to God that makes it a good and worthy proposition”, and so forth, and were dishonest. I don’t think they did it for that reason. I think they just planned on sharing the booty. So here they are with all these animals.

16 Then Samuel said unto Saul, Stay, and I will tell thee what the Lord hath said to me this night. And he said unto him, Say on.

17 And Samuel said, When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the Lord anointed thee king over Israel?

What a revealing thing that is. He was a good man, a humble man. He was little in his own eyes then. Which implies that he is what now? That is not the way he is anymore. When you were little in your own eyes this is what happened.

18 And the Lord sent thee on a journey, and said, Go and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed.

19 Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the Lord, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst evil in the sight of the Lord?

Samuel wasn't buying this story. "Well, we brought the animals back to sacrifice them to God." No, no. You flew upon the spoil. That means you took them for yourself, didn't you? And he wasn't pointing the finger at the people. He was talking to Saul. There's not one hint here that God or Samuel blamed the people for what took place. They laid the whole thing at the feet of Saul.

²⁰ And Saul said unto Samuel, Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, and have gone the way which the Lord sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites.

"I don't get it! Look, I've obeyed God and here's the evidence! Here's Agag!" Whereas Agag was the evidence that he had not. He's bringing into court clear evidence that you have not as evidence that you have. You really do wonder what was going on in this man's head. This man who was converted, who started out right, was little in his own eyes, was not a bad person, was a good choice, was a warrior, would have been a fighter, and had the full option before him of following God, obeying God, and leading his people. But here we find him, so messed up in his head that he can bring in evidence of his failure and offer it as evidence of success.

²⁰ [We] have utterly destroyed the Amalekites.

²¹ But the people [...]

(There goes the finger-pointing again.)

²¹ [...] took of the spoil sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed [...]

Now what is he saying? "You're right. They should have been utterly destroyed. The people brought them here and shouldn't have." He's still blaming somebody else for his own failure.

²¹ [...] to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God in Gilgal.

Another lie, they didn't do that. They kept them because they wanted to keep them.

²² And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? [...]

Doing what you're told. Don't second-guess Him. Don't try to figure it out. Don't figure out your way. Don't assume you know better than God. Take God at His word and obey Him. That's what Samuel is saying.

22 [...] Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.

23 For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness [...]

Stubbornness? Isn't that interesting? In the first place he rebelled, and that's as the sin of witchcraft, but the stubbornness

23 [...] is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king.

Right there, on the spot. Now that's a sad moment. It didn't happen that way with David, did it? David was faced with his sin. And when he said, "I'm sorry." he wasn't rejected as king of Israel.

24 And Saul said unto Samuel, I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice.

25 Now therefore, I pray thee, pardon my sin, and turn again with me, that I may worship the Lord.

26 And Samuel said unto Saul, I will not return with thee: for thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord hath rejected thee from being king over Israel.

Now did you see anything wrong in what Saul said here? He said "I have sinned" didn't he? He did say something wrong. He excused it. "Because I feared the people" "I'm not really a bad person. There were mitigating circumstances." "I did it. But I did it because I was afraid."

Now, I don't know how much you remember of David's response to Nathan, when Nathan challenged him over the death of Uriah and his adultery with Bathsheba, but David blamed no one. David made no excuses. David offered no mitigation. He simply said "I have sinned" and that was the end of it. He pointed no fingers, made no excuses, blamed no one except himself.

27 And as Samuel turned about to go away, he laid hold upon the skirt of his mantle, and it rent.

28 And Samuel said unto him, The Lord hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbour of thine, that is better than thou.

29 And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for he is not a man, that he should repent.

30 Then he said, I have sinned: yet honour me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel, and turn again with me, that I may worship the Lord thy God.

Not "the Lord our God." Not "the Lord God." But "the Lord your God."

31 So Samuel turned again after Saul; and Saul worshipped the Lord.

Worship, mind you, means to do obeisance to God, which means he bowed and went through the motions.

³² Then said Samuel, Bring ye hither to me Agag the king of the Amalekites. And Agag came unto him delicately. And Agag said, Surely the bitterness of death is past.

”They’ll ransom me.”

³³ And Samuel said, As thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless among women. And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal.

This old man was not a man to be trifled with, I gather. He just did what God said. He killed him. He didn’t just kill him, he cut him to pieces.

³⁴ Then Samuel went to Ramah; and Saul went up to his house to Gibeah of Saul. And Samuel came no more to see Saul until the day of his death: nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul: and the Lord repented that he had made Saul king over Israel.

What a terribly sad state of affairs.

1 Samuel 16

¹ And the Lord said unto Samuel, How long wilt thou mourn for Saul,

It is interesting that this great man, Samuel, in spite of all that took place, could not bring himself to hate Saul, to personally reject Saul. He wanted to pray for him. There was not point left in praying for him, but at least he could mourn for him, and mourn he did.

² And the Lord said unto Samuel, How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? fill thine horn with oil, and go, I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite: for I have provided me a king among his sons. And Samuel said, How can I go? if Saul hear it, he will kill me. And the Lord said, Take an heifer with thee, and say, I am come to sacrifice to the Lord.

Use a little benign subterfuge and go on up there.

³ And call Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will shew thee what thou shalt do: and thou shalt anoint unto me him whom I name unto thee.

⁴ And Samuel did that which the Lord spake, and came to Bethlehem. And the elders of the town trembled at his coming [...]

Now isn't that interesting? This man is so powerful, an old man mind you, that he walks into town and the elders come to him with their knees knocking, scared as to why he's come down.

⁴ [...] and said, Comest thou peaceably?

⁵ And he said, Peaceably: I am come to sacrifice unto the Lord: sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice. And he sanctified Jesse and his sons, and called them to the sacrifice.

⁶ And it came to pass, when they were come, that he looked on Eliab, and said, Surely the Lord's anointed is before him.

He must have been a fine, strapping, impressive fellow.

⁷ But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.

Familiar scripture? You may want to mark that. It's one we use so many times. Don't look on the outward appearance. God looks on the heart. So he went through all of his boys. Finally, after all was said and done Samuel said "I don't get it. God hasn't told him this was the man. There still has to be somebody."

1 Samuel 16

¹¹ And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children? And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Send and fetch him: for we will not sit down till he come hither.

¹² And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance [...]

Apparently, really a good-looking, fair, young man.

¹² [...] and goodly to look to. and the Lord said, Arise, anoint him: for this is he.

¹³ Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah.

¹⁴ But the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him.

Why do you suppose that was? Now my view is, this isn't just an evil spirit coming into a vacuum. It says it is an evil spirit from the Lord that troubled him. So Samuel didn't just walk away, and God didn't just turn around and leave Saul to whatever carnal happenings took place in the world. Oh, no no. An evil spirit from the Lord troubled this man in the days that followed.

And why was that done, you suppose? And why could he only get relief from the music of David, of all people? The only way Saul could get relief was if David came in with a musical instrument and played before him. The evil spirit would not trouble him and depart from him and he would not be that way. Now, we don't know all the implications of this. We do know that Saul was a murderer at heart.

Oh, yeah. He was a murderer at heart. Samuel was afraid to go to the town without subterfuge, saying "Saul will kill me if he hears I've gone down. Saul would have thought nothing about taking out his sword and lopping my head off. In fact, it's a wonder he hasn't already done it." So he was a murderer. And here he is tormented by an evil spirit, (Insane, I guess, by our definitions.) and in comes this ruddy, handsome, young man with a musical instrument who sits there playing for him and he gets relief. But while David is there, and while David is playing, Saul reaches over and takes a javelin (David spots him out of the corner of his eye, apparently.) and tries to pin David to the wall with the javelin. David fled from his presence.

What kind of demon could descend upon a man that he would even attempt to destroy his only palliative his only sense of relief from the torment he was living under, and why did he have to go through that? I wonder. David being the only man that could give him relief from his insanity. I wonder was God still looking for repentance from Saul? Was the evil spirit there so that Saul would know what God had done, know what he had done?

Was God looking for Saul, at some point in his life, to do what Ahab did when Ahab was the worst of a bad lot of all the kings in Israel, we're told. When God pronounced these terrible prophecies against him, he clothed himself in sackcloth, put ashes on his head, took off his shoes and went around the palace very softly, humbly, repentant. And God said, "Look what Ahab did. I won't bring the evil on him in his days. I'll bring it in the days of his son, instead." There was relief for Ahab, who was the worst king Israel ever had (including Saul, apparently.) Was God looking for something out of this man? Some repentance, some change in his heart and in his mind?

It never came. The man died a wretched suicide. The way the accounts are you have this question mark about whether he actually committed suicide, but I think he did, the way they are worded. He was wounded in battle, wasn't dead, and was afraid he'd be taken captive so he fell on his sword and died there.

I can't explain Saul. He's a hard man to explain. His crimes, taken severally, do not seem terribly great to me. They seem like impulsive mistakes. They seem like human errors. They seem like the sort of thing that a lot of us could carelessly or foolishly find ourselves doing.

In fact, they really don't seem any worse than the lineup of transgressions that David had. You go read through the life of David, because it gives him a lot more pages than it does Saul, You've got lots and lots of sins that this man committed. Lots of errors. Lots of mistakes. Lots of harm that was done by the man through his career. A lot of people died because of David's foolishness, and yet he's a man after God's own heart and this happened to Saul.

I think, probably, his greatest sin was that he was never willing to truly repent and submit to God. He just wouldn't make the change. I'm not prepared to say that Saul could not. He was not that bad a man, but when he was rejected from being king...that was too much. He wasn't even kicked out of office. It's just that God no longer backed him in all this. He was no longer God's man in that office. He was rejected by God in that office, and the bitterness that came along with that had to be very profound in Saul, and he would not...would not repent, and he would not turn.

Why was it that way? Well, when he was challenged on his transgression he shifted blame to others. He pointed the finger at the people. “It’s their fault. Somebody else made it happen. It wasn’t really me.” Or “If it was me, I was afraid, and surely you can have mercy upon somebody who’s afraid.” It’s like a man who gets drunk, drives a car and kills a bunch of people and says, “Well, surely you should have mercy on me, I was drunk at the time.” Or a guy who gets insulted in a bar, and because he’s drunk, goes out to his car and gets a gun, comes back in and kills everybody in the place or shoots down five or six people. They try him for it, and he says it’s a mitigating excuse that he was drunk. “I was afraid. I was drunk.” He justified himself.

He tried to find ways of explaining what he had done. He minimized his sin. “It really isn’t all that bad.” He was sorry, so how can I say he never repented? Well, I would say that Saul never repented because he never accepted the responsibility, the full responsibility, for what he had done. He did not accept the responsibility for that for which he was responsible. He wasn’t necessarily the one who spared a given sheep. It was some person in his command. But that person was in his command, and it was his responsibility, and he did not accept the responsibility. Now if you’re king in that world, in that time, and your soldiers do something contrary to their orders it’s because of a failure on your part. The failure to lead. The failure to direct.

He never accepted responsibility for what was done. It is not only indicated in his words in the text, it is demonstrated by the events of his life, because he never repented. He was a murderer at heart. He would have killed Samuel in a minute, and he tried to kill David on numerous occasions. This is not what repentant people do. For people like Saul, it is always someone else’s fault. His. Hers. Theirs. The finger-pointing that goes on.

Now what lessons can I draw for you from this lesson of Saul. I’ve got seven.

Number One: Don’t blame others when things go wrong.

Look at yourself and ask where you made your mistake. Where you went wrong and why you did what you did.

Number Two: Do not minimize your mistakes and your sins.

Let them be as bad as they can be in your own eyes. Yeah, wallow in them if you want to. Go back and read the 51st Psalm. David does not attempt to even so much as shade what he has done. He does not try to say “Well, I’m really basically a good person who has gone wrong.” No, no. He uses language in that psalm to demonstrate that this is not his thinking. He said,

Psalm 51

⁵ Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me

It’s a hyperbole which is saying “I am not a good person gone wrong. I was bad from the start. I did wrong because I was wrong.” You understand the difference? Whereas Saul says “I’m basically good. I was afraid for a moment of the people.” or “I did what God said, but the people over here, they did this.” The attitude and the frame of mind are totally different. So if the question of repentance of you, yourself, comes along.

The first one is: **Don’t blame others.** The second one is: **Don’t minimize it.** Let them be as bad as they can be. David really just laid it out.

Psalm 51

⁴ Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight[.]

It wasn't a mistake, wasn't a slip. I...have...done...evil.

Number Three: Don't justify yourself.

There's no way you can do that, and as long as you're trying to justify yourself how can God justify you? How can Christ justify you? How can the blood of Christ be applied to you and justify you when you are trying to justify yourself? You can't come to God and say "The devil made me do it and I hope you will forgive me." If the devil made you do it, it's not your fault. The fact is you did it because it was what you wanted to do. Until we can make ourselves see that we are not going to be in a repentant attitude.

You've two big extremes here: Saul and David. Maybe there's some gray area in between, but I'm not going to try to find the dividing line. What I'm trying to draw for you to understand is the difference between someone who has repented and someone who has not when they both say they're sorry. They both say they've sinned. Where does the difference lie?

Number Four: Accept responsibility for what has happened.

Now that goes along with number one, not blaming others. I mean, the responsibility is yours. Pick it up. Wear it. Deal with it. You go to God, There's no point in telling Him "I wasn't really responsible." He wants you to accept responsibility.

Number Five: Admit you were wrong. Confess your sins.

A good test might be try to recall the last time you admitted you were wrong. Because anybody who isn't admitting they were wrong at least once a week is not paying attention. None of us are that good. We're all making too many mistakes. We hurt people. We step on toes. We cause problems from time to time. Those little words: "I was wrong. I'm sorry." will get you out of more trouble than you can possibly imagine. I know. I've used them so many times. And I have always found (I'll share this with you for what it's worth) that it just works so much better when you say "I was wrong. I'm sorry." than if you try to explain and explain, justify, point fingers, blame others, shift blame, and all the other things that we try to do. It works better with men, you know that? Why wouldn't you think it would work better with God?

Why lie to God? Why try to kid God when it doesn't work with one another. (We wouldn't want people out in tape-land to miss Number Six. Are we rolling? Ah, good.)

Number Six is really important. It's related to the one before, although Number Five (Admit you were wrong.) has to do with yourself and with God.

Number Six: Apologize. Just simply apologize.

You can only really be considered to be sorry and repentant when You've accepted responsibility and apologizing does that. It says, "I apologize."

Number Seven: Number Seven is really the most important of all of them. It's repent.

By “repent” I mean this: it means you turn your conduct around and you start living your life differently. You know, there’s a funny thing about these. They all really go together.

I have never really seen anybody who can turn his life around and begin to live it differently who’s still trying to blame others for what he’s done. I have never seen anybody who’s really been able to turn his life around and go in a different direction when he’s minimizing the mistakes and the wrongs, when he’s justifying himself, or avoiding responsibility. Naturally he’s not going to turn around and do things differently. And, of course, one who refuses to apologize is not very likely to turn around and do things differently anyway.

You really ought to give these things some very serious thought in your life because what we are looking at here is a man who was unwilling to repent. And as a result of that, an evil spirit from the Lord came upon him. And that the self-deceit, the dishonesty inside of himself, the blame-placing, the finger-pointing led to a kind of insanity, to a spiritual disease, to a spiritual illness which the Bible calls “an evil spirit from the Lord”, troubling him.

Now, you know, none of what I’ve told you here is easy. It’s not easy. But any other course than the repentant course leads to a kind of insanity.

If you lie to others, you are a sinner.

If you lie to yourself, you’re crazy.

If you lie to God? I’ll let you fill in the blanks.

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