

Saul – A Disappointing King

Saul is an example of a person of high promise who fails to realise God’s purpose for their life.

The account of his reign is probably one of the most calamitous stories in the whole of scripture.

At the start of his reign nobody could have guessed that he would be such a dreadful failure.

The account of Saul’s life as recorded in God’s Word, the Christian Bible, should be a warning to all of us.

Saul’s life story illustrates that when a person sins, it is not a solitary or isolated event, but all transgressions from God’s way of life have a triple effect.

Sin against the Creator God, [Psalms 51:4].

Sin against other human beings, by not being the effective witness for the Creator God’s way of life for all human beings.

Sin against ourselves for the final outcome of un-repentant sins is eternal death, [Romans 6:23].

In this study of the life of King Saul we will consider each of these aspects of his life.

A disappointment to God –

God called Saul a man who was exceptionally gifted to an office of great spiritual responsibility.

Saul was to be Israel’s first king, to serve the nation by right example and wise leadership.

1 Samuel 9:15-17 [New King James] *“Now the LORD had told Samuel in his ear the day before Saul came, saying, ‘Tomorrow about this time I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin, and you shall anoint him commander over My people Israel, that he may save My people from the hand of the Philistines; for I have looked upon My people, because their cry has come to Me.’ So when Samuel saw Saul, the LORD said to him, ‘There he is, the man of whom I spoke to you. This one shall reign over My people.’”*

The divine intervention for Saul’s life was to be a leader who would save the nation from captivity of the Pagan nations that surrounded them.

1 Samuel 9:1-2 [New King James] *“There was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish the son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Bechorath, the son of Aphiah, a Benjamite, a mighty man of power. And he had a choice and handsome son whose name was Saul. There was not a more handsome person than he among the children of Israel. From his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people.”*

God’s hand had been on Saul in his early life to prepare him for this appointment as king.

Saul was physically equipped for the task and intellectually as the handling of delicate and difficult situations showed in the record of his early life as king.

1 Samuel 9:27 [New King James] *“As they were going down to the outskirts of the city, Samuel said to Saul, ‘Tell the servant to go on ahead of us.’ And he went on. ‘But you stand here awhile, that I may announce to you the word of God.’”*

Saul was also spiritually equipped for the task by Samuel, who remained a close help continually during his reign.

Although Saul began in this well-prepared way, his life took the wrong turning and he became a bitter disappointment to the Creator God who loved him.

This is the dreadful thing about sin, it grieves our Creator God for He loves us so much, and longs for our lives to be profitable and enriching to other human beings, who do not as yet know Him.

Despite Saul's failure and rejection as king, the Creator God went on caring for him, seeking to bring him to repentance and trust in him, [2 Peter 3:9].

Saul's reign as king could have been magnificent but it went down in Hebrew history as a period of shattered hopes and frustrated intentions.

Why did Saul's reign as king fail? –

There are recorded seven tragic sins in Saul's life that led to this failure, each are possible sins that could cause our lives to be a failure in the eyes of the Creator God.

a) Impatience –

This is the first sign of spiritual decline in Saul's life.

1 Samuel 13:8-14 [New King James] *“Then he waited seven days, according to the time set by Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him. So Saul said, ‘Bring a burnt offering and peace offerings here to me.’ And he offered the burnt offering. Now it happened, as soon as he had finished presenting the burnt offering, that Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, that he might greet him. And Samuel said, ‘What have you done?’ Saul said, ‘When I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered together at Michmash, then I said, “The Philistines will now come down on me at Gilgal, and I have not made supplication to the LORD.” Therefore I felt compelled, and offered a burnt offering.’ And Samuel said to Saul, ‘You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you. For now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you.’”*

Power seems to have gone to Saul's head, he had become accustomed to not having to wait for anybody or anything.

Samuel was expected to visit Gilgal in order to offer a sacrifice, but after waiting for God's prophet for a full week Saul took matters into his own hands.

The people knew this was Samuel's task and moreover Saul knew he had made a mistake.

If we genuinely wish to walk in unbroken fellowship with our Creator God, we must guard against the sin of impatience.

Various scriptures urge us to *“wait upon God,”* [Psalms 37:7; Lamentations 3:25; Habakkuk 2:1-3].

Remember the Christian Church began with a group of people who obeyed the Creator God by waiting, [Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4].

b) Presumption –

The sin of impatience can very soon lead to the sin of presumption, [1 Samuel 13:13-14].

Psalms 19:13-14 [New King James] *“Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and I shall be innocent of great transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer.”*

King David in contrast to Saul was well aware of the danger of presumptuous sins.

Remember that patience or long-suffering is one of the “fruits” of an active indwelling of the Holy Spirit, [Galatians 5:22-25].

c) Greed –

Israel’s first king turned into an avaricious materialist.

1 Samuel 15:1 [New King James] *“Samuel also said to Saul, ‘The LORD sent me to anoint you king over His people, over Israel. Now therefore, heed the voice of the words of the LORD.’”*

It seems that God was giving Saul another chance to obey Him.

1 Samuel 15:2-3 [New King James] *“Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he ambushed him on the way when he came up from Egypt. Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.’”*

How did Saul respond to this command?

1 Samuel 15:7-9 [New King James] *“And Saul attacked the Amalekites, from Havilah all the way to Shur, which is east of Egypt. He also took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were unwilling to utterly destroy them. But everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed.”*

Then when confronted by God’s prophet Samuel, Saul tried to pass the blame onto the people, only “devoted” to God that which they did **not** want for themselves.

The prophet Malachi had something to say about this attitude of mind, many centuries after Saul.

Malachi 1:7-8 [New King James] *“‘You offer defiled food on My altar, but say, ‘In what way have we defiled You?’ By saying, ‘The table of the LORD is contemptible.’ And when you offer the blind as a sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? Offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favourably?’ says the LORD of hosts.”*

The prophet is asking if human leaders would be pleased if we offer the same to them as they were to the Creator God.

Malachi 3:8 [New King James] *“Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings.”*

The Creator God who owns everything [**Deuteronomy 10:14; Haggai 2:8**] including our own life, [**Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20**] only asks us to return to Him a small part of our income to support the work He is doing on earth through His servants.

We must take care that our lust for material things robs us of the spiritual satisfaction that the Creator God desires we enjoy in His presence.

d) Disobedience –

This was the most serious of Saul’s failures, and it occurs again and again in the record of his life as the King of Israel.

1 Samuel 15:22-23 [New King James] *“So Samuel said: ‘Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king.’”*

Samuel reminded Saul that obedience was far more important to the Creator God than offerings and sacrifices of animals.

Such a rebellion against the Creator God’s commandments caused Saul to be rejected by Him.

e) Hypocrisy –

Having stolen what was really God’s [**1 Samuel 15:1-3, 9**] Saul then told Samuel he had obeyed God [**1 Samuel 15:13, 20-21**], it was the people who had disobeyed.

What a lie, Saul had all the right words and really believed that he was obeying God, but this was only an outward mask, [the meaning of the word hypocrite]. Saul did **not** obey God in his heart and spirit.

We need more than the right religious sounding words if we are to convince others that the Creator God’s way of life will bring them joy and peace of mind, we have to live what we preach.

We have to “walk the walk, not just talk the talk!”

f) Pride –

The distressed prophet of God, Samuel, could see this pride very clearly in Saul.

1 Samuel 15:17 [New King James] *“So Samuel said, ‘When you were little in your own eyes, were you not head of the tribes of Israel? And did not the LORD anoint you king over Israel?’”*

Our prayer should always be for God to keep us small in our own eyes.

Pride causes more disasters within human relationships than anything else, for it is the very nature of the enemy of all humanity, Satan, the former Lucifer.

Isaiah 14:12-14 [New King James] *“How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.’”*

It was this pride of Lucifer [the “King of Tyre” **Ezekiel 28:12-15**] that was his downfall.

The apostle Paul continually warns us about the devastating evil of pride, [**Romans 12:9-10, 16; Philippians 2:3**].

Power and authority can so easily corrupt us and cause us to become proud and sin in God's eyes.

g) Cowardliness –

Saul constantly failed to face the consequences of his decisions, seeking to place the blame on others.

Samuel, because he delayed coming to sacrifice, [1 Samuel 13:11] the people took what was supposed to be sacrificed to God [1 Samuel 15:15, 21, 24].

These were the words of a coward, **not** of a king, or a human being who stood head and shoulders above everyone else, [1 Samuel 9:2].

Saul failed himself –

Saul was given an opportunity to be a great King of Israel yet ended up its greatest fool, [1 Samuel 26:21].

1 Corinthians 10:11-12 [New King James] *“Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.”*

The apostle Paul reminds us that all that happened to Ancient Israel were recorded for us to learn from, this includes the failed life of Saul as King of Israel.

To present a balanced account of the life of King Saul, it is necessary that we study the lovely qualities that he had when he started his work for God as King of Israel, even though he lost them in his later life.

1 Samuel 9:21 [New King James] *“And Saul answered and said, ‘Am I not a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel, and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? Why then do you speak like this to me?’”*

This was a man with great humility, notice the protestation of absolute unworthiness.

Later on came the moment for the public declaration of his kingship. Where did they eventually find Saul with the help of God? Hidden among the baggage, [1 Samuel 10:21-23].

Saul in his early days knew what it was to attend to the Word of God, [1 Samuel 9:25, 27].

We need to ask ourselves, do we “*stand still*” amidst our busy life just so we can receive the guidance and commandments of our Creator God? Or do we plunge ourselves into fresh responsibilities and demanding assignments without seeking what God's Word, the Christian Bible, tells us about such a situation or what our attitude of mind should be?

Saul's faith in the Creator God was once confirmed by miraculous signs, [1 Samuel 10:1-6]. This included the sovereign control of his life by the active Holy Spirit in his life.

Saul was a man who experienced the presence of God in his life.

1 Samuel 10:7 [New King James] *“And let it be, when these signs come to you, that you do as the occasion demands; for God is with you.”*

What glorious words with which to begin any project or service for the Creator God.

Yet later in Saul's life, following his fatal sins of greed, disobedience and rebellion, **we are told that the Holy Spirit left him**, [1 Samuel 16:14].

1 Samuel 10:26-27 [New King James] *“And Saul also went home to Gibeah; and valiant men went with him, whose hearts God had touched. But some rebels said, ‘How can this man save us?’ So they despised him, and brought him no presents. But he held his peace.”*

Once acknowledged as king, Saul returned to his native town with a group of his closest subjects but some of the inhabitants refused to recognise his kingship.

Saul exercised great self-control and ignored these disrespectful people.

What a great thing to do, it is sad that Saul did not continue to act in this humble way, especially in response to the women who sang about the victory of David over Goliath, [1 Samuel 18:7-9].

At the start of his reign as king, Saul was eager to confess his absolute reliance upon God.

1 Samuel 11:12-15 [New King James] *“Then the people said to Samuel, ‘Who is he who said, “Shall Saul reign over us?” Bring the men, that we may put them to death.’ But Saul said, ‘Not a man shall be put to death this day, for today the LORD has accomplished salvation in Israel.’ Then Samuel said to the people, ‘Come, let us go to Gilgal and renew the kingdom there.’ So all the people went to Gilgal, and there they made Saul king before the LORD in Gilgal. There they made sacrifices of peace offerings before the LORD, and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly.”*

Saul was saying in effect, “This is God's work. Any victory we have obtained is due to His goodness alone, this is no moment for vindictive behaviour.”

It is important to remember that Saul started his work for the Creator God in a most exemplary manner. At the beginning Saul relied upon God, but he did **not** continue to do so.

The life of Saul is an example of good beginnings, that failed to remain faithful to the Creator God until the end.

Ecclesiastes 7:8 [New King James] *“The end of a thing is better than its beginning; the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.”*

To finish what we start takes hard work, wise Godly guidance, self-discipline and patience. Anyone with vision can start a big project.

Our life is the biggest project we will ever have but without the Godly wisdom found in God's Word, the Christian Bible, we will not finish this great project in the way our Creator God longs for us to end our life.