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A Biographical Study of Saul

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Saul

CHRONOLOGICAL SUMMARY

I. Saul, the seeker

A. The servant and Saul

1. Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin (1 Sam. 9:1-2).
2. He was very tall and equally impressive (1 Sam. 9:2).
3. He was sent by his father to look for some donkeys which had strayed away (1 Sam. 9:3).
4. After a futile search, Saul determined to return home, lest his father begin to worry about him.
5. Saul's servant, however, suggested they ask Samuel the seer (prophet) who lived in a nearby town if he could help them.

B. The seer and Saul (1 Sam. 9:15—10:8)

1. The announcements

a. God's announcement to Samuel

- (1) On the previous day, God had told Samuel he would send a man to the prophet from the tribe of Benjamin within 24 hours.
- (2) Samuel was to anoint this man as Israel's first king.

b. Samuel's announcement to Saul

- (1) At the meeting of the two men, God revealed to Samuel that Saul was the one.
- (2) Samuel greeted the astonished Saul with a twofold message. "Your father's donkeys have been found!" "You will become Israel's first king!"

2. The anointing

- a. Saul agreed to have supper with Samuel and stay with him for the night.
- b. Before the men parted on the following day, Samuel anointed Saul with oil.

3. The assurance—The prophet gave Saul a threefold sign to prove he would indeed become king.

- a. First sign—Samuel predicted Saul would meet two men near Rachel's tomb who would tell him his father's donkeys had been found.
- b. Second sign—Three men en route to Beth-el would meet him under the great tree at Tabor and offer him two loaves of bread.
- c. Third sign—Near the town of Gibeah, he would meet a procession of prophets, playing musical instruments and prophesying. Saul himself would then join in and prophesy with them in the power of God. All three signs were fulfilled.

4. The acclamation—Saul was proclaimed king over all Israel by Samuel during a ceremony at Mizpeh (1 Sam. 10:17-27).
 5. The abasement—At the beginning of his reign, on three separate occasions, Saul demonstrated great humility and seemed actually reluctant to assume the throne.
 - a. First occasion—When Samuel first told him he was God’s choice to be king, Saul replied . . . “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? Wherefore then speakest thou so to me?” (1 Sam. 9:21).
 - b. Second occasion—When it came time to be crowned, Saul disappeared and hid himself (1 Sam. 10:21-22).
 - c. Third occasion—When he became established in power, Saul displayed a merciful spirit, refusing the request to punish those who had previously ridiculed him. “The people said unto Samuel, Who is he that said, Shall Saul reign over us? Bring the men, that we may put them to death. And Saul said, There shall not a man be put to death this day: for to day the Lord hath wrought salvation in Israel” (1 Sam. 11:12-13).
- II. Saul, the sovereign—Saul was confirmed in the kingship when he rescued the Israelite city of Jabesh-gilead (1 Sam. 11:1-11).
- A. The terrible demand by Nahash
 1. Nahash, an Ammonite king had surrounded Jabesh-gilead.
 2. When the city attempted to make peace, he imposed the following conditions:
 - a. What he demanded—He stated his intention to gouge out the right eye of all the citizens.
 - b. Why he demanded this—Nahash knew this would bring disgrace upon all Israel.
 - B. The total destruction of Nahash
 1. Upon hearing of this, an angry Saul quickly raised an army of 330,000 men.
 2. He did this by cutting a pair of oxen into pieces and sending them throughout the land, threatening to do the same to the oxen of anyone not following him.
 3. Saul separated his army into three divisions and utterly destroyed the Ammonite enemy.
- III. Saul, the sinner—Israel’s first king was guilty of at least five grievous sins.
- A. He was guilty of disobedience.
 1. First occasion—Before a battle (1 Sam. 13:1-5)—At this time the king was rebuked by Samuel the prophet.
 - a. The background of this rebuke

- (1) Saul had attacked a small Philistine outpost with 3,000 Israelite soldiers and had aroused the anger of his bitter enemy. It looks from the verses that Jonathan attacked the outpost and defeated it with 1,000 men.
 - (2) The Philistines thus assembled a vast army of foot soldiers along with 30,000 chariots and 6,000 horsemen, creating great fear among Saul's troops, causing many of them to flee in panic.
- b. The basis for this rebuke
- (1) Saul was instructed to wait for Samuel in Gilgal for seven days, at which time the prophet would appear, sacrifice an offering, and bless the troops.
 - (2) At the end of the seven days the impatient king offered up the sacrifice himself, only to see Samuel appear!
 - (3) Samuel told Saul two tragic things would result from his act of disobedience.
 - (a) His kingdom would not endure.
 - (b) God had sought out a man after his own heart.
2. Second occasion—After a battle—In spite of his first act of disobedience, Saul was allowed by God (for sake of Israel) to defeat his various enemies, including the Moabites, Edomites, Ammonites, Amalekites, and Philistines (1 Sam. 14:47). However, once again disobedience entered his life. Are the Amalekites being equated with “the kings of Zobah” here? Should this be the case?
- a. The king of Israel set aside the God of Israel (1 Sam. 15:1-9).
- (1) Saul was commanded to utterly destroy the Amalekites and their king because of past hostility against Israel.
 - (2) Not even their animals were to be spared.
 - (3) Saul disobeyed, however, sparing Agag, the Amalekite king, plus the best of the sheep and cattle.
- b. The God of Israel set aside the king of Israel (1 Sam. 15:10-35). Upon being asked by Samuel why he spared the animals, Saul weakly replied . . . “The people took the spoil, sheep, and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God in Gilgal” (1 Sam. 15:21).
- (1) The rebuff—“Samuel said, Hath 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 hearken than the fat of rams” (1 Sam. 15:22).

- (2) The remorse—“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” (1 Sam. 15:24).
 - (3) The request—“Now therefore, I pray thee, pardon my sin, and turn again with me, that I may worship the Lord” (1 Sam. 15:25).
 - (4) The rejection—“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. And as Samuel turned about to go away, he laid hold upon the skirt of his mantle, and it rent. And Samuel said unto him, The Lord hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbor of thine, that is better than thou” (1 Sam. 15:26-28).
- B. He was guilty of self-will—Saul ordered the death of his own son Jonathan for disobeying his command (1 Sam. 14:24-46).
- 1. The stupidity of Saul’s command
 - a. Saul forbade his soldiers as they went into battle against the Philistines to eat any food whatsoever until he had exacted full revenge upon his enemies.
 - b. The hero of this battle, Jonathan, unaware of the order, ate some honey.
 - 2. The sin caused by Saul’s command
 - a. Following the victorious battle, the famished Israelite troops quickly butchered some sheep and oxen and ate the raw, bloody meat, thus breaking the Mosaic Law which prohibited the eating of blood.
 - b. Upon learning what Jonathan had done, the self-willed Saul ordered his execution. The Israelite soldiers refused, however, to allow the death of Jonathan.
- C. He was guilty of hatred—Saul turned against David, hating him with a passion.
- 1. The root of his hatred
 - a. The background—During their first two meetings, the two men got along quite well.
 - (1) First meeting—Saul and David the singer (1 Sam. 16:14-23)
 - (a) Saul was troubled by an evil spirit.
 - (b) A search was conducted for a skilled harpist whose music would hopefully soothe the troubled king.
 - (c) David’s fame reached Saul and he was brought to the royal court.
 - (d) At the playing by David the evil spirit left Saul.
 - (2) Second meeting—Saul and David the soldier (1 Sam. 17:1-58)

- (a) Saul and Goliath—During a battle with the Philistines, Israel had been challenged for 40 days by mighty Goliath to send out a champion to fight him. Neither Saul nor any of his soldiers were willing to do this.
 - (b) Saul and David—David convinced a reluctant Saul that he be permitted to fight Goliath. The king offered David his own armor, but David refused to wear it. With but a sling in his hand, David slew Goliath.
- b. The basis—What was it that turned Saul’s affection for David to hatred? The answer is very clear. “And it came to pass as they came, when David was returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women came out of all cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet king Saul, with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of musick. And the women answered one another as they played, and said, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands. And Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased him; and he said, They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands: and what can he have more but the kingdom? And Saul eyed David from that day and forward” (1 Sam. 18:6-9).
- 2. The fruit of his hatred—Saul displayed his loathing of David through both private and public attempts to kill him.
 - a. Private attempts to kill David
 - (1) He began by demoting David from a high-ranking army officer to that of a lower rank (1 Sam. 18:5, 13).
 - (2) He attempted on two occasions to kill David with a spear (1 Sam. 8:10-11; 19:9-10).
 - (3) He tried to arrange for David to be killed in battle (1 Sam. 18:20-30).
 - (a) Aware of David’s love for Michal, Saul’s daughter, the king offered her hand in marriage, but only if David could bring proof that he had killed 100 Philistines in battle, secretly hoping the young man himself would be killed in the attempt.
 - (b) David, however, soon presented Saul with evidence that he had killed 200 enemy soldiers! (1 Sam. 18:25-27)
 - (4) He put pressure on his own son Jonathan to kill David (1 Sam. 19:1).
 - (5) He then pretended to have a change of heart (or was temporarily sorry) and assured Jonathan no harm would come to David (2 Sam. 19:6).

- (6) Upon realizing, however, the depth of Jonathan's loyalty to David, Saul lost total control. He cursed his son and actually attempted to kill him with a spear (1 Sam. 20:30-33).
- b. Public attempts to kill David
- (1) Saul and David—The malice
- (a) He sent soldiers to arrest David in his own home, but Michal helped her husband to escape (1 Sam. 19:11-17).
 - (b) He dispatched three companies of soldiers to capture David in the home of Samuel. Each attempt was unsuccessful, however, for the troops wound up prophesying (1 Sam. 19:18-21).
 - (c) He himself then went to Samuel's house, only to end up also prophesying as the soldiers had done (1 Sam. 19:22-24).
 - (d) He attempted to trap David in the city of Keilah, but God revealed to his servant the king's wicked intentions (1 Sam. 23:7-13).
 - (e) On one occasion Saul was closing in on David, but was forced to break off pursuit upon learning the Philistines had invaded Israel (1 Sam. 23:26-28).
 - (f) Time and again, for some years Saul vainly and publicly sought out the life of David (1 Sam. 23:14).
- (2) David and Saul—The mercy: Saul's life was spared by David on two occasions.
- (a) First occasion—In a cave (1 Sam. 24:1-22). During one of his pursuits of David, Saul entered a cave down by the Dead Sea to go to the toilet. David and his men were in the cave and watched Saul who was utterly unaware of their presence. David refused to allow his men to kill Saul, but secretly cut off a corner of the king's robe. From a safe distance David later showed Saul this piece of cloth and demanded to know why the king was trying to kill him. Realizing his life had indeed been spared, Saul responded . . . "Is this thy voice, my son David? And Saul lifted up his voice, and wept. And he said to David, Thou art more righteous than I: for thou has rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil . . . And now , behold, I know well that thou shalt surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in thine hand. Sware now therefore unto me by the Lord, that thou wilt not cut off my seed after me, and that thou wilt not destroy my name out of my father's house" (1 Sam. 24:16-17, 20-21).

- (b) Second occasion—On a hillside (1 Sam. 26:1-25). Under cover of night, David and a soldier secretly visited Saul’s camp and removed from the sleeping king his spear and water jug. Standing on a nearby hill David then called out and awakened Saul, showing him the spear and jug which had been taken. Once again David demanded to know why Saul was trying to kill him. Saul responded, “I have sinned: return, my son David: for I will no more do thee harm, because my soul was precious in thine eyes this day: behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly” (1 Sam. 26:21).
- B. He was guilty of murder—Saul instigated a terrible slaughter at the town of Nob (1 Sam. 22:6-19).
1. Whom he had killed—At the king’s order, Ahimelech, Israel’s high priest, along with 84 other priests, plus all the men, women, children and livestock at Nob were put to the sword in a bloody massacre.
 2. Why he had them killed—Saul learned that Ahimelech had innocently befriended David (who had lied to the high priest, claiming he was on a secret mission for Saul), providing him with food and a weapon.
- C. He was guilty of apostasy—Saul visited the witch of Endor (1 Sam. 28:3-25)
1. The reasons for the visit
 - a. He was faced with a vast and imminent Philistine invasion.
 - b. The prophets could not offer him advice or assurance.
 - c. The Lord would not offer him advice or assurance.
 2. The results of his visit
 - a. The king’s trickery—Disguising himself, Saul visited the witch and requested that she put him in contact with the dead Samuel.
 - b. The witch’s terror—two events quickly filled her with fear.
 - (1) She recognized Saul.
 - (2) She saw an old man wearing a robe ascending up from the earth. This was Samuel.
 - c. The prophet’s testimony—Samuel told Saul the what and the why of the future.
 - (1) The what
 - (a) Saul would lose the battle the next day.
 - (b) Both he and his sons would be killed.
 - (c) The kingdom then would go to David.
 - (2) The why—All this would happen because of Saul’s disobedience.
- b. Upon hearing this, the nearly fainting Saul accepted some food from the witch and left.

IV. Saul—The suicide (1 Sam. 31:1-13)

- A. The place of his death—he died during the battle with the Philistines on Mt. Gilboa.
- B. The particulars of his death
 - 1. The method
 - a. He was critically wounded by the Philistine archers.
 - b. He fell upon his sword to escape being captured alive by the enemy.
 - 2. The mutilation involved
 - a. The Philistines cut off his head.
 - b. His body was then nailed on the city wall of Beth-shan.
 - c. Saul's body was later recovered by the men of Jabesh-gilead and given a decent burial.
- C. The pain over his death—Upon learning of Saul's death, David lamented over him (2 Sam. 1:17-27). "The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places; how are the mighty fallen! Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided: they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions" (2 Sam. 1:19, 23).
- D. The perversion that caused his death—"So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the LORD, even against the word of the LORD, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to enquire of it; And enquired not of the LORD: therefore he slew him, and turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse" (1 Chron. 10:13-14).

THEOLOGICAL SUMMARY

- I. Saul did not revere the ark of God (as did David) during his reign (1 Chron. 13:3).
- II. He was mentioned in the titles of the following psalms:
 - A. Psalm 18—A psalm written by David after God had delivered him from the hand of Saul. In some cases, his name is in the introduction only.
 - B. Psalm 52—Written by David after Saul had killed the priests at Nob (see 1 Sam. 22)
 - C. Psalm 54—Written when the Ziphites attempted to betray David into Saul's hand (see 1 Sam. 23)
 - D. Psalm 57—Written when David hid in a cave from Saul (see 1 Sam. 22)
 - E. Psalm 59—Written when Saul attempted to kill David in his own house (see 1 Sam. 19)
- III. Saul was referred to by Paul the apostle during his message in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:21).
- IV. The Saul of the Old Testament can be both compared and contrasted with the Saul of the New Testament.

A. The Old Testament Saul

1. Was tall and impressive (1Sam. 9:2)
2. Was from the tribe of Benjamin (1 Sam. 9:1-2)
3. Began as God's friend (1 Sam. 9:16; 10:6-7)
4. Ended as God's enemy (1 Sam. 28:6)
5. Went to the witch in the hour of death (1 Sam. 28:7)
6. Took his own life in great fear (1 Sam. 31:4)
7. Was characterized by disobedience (1 Sam. 13:13; 15:22-23)

B. The New Testament Saul

1. Was short and unimpressive (Gal. 4:13-14; 2 Cor. 10:10)
2. Was from the tribe of Benjamin (Phil. 3:5)
3. Began as God's enemy (Acts 9:1)
4. Ended as God's friend (2 Tim. 4:18)
5. Went to the Word in the hour of death (1 Tim. 4:13)
6. Gave his own life with great expectation (2 Tim. 4:6-8)
7. Was characterized by obedience (Acts 26:19)

STATISTICS

Father: Kish (1 Sam. 9:1-2)

Spouse: Ahinoam (1 Sam. 14:50)

Sons: Jonathan, Ishui, Melchi-shua, and Abinadab (1 Sam. 14:49; 1 Chron. 8:33)

Daughters: Merab and Michal (1 Sam. 14:49)

First mention: 1 Samuel 9:2

Final mention: Acts 13:21

Meaning of his name: "Asked for"

Frequency of his name: Referred to 388 times

Biblical books mentioning him: Six books (1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Chronicles, Psalms, Isaiah, Acts)

Occupation: King of Israel

Place of death: At the base of Mt. Gilboa (1 Sam. 31:1-2)

Circumstances of death: He was killed by the Philistines as a direct judgment by God (1 Sam. 28:16-19)

Important fact about his life: He was Israel's first king (1 Sam. 8–10)