

THE TRAGEDY OF SAUL
The Teacher's Bible Study
INTRODUCTION

Saul makes an interesting character study.

When we take his endowments and fine qual-

ities and put them alongside the defects

of character we will be fascinated in

watching the reactions and responses. It

will be an easy matter to transfer the

pattern to our own day and arrive at cer-

tain inevitable results in men who walk

before us. Saul's autobiography is writ-

ten in one line: "I have played the fool".

Is that a worthy epitaph for God's anoint-

ed king? *FF* How about your own estimate of

the dividends to be collected from life's

investment in you? *as it* ~~It is~~ a gratifying

picture to measure your growth and achieve-

ment alongside God's blueprint for you?

It is hoped that you and I will be pre-

foundly stirred by the realization that

126 under

God expects big things of us. He has plans for us that include triumphs and achievements. When the final test is made how will we measure up under his searching test?

HIS ENDOWMENTS

The Book tells us that he was "a choice man and a goodly; among all the sons of Israel there was none goodlier than he". That would certainly indicate that he was not only attractive physically but that he possessed charm and winsomeness. His dignity and reserve and self-control must have called forth approval from men and women of all classes. He was tremendously big and powerful. He was known far and wide for his enormous stature. We can well believe that he was every inch a king in his physical proportions. He was big enough to command respect and also to help

137 inches

protect those who were less powerful.

His father bequeathed to him a good name and an outstanding reputation among the people of the land. The father was spoken of as "a mighty man of power". It is difficult to estimate fully the influence of such a father. Saul started out with a heredity and an environment that made victory almost inevitable.

In his early days he was modest and humble.

The call to service seemed to bring out the best in him. Pride was utterly foreign to his nature. His humility was positively refreshing in the hour of confusion and turmoil.

He had a wonderful friend and counselor in Samuel, the prophet. That one blessing was too precious for words. What could a young man do with such a leader and counselor? Samuel believed in him to the fullest. He was able to introduce him

to the best people of the land with tell-

ing effectiveness. He prayed for Saul.

How could he fail with the prayers of the

old prophet knocking at heaven's door for

him?

He had the love and admiration and support

of the people to spur him on to higher

attainments. What a boost they gave him!

It is not easy to accept the sad story of

weakness and defeat in the face of such

heartly encouragement.

LIFE'S EARLY MORNING

Saul's public life started beautifully.

It is a thrilling story of a farmer boy

invited to dinner with the biggest man in

the kingdom and secretly chosen to be the

first king of God's chosen people. Almost

before he realized it he was formally and

publicly elected to this high office, pull-

129 mfw

baggage
ed out from the baggage where he had taken
refuge, and anointed amid the shouts of
admiring subjects who delighted to honor
him.

Modestly he returned to his father's farm
to continue his *plowing* ~~ploughing~~ until interrupt-
ed by a call for help from beyond the Jordan.

Victory was quick and decisive. The Ammonites
were soundly defeated. Saul was instantly
elevated to the position of a hero. He
was a deliverer. On all sides he was hail-
ed as a warrior-king who deserved the loyal
support of the entire nation.

At Gilgal he was solemnly anointed as king
of all Israel. What greater heights could
he reached by a young country boy? It was
a grand beginning. Samuel loved him and
believed in him. God had chosen him and
given him a victory. The people were solid-

135 mld

ly behind him. Why not count him a glowing success and give him the crown? We must await the verdict of another day and see how the king carries himself.

BEGINNING TO BREAKDOWN

Did you ever see the collapse of a mighty tree? For years and years it had stood the strain of storms and in one fateful moment it finally went down in a heap.

As you looked closely you saw that the heart was rotten and the body of the tree had been severely weakened. Back yonder somewhere there was a beginning time. The rotting process began. It is always a dangerous time in a tree or in a life. It was a disastrous day in Saul's life when he first revealed his rebellious nature, his lack of reverence for God, and his disregard of God's sacred requirements.

Impatiently he chafed under Samuel's tardiness and delay. To save what he thought

was the collapse of his army he took over
the office of priest and offered sacrifices.

To him it seemed a small thing but it was
enough to bring the wrath of God upon his
head and the announcement from Samuel that
God had rejected him from being king over
his people. God could look deeper into
his mind and soul than we are able to see.

He detected something that was to grow in-
to a very ugly growth. The outcome would
make Saul utterly unreliable as God's man
to direct the affairs of his kingdom. It



was time for Samuel to begin to look a-
round for a successor. God wanted a man
who would reverence his holy name, repre-
sent his divine Lord before the people,
and behave as a proper representative in
a theocracy.

DISOBEDIENCE

Saul soon ran into trouble again. He was

8

still under the authority of Samuel although he was the king. The old prophet ordered him to do God's bidding and go to destroy the Amalekites with all their possessions. It was a divine command. Saul went forth to fight the enemy and was soon master of the situation so far as the fighting was concerned. He claimed a sudden victory. When Samuel confronted him with some embarrassing questions he lied concerning the treatment of Agag and the Amalekites and the cattle. He claimed that he had obeyed God. Later he claimed that his own skirts were clean but that the people had claimed some of the cattle and sheep.

  Samuel said: "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken

19

9

than the fat of rams. - - - Because thou
hast rejected the word of the Lord he hath
rejected thee from being king". It was a
perilous thing to rebel and refuse to obey
the Lord. It was more than God could over-
look. His chosen king must be willing to
obey and reverence and honor the God of
Israel. Nothing short of this could please
him. We are told that Samuel turned from
Saul and "came no more to see Saul until
the day of his death". What stark tragedy!
How could Saul hope to stumble on without
Samuel?. How could he hope to serve as God's
representative in the world since God had
rejected him from being king? It was a
dark day in the life of Saul. What a pit-
iful man he was!

GREEN-EYED JEALOUSLY (ENVY)

While Saul continued on as usual without
the presence and counsel of Samuel we may

20

10

be sure that a profound change came about in the mind and heart of Saul. We are told that "the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul and an evil spirit from the Lord terrified him". We cannot imagine the terrific black moods of depression that weighed heavily upon him. His conscience worked over time. The sense of his foolish behavior overwhelmed him. Now he knew he was "rejected". He could not pray and ask for guidance. Days and nights brought terror and confusion to him. He was now a godless man. Never would he be able to reach out in the darkness and feel his hand again. We do not wonder that a musician was needed to soothe his troubled spirits. It was a sad situation.

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To add to his misery he found that the young David was becoming so popular with the people that they would soon come to

2

love and praise the king. This must have been a blow too heavy to stand. How could he stand by and see another take his place in the affections of his people? Jealously took over in his mind.

Seen he began to see that his son, Jonathan, loved David more than he loved his own father (Saul). We are told that "Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul". Saul was not happy over such a situation in his own household. David was rapidly becoming the favorite throughout the kingdom. The women sang: "Saul hath slain his thousands and David his ten thousands". Envy and fear combined to wreck the slender strings in Saul's frenzied mind. The strong body was standing up under the pressure but the peer mind was fast breaking down under the terrific pressure. The conqueror of the giant

Goliath was the rising sun in the kingdom.

Saul was in need of help. How he needed

Samuel! How desperately he needed God!

Soon ugly hatred took its place to make

his days and nights unbearable. Fear and

a diseased mind had resulted in this tragic

state. He was alarmed to realize that "the

Lord was with David". That realization

caused more worry than all else. How was

he to compete with the here-worshipping

people and the almighty God? Jonathan

seemed to be on David's side too and this

made bad matters worse. The Book tells

us that he "was yet more afraid of David;

and Saul became David's enemy continually".

What a mess he was making of his life!

It is unthinkable that God's chosen king

would sink into such a state. In a hour

when God needed a man he found that he had

a weak baby, bowed down by fears and dreads

13
and hostility, and growing worse every day.

What was God's next move?

SAUL AND DAVID

Hatred brought its fruits too. Not only

did it make him utterly miserable but it

directed his efforts and his energies at

the popular young hero. In every way

possible he sought to strike him down.

He was sent out on an "impossible" mission

against the Philistines with the thought

that David would surely be killed. ^{at another time} Saul

directed a spear at the young soldier but

^{Jonathan was ordered to help put an end to the}
missed. ^{rapid rise of the popular rival} He was made a fugitive because

of Saul's hatred and driven from one hiding

place to another in an effort to save his

life. ^{He became the head of a band of outlaws who gladly followed him for their own protection} Saul went out to find and kill him.

^{In each instance David escaped} As hatred flamed and danger loomed it finally

became necessary for David to leave the

country and join forces with the Philistines.

David's magnanimous treatment of his king

20

14

when he refused to fight back must have added to Saul's worries. His conscience had a field day with him after these beautiful evidences of love and devotion on the part of his hated rival.

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When the end came for Saul and his sons David manifested the sweetest spirit imaginable. The tributes he paid to Saul and Jonathan will always stand as examples of pure love and sincere devotion to God's anointed. It had been a queer struggle all along. The more Saul hated and sought to kill the more magnanimous David became. The more popular and good and devoted David became the more frenzied grew Saul's ugly hatred of him. How can you reconcile such incredible behavior? What a peer, miserable man Saul was!

night and day he grew worse and suffered more.

240 to 7

lines
294 to line

moment! How can Saul who does not have a
great preacher friend and a holy sanctuary
find guidance and solace in such deep
darkness? If God had cast you off to
whom can you go when you just must have
help? "He was afraid and his heart greatly
troubled". *Pen Saul!*

In sheer desperation he decided to
seek some one who could "call up" Samuel
for him. Of all the people who had ever
lived the dear old saint was the one
person Saul wanted. What a tribute to
Samuel! He had proved to be the sort of
stay that Saul felt that he needed. He
must have him! He must get guidance
from Samuel for the road ahead!

Even though he had given the order
outlawing all such practices the terri-
fied king sought out a woman at Endor
who made a practice of communication
with the dead.

able to do this. He possessed

ordinary intelligence. He could have re-

fused to put any faith in anyone who

practiced such a life. He was pathetic

though, and was grasping at the last

floating straw. What a sorry figure!

God's anointed king who started life in

such promise and grandeur was now a poor,

pitiful wreck of his former self.

What could Samuel say? What could

anyone say other than the tragic story

of defeat and shame and disgrace and

death? Any person who knew the situation

could speak of all these distressing

angles to the black terrors. No hope

could be held out for one who had so com-

pletely collapsed. Destruction and death

awaited the house of Saul. The witch of

Endor could not help the helpless man.

DEATH IN BATHS

The Philistines were ready that

He was distracted to the point where even a lying man seemed to be his only hope. Can you imagine such a desperate plight?

and disappointment was set up in the

him to sense all the agony and distress

shame and disgrace in it. He cannot be-

life to end a career that has much

stricken king chose to take his own

of battle. The poor, demoralized, grief-

king made himself a suicide on the field.

What a sad shipwreck! God's chosen

certain.

sword and fell on it to make his death

wish of his children. Saul set his own

to kill him. When he refused this last

hated foe, called on his armor-bearer

unwilling to fall into the hands of his

the enemy. Saul was sorely wounded and,

the king went down before the fury of

God's chosen people. The three sons of

Saul's army. It was a tragic day for

they swept on across the flower of

match for them. Like a steam roller

time. The king of Israel was dead.

story of the fall of Saul. He had tried
to stand alone, leave God out, disregard
Samuel's words, and plunge on into life's
storms on his own. His own words were:

"I have played the fool. How true! What

poor returns on God's lavish investment

in him! "How the mighty are fallen!"

The golden glow of a peaceful sunset was

denied him. The bright radiance of a

wondrous sunrise was never to be his.

The bodies of the king and his sons were

taken to Beth-shan and fastened to the

wall. It was a shameful thing to do.

The body of God's anointed king, minus

the head, was displayed to the curious

gaze of the public. The people of Jabesh-

Gilead, remembering Saul's deed in saving

their lives, came to rescue the bodies

and take them home for decent burial.

Thus ended the earthly career of Saul,

the first king of Israel. Saul and Samuel

did their best with what he had. The

wreck near the end of the journey was wholly his own. There was much to admire. He accomplished much, but he collapsed pathetically when he turned to his own way and refused to listen to God.

✕ we would know Saul we must look into David's estimate of him. In the elegy written after Saul's death we find something of the poet's estimate of the man. David knew him more intimately and better than anyone else. He had seen the worst in him. In some strange way he was able to forget those ugly scenes and those hateful words and in his balancing of good and bad he seemed to find the balance decidedly in favor of the good. He was thinking of Saul in the days when God's spirit had made him the mighty warrior-king. In

21

those high hours Sam was truly a great
champion. Rebellion and selfishness
and fear and envy and superstition can
wreck the mightiest oak unless he has
an anchor and unless God's arm is
stretched out to uphold.

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21
11
38 (over)

1. Every nation needs God's special guidance. Who would think for a moment of setting a high powered automobile under full power to run through a thoroughfare or highway without an alert driver at the wheel? How can we hope to have a nation make its way through the perilous journey without God? It seems to be a good time to come back to this sensible thought and set ourselves to put God in direct control in our land. He is ready to take over. He has the only answer. He provides the one salvation.

2. Each one of us needs to look for a moment at God's investment in us. How about asking God to let us read His sheet of specifications for our life and look for a moment at a copy of the blueprint he has made for us. Can it be that we are missing the mark so that we may end up in a disgraceful wreck? Are we to end our life in such a way that God will be disappointed? He has a right to expect rich returns on the investment made in us.

3. Envy can wreck a mind and a life. Of all the things we should shun as a plague envy ranks among the leaders. It is one of the most prominent marks of a diseased mind. It is the enemy of peace.

thoroughfare

the mind as well as the happiness and peace of mind. Homes can be wrecked by the fires that flame as a result of it. Hearts are made miserable. Sleepless nights add to the sorry state and irritable natures result. Hatred soon comes to take its place to help destroy what is left of peace and wholeness.

4. A man out of step with God inevitably heads toward the place where the epitaph, "He played the fool", is in order. No one of us is smart enough to go it alone. We are built to keep step with him. We are never happy or useful when we are out of tune with him. Our hand in his will make for harmony and happiness and health of soul.

5. We should help immature minds understand the utter impossibility of communicating with the dead. Grasping soothsayers and palm readers and undercover women who prey on our people for the money they can extract ought to be put completely out of our communities. A careful study of the Old and New Testament^s will reveal God's hatred of such nefarious business. He has warned man against this from the first.

6. Look upon the agonizing death of Saul and weep for one who came to the end of the way without God. It brings tears to see a poor,

lonely, forsaken, and a man breathe
his last in a cowardly act of suicide.
How can anybody face the end of this
life without God? All the "things" of
earth cannot be of the slightest value.
No language can adequately describe the
full agony of his position. No flight of
the imagination can take in the horror
of it.

31
31
9
71