



Writing Life Faith



Life of a King: Saul's Downfall

The First King.

You can read King Saul's story in 1 Samuel 9-31 and 1 Chronicles 10.

When I, Saul, was anointed King of all Israel, I thought it was a joke. I mean, I'm from the tribe of Benjamin. I didn't set out to be King; I was just looking for my lost donkeys. Then I met Samuel, and suddenly I was prophesying. Soon after, I was anointed as the first King of Israel. I became the most powerful person in the country.

Once I was anointed, war began, and I won many great battles. Then everything went sour when Samuel told me to wait seven days before returning to war, so that he could come and give a burnt offering. When he didn't show up, I made a vital decision on behalf of my army and did the sacrifice myself. But when he arrived, Samuel rebuked me!

Some time later, after another critical battle, I kept the best sheep and goats - obviously as a sacrifice to the LORD - but Samuel condemned me! After this, he denounced my Kingship and anointed another.

This 'David' somehow defeated the giant Goliath, then kept winning battles. But I knew the truth: God had anointed me as King. This imposter, David, needed to be destroyed at all costs. The power I wielded belonged to me, and nothing would stop me from doing my anointed job. I pursued David in the desert, and even consulted a medium, but to no avail. The LORD, who had provided me with all I deserved, rejected me!

It didn't make sense. I had won many battles and brought honour to the House of Saul! Why would Samuel reward me for my actions by taking the Kingship from my house? God had been on my side. He was on my side. Wasn't he?

I know I say this every time I start a new series, but welcome to the biggest and most extensive WLF undertaking to date. After a handful of topical series, I thought it was time to go exegetical and examine some Old Testament scripture. We recently looked at the first Advent and saw the King's arrival: Jesus. But if we read the New Testament while ignoring the kings who came before Him, we will miss so much context.

In this series, we'll spend a week focusing on each king of Judah (yes, I'm counting David, Saul, and Solomon, even though they also reigned over Israel). After reading through Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles during my Bible in a Year, I couldn't believe how rich these books were with spiritual takeaways. I was finding practical lessons in everyone's life. So, before you're tempted to write off this series as "Old Testament fluff", I beg you to reconsider.

I believe the entire Bible is rich with books pointing towards the King, and this series is no different. We'll ultimately advance through history and return to Jesus, seeing more clearly how every other ruler paled in His light.

Before we jump in, you're probably wondering: What's the difference between Chronicles and Samuel/Kings? To put it briefly, Chronicles is a summary of 1 & 2 Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings, written after the exile. While both accounts focus heavily on Saul and David, Chronicles fixates on the kings of Judah.

Since Chronicles was written later, it also strives to encourage the Israelites by painting their kings in a more positive light. You'll notice that select stories are omitted from Chronicles (like David and Bathsheba). I assure you this isn't an attempt to mask the truth, since the Israelites could reference Samuel and Kings to find the original story. While the goal of Kings is documentation, the goal of Chronicles is to show how the past points to the future.

All that aside, let's look at the life of Israel's first king.

The Beginning.

"...This is the man the LORD has chosen as your king. No one in all Israel is like him." (1 Samuel 10:24)

After many years of demand for a king, God relented. Cue Saul, whose story begins with a wild-donkey chase. After no luck, Saul and his servant turn to the seer Samuel for help. But Saul gets far more than he bargained for, and once he fulfills God's signs, he starts prophesying. Some time later, he's anointed as king...but disappears and is found hiding amidst the baggage. Some start.

About a month later, Saul gets his first crack at glory when King Nahash of Ammon attacks an Israelite town. Saul is chilling at his plow when he receives the message, and Scripture records that "the Spirit of God came powerfully upon Saul, and he became very angry" (1 Samuel 11:6). Saul then sets out and launches a surprise attack which is so effective that "no two of [the Ammonites] were left together."

The Middle.

"How foolish!" Samuel exclaimed. 'You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you. Had you kept it, the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever.'" (1 Samuel 13:13)

After more war with the surrounding nations (they really should've driven them out at the beginning), Samuel instructs Saul to wait seven days for him to arrive. As time runs out and Saul sees his men playing deserter, he personally makes the offering. Lo and behold, as Saul finishes, Samuel shows up. This act of rebellion cost Saul the kingdom, even though he technically did "the right thing". We'll get to this point shortly.

The End.

"And Saul said to David, 'You are a better man than I am, for you have repaid me good for evil.'" (1 Samuel 24:17)

From here, things go downhill faster than Moses descending Mount Sinai. Following another act of explicit disobedience (keeping animals the LORD set aside for destruction), Samuel prophesies that the kingdom will be taken from Saul. David is soon-after anointed, and once he begins to win battles, Saul sets out to kill him.

Yet in the ensuing years, David spares Saul's life twice. As the once great ruler of Israel spirals into mental collapse, he tries consulting a medium, where his worst fears are reinforced: the LORD has left him. Not long after, the former king of Israel falls upon his sword in battle.

What went wrong? I think a better question is...

What Defined Saul?

As we go through this series and evaluate the kings, we'll start to see one or two defining traits in each of their lives. Let's look at Saul's.

Self-Interest

"Saul replied, 'I saw my men scattering from me, and you didn't arrive when you said you would, and the Philistines are at Micmash ready for battle...'" (1 Samuel 13:12)

Hold on, didn't Saul do the right thing? God commanded him to fight, so he fought. And Samuel told him to wait seven days, so when he didn't show up, wasn't Saul making the right move via the sacrifice? The answer is no. Even if we are doing the right things, if we do them out of self-interest, God will not reward us. Saul knew the story of Gideon and his victory with 300 men. If Saul's faith had been in God, he would've known that men weren't his

greatest asset. Saul was more concerned with damaging his reputation as a mighty war hero than sacrificing to God.

When Saul is rebuked in 1 Samuel 15, it's for the same reason: self-interest. Saul kept the animals that the LORD said he should destroy. Saul's excuse of "saving the best for the LORD" may have sounded high-and-mighty, but it was likely a mask for self-interest. This points to another Biblical truth. Religion isn't about doing the correct things; it's about having the correct motives. Otherwise the only god we're serving is ourselves.

Thankfully, if we regularly seek God in prayer and surrender our will to Him (Matthew 6:10), it'll be far easier to spot self-interest.

Good/Bad.

The verdict is in, ladies and gentlemen. What began with sky-high potential ("A king so we can be just like the other pagan nations!") quickly fell flat. Shocker, but when God gives you something, shouldn't you use God's methods to steward it, and not yours?

Which is why we need to put Saul in his place on the [Kings Chart](#)...on the 'BAD' side.

At the end of the day, Saul started with honourable intentions. And true, he won many battles for Israel. But as his character put it in the TV series House of David, "I have brought glory to the House of Saul." There is only one house we can serve, and Saul's life is a testament to a chilling fact: when you're only looking out for your house, you certainly aren't looking out for God's.

As Samuel so aptly put it in 1 Samuel 15:22... *"What is more pleasing to the LORD: your burnt offerings and sacrifices or your obedience to His voice? Listen! Obedience is better than sacrifice."*



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