

Bible Stories

SAUL

1 Samuel 8:7

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The story of Saul begins in the 8th chapter of 1st Samuel. Being old, Samuel appointed his 2 sons, Joel and Abijah, to take his place. Unfortunately, Samuel's sons were pretty terrible: They did not walk in his ways, they took bribes and perverted justice {1 Samuel 8:3}.

- **Ellen White {PP 604}**: The injustice of these judges caused much dissatisfaction, and a pretext was thus furnished for urging the change that had long been secretly desired. *"All the elders of Israel gathered together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah, and said him, you are old, and your sons don't walk your ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations."* The cases of abuse among the people had not been referred to Samuel. Had the evil course of his sons been known to him, he would have removed them without delay; but this was not what the petitioners desired. Samuel saw that their real motive was discontent and pride, and that their demand was the result of a deliberate and determined purpose.

Samuel saw through the *"dissatisfaction"* of the people, but still, he was hurt. He had devoted his life to their service, but now was being cast aside and he felt rejected, so he had a chat with God:

- **1 Samuel 8:7** – Yahweh said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have **rejected Me** from being king over them."

Can you imagine the heart of God? Broken, I'd say. Right from the beginning He had promised to be Israel's God and He had kept every promise. Even when they actively sought after other gods, He had been quick to forgive and redeem and now..... this.

They wanted a king? So be it, but before making up their minds, God told Samuel to tell the people what they could expect from a king:

- **1 Samuel 8:11-18** –

He will take your sons and conscript them into his army and make them fight his wars.

He will take your daughters as *his* perfume makers, cooks and bakers.

He will take the best of your fields, vineyards and olive trees and he will give *them* to his servants.

He will take a tenth of your seed and vineyards and he will give *it* to his high officials and to his servants.

He will take your male and female slaves, the best of your young men and your donkeys and he will use them for his personal projects.

He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you *yourselves* will become his servants.

You will cry in despair because of the king you have chosen, but Yahweh will not answer you....

Israel demanded a king anyway.

Chapter 9 – Saul Introduced

Saul was the son of Kish – a wealthy man from the tribe of Benjamin. He was 30 years old, *"a young and handsome man. There was not a man from Israel more handsome than he was. He was without equal – a head taller than all the people."*

He had all the qualities people look for when considering a king, but at this point he was just another Israelite whose father's donkeys had wandered off.

During his search for the donkeys, Saul and his men came to the town where Samuel lived.

The day before, Yahweh had told Samuel he would meet a man from Benjamin – that man would be king.

Samuel said to Saul, *"Let's have lunch"*

Chapter 10 – Saul anointed King

Samuel took out his flask of oil and anointed Saul ruler over all Israel then summoned the people to Mizpah and said to them:

- **1 Samuel 10:18-19** – Here's what Yahweh says: 'I brought Israel up from Egypt, and I delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of all the kingdoms that *were* oppressing you.' ¹⁹ But today you have rejected Me, the One who always delivers you from all your calamities and distresses. You have said, 'We don't want you, appoint a king over us!' Therefore, present yourselves before Yahweh by your tribes and by your clans.

Lots were cast: The tribe of Benjamin was chosen → the family of Matri was chosen → Saul, son of Kish, was chosen.

Yay! We have a king! But, where is he? Ssshhhhh.... He's hiding amongst the luggage.

Not the best of starts. Oh well, long live the king!

Some thought Saul was a great choice, others did not....

Chapter 11 – Saul defeats the Ammonites

About this time King Nahash of Ammon laid siege to Jabesh-gilead. The elders of the town offered to make a treaty with Nahash, which he agreed to ---- on one condition ---- the right eye of all the townspeople would be gouged out. He would humiliate them before all Israel before enslaving them. NICE!

The elders responded: *Give us a week to find a deliverer. If we can't find someone to rescue us, we will submit to you.*

When Saul was made aware of the situation at Jabesh-gilead he became very angry and basically said, ***"I'm going to cut all of you in pieces if you don't help me defeat Nahash."***

The people were so afraid of Saul that all the men joined the fight. And the next day the army of the Ammonites was defeated.

Chapter 13-14 – Micmash

Sometime later, the Philistines were at it again. Saul divided his force into 2 groups. 2000 went with him and 1000 went with his son Jonathan, who was old enough at this point to be a commander in Saul's army. Jonathan went to the Philistine garrison at Geba and killed the soldiers there. The Philistines got wind of this and assembled a vast army:

- 30,000 chariots
- 6,000 horsemen
- And an army like the sand on the seashore.

And came to Micmash.....

The Israelites were so afraid that they hid in caves and pits and among the rocks. Some even ran to the land of Gad and Gilead on the other side of the Jordan River. As a result, Saul was left with just 600 soldiers.

You can understand the fear of the Israelite soldiers when you realize that none of them had weapons: swords, spears, etc. Why? Because the Philistines did not allow them to have any blacksmiths. As a matter of fact, the Israelites had to go to Philistia to have their farm equipment - plowshares, axes, sickles, etc. - sharpened.

Only Saul and Jonathan had weapons.

Samuel instructed Saul to wait for 7 days at which time he would come and sacrifice to the Lord. Saul got tired of waiting and sacrificed the burnt offering himself – a duty reserved exclusively for the priest. Samuel arrived not long after Saul finished the ceremony.

Samuel: *What have you done?*

Saul: *What was I supposed to do? I saw that the people were scattering and you had not come - as promised - and the Philistines were assembling at Michmash. I said, **"The Philistines are coming against me and I have not asked for Gods favor,"** so, I forced myself to offer the burnt offering.*

Samuel: *Bad idea! You have disobeyed the direct command given to you by Yahweh. He would have established your kingdom over Israel forever, but now your kingdom will not last. God is looking for a man after his own heart and will appoint him ruler over the people because you have not obeyed the Lord!*

Samuel left.....

Meanwhile, Jonathan and his armor bearer snuck out of camp and headed toward the Philistine garrison, which sat a-top a butte.

They moved among the rocks working their way toward the Philistine camp. The Philistines saw them and said, ***"Hey! Come over here we have something to tell you."*** – this was the sign Jonathan was looking for – Yahweh would give the Philistines into Israel's hand.

Jonathan and his armor bearer climbed the cliff that was said to be unclimbable and killed 20 Philistines. There was a great earthquake and great confusion broke out amongst the Philistines causing them to start killing each other.

Saul saw that the Philistines confusion was increasing, so he rallied his soldiers and went into battle.

And the **Lord** delivered Israel that day.

The morning of the battle, Saul had put his army under a curse – forbidding them to eat anything *“until I have taken vengeance on my enemies.”* – as a result the army did not eat all day. Jonathan did not know about the curse. Understandably hungry from fighting, he ate some honey he found in a tree and immediately felt better.

After the battle the men were so hungry that they slaughtered some animals and ate the meat with the blood still in it - which Levitical law prohibited. Saul accused the men of acting wickedly before God, and now, because of what **THEY** had done, a guilt offering would be required. Saul built an altar and inquired of God, *“Shall I chase the Philistines and will you hand them over to Israel?”*

Crickets.....

Houston, we have a problem! Yahweh was not answering. Why?

Lots were cast → Jonathan was chosen.

Saul asked Jonathan what he had done and Jonathan admitted to eating some honey. *“You shall surely die,”* said Saul.

The truth, however, was that the sin rested 100% on Saul – not on his army and not on Jonathan. He was willing to kill his own son in order to save face before the army, and would have done, had the men not intervened – *“God forbid that you kill Jonathan! It is because of him that we are victorious over the Philistines!”*

- **1 Samuel 14:52** - Warfare was severe against *the* Philistines all the days of Saul. Whenever Saul saw anyone who was a mighty warrior or any brave man, he conscripted him into his service.

Chapter 15 – Saul defeats the Amalekites

Yahweh commanded that now was the time for Israel to execute His judgment on the Amalekites, which had been prophesied in Exodus 17.

The entire nation was to be destroyed – nothing was to be spared.

Saul defeated the Amalekites, but he spared king Agag and the best of all the animals.

God came to Samuel: *I regret having made Saul king. He has turned his back on me and has not carried out my instructions.*

Samuel cried before Yahweh all night and then went to see Saul.

Saul: *Look! I have obeyed God’s instructions*

Samuel: *Then why do I hear the bleating of sheep and the lowing of cattle?*

Saul: *Well..... the people brought the best animals to sacrifice to the Lord, but the rest were destroyed.*

Samuel: *Let me tell you what Yahweh said to me concerning you.*

- **1 Samuel 15:17-19** - ... "Is it not true that though you were little in your own eyes, you were *made* the head of the tribes of Israel? Yahweh anointed you king over Israel, and He sent you on a mission, to 'Go and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are exterminated.' "Why then did you not obey the voice of Yahweh, but rushed upon the spoil and did what was evil in the sight of the LORD?"

Saul: *I did obey! I did what God told me to do! Look, I have king Agag, but everyone else has been killed. Now the **people**, well, they did take some of the spoils - sheep and oxen - the best stuff, to sacrifice to Yahweh **your** God at Gilgal.*

Samuel: *Does Yahweh like burnt offerings as much as he likes obedience? To obey is better than sacrifice! For rebellion is the same as the sin of divination, and insubordination is the same as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of Yahweh, He has rejected you from being king.*

Saul: *I have sinned; I have indeed disobeyed the command of Yahweh and your words. I feared the people and listened to their voice. Please pardon my sin and return with me, that I may worship Yahweh.*

Samuel: *I will not return with you. You have been rejected as king over Israel.*

As Samuel turned to go, *Saul* seized the edge of his robe, and it tore.

Samuel: *Yahweh has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today, and has given it to your neighbor who is better than you.*

Saul: *I have sinned; but please honor me now before all Israel, and go back with me, that I may worship Yahweh **your** God.*

Samuel went back with Saul, and Saul worshiped Yahweh.

Samuel called for Agag to be brought before him and he did what Saul should have done.

Samuel returned to Ramah and Saul went home to Gibeah.

Samuel did not see Saul again, but grieved for him for many months.

Saul reigned over Israel for 42 years.

What do we do with this story?

Israel wanted a king and they looked for any excuse to get one. They cast Yahweh aside for a tall good-looking Benjamite. And what of Saul? He had choices to make. He could have been a great king, leading Israel into a deeper, more dependent relationship with their God, but he chose differently. Saul was proud, stubborn and self-willed and did not take instruction gladly:

- He **Rationalized** his failure to obey – “The people were scattering, so I forced myself to make the sacrifice.”
- He **Blamed** others for his failure to obey – “We have to make a guilt offering because of what you have done.”
- He **Minimized** his failure to obey – “Yes, but the best was kept as an offering to you.”
- He **Excused** for his failure to obey – “I was afraid of the people.”

And, in the end, Yahweh rejected him as king. Yahweh would continue the search, looking for a man after his own heart.

Saul reigned in Israel for many more years, but they would not be good years. He declined into madness and in the end, would die in battle his sons at his side. The saddest part of Saul’s story is that it didn’t have to turn out the way it did. Saul could have made different choices, but he didn’t. He could have remained faithful to God, but he didn’t. He could have chosen humility and repentance, instead he chose pride, self-reliance and self-centeredness.

Proverbs 16:18 - Before destruction comes pride, and before a fall, a haughty spirit.