

# LESSONS FROM **THE KINGS**



ANCIENT WISDOM FOR MODERN TIMES

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1. KING SAUL: ON THE EDGE OF GREATNESS – PART 1</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. KING SAUL: ON THE EDGE OF GREATNESS – PART 2</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>3. KING SAUL: ON THE EDGE OF GREATNESS – PART 3</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>4. GIANT-KILLER: DAVID AND GOLIATH</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>5. DAVID AND ABIGAIL</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>6. A MODEL FOR REPENTANCE</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>7. DAVID'S CHARGE TO SOLOMON</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>8. KING HANUN'S SUSPICIOUS MIND</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>9. SOLOMON'S STRATEGY FOR SUCCESS</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>10. THE LIFE AND TIMES OF HEZEKIAH – PART 1</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>11. THE LIFE AND TIMES OF HEZEKIAH – PART 2</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>12. THE LIFE AND TIMES OF HEZEKIAH – PART 3</b>	<b>109</b>

# 1. King Saul: On the Edge of Greatness - Part 1

I SAMUEL 9

This book profiles the lives and times of the many kings who served as leaders of God's people. Some are well-known to us and others less so, but every one of their stories provides a rich treasure of human experience that can be applied to our own lives today. Paul the Apostle, in speaking about the lives of Old Testament characters, says that their life experiences were recorded and kept as a teaching device for subsequent generations of believers:

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.

- I Corinthians 10:11

And so, we begin this book entitled, “Lessons from the Kings: Ancient Wisdom for Modern Times” where we will look at either the life or a specific episode in a king’s rule and see if we can draw some practical lessons for our own lives as Christians, for the times we live in today.

These men lived in very different social and cultural contexts than we do today, but we share the same belief in God and desire to know and do His will just as they did. We also share similar human natures weakened by sin and subject to temptation and failure as they did. How God dealt with them is similar to how He deals with us today. I believe, therefore, that examining their relationship with the Lord will be quite illuminating.

The ruler that we will begin with is King Saul, the first king of Israel appointed by God. In studying his life and reign we will see how one person who began his service to the Lord as king managed to lose his bid for greatness because of personal weakness.

## **BACKGROUND ON SAUL**

The story of Saul is set about 200 years (1052 BC) after the Jews had entered the Promised Land, having completed their wanderings in the desert for 40 years. Each tribe had been assigned a portion of the territory and were busy subduing and settling into the cities formerly held by the pagan nations that had previously inhabited the land. With time, however, the Jewish people became less zealous in eradicating these nations according to God’s original command through Moses. Instead, they began to enslave or make treaties with them. This approach was easier and proved more profitable in that they acquired slave labor and avoided the difficult task of waging war against the pagan peoples in that place. Because of their disobedience, God sustained certain pagan nations in the area and used them to punish the Jews for their stubbornness. One such nation was the Philistines. They lived on a small strip of land along the Mediterranean coast and were fierce enemies of the Jews for many decades.

During this period of time God ruled the Jews directly (theocracy) through the laws and commands He had given Moses. From time to time,

however, He would send a special leader (judge) to help the people through a period of trial and trouble. We read about these men and women in the book of Judges. People like Samson, Gideon or Deborah were appointed by God for a particular mission to lead or rescue the people when they were in danger. The last and greatest of these “judges” was Samuel who was dedicated as a child by his parents to the service of the Lord:

- He was the last great judge of Israel.
- He was also a prophet (I Samuel 3:20, Acts 3:24).
- He served as a priest offering up sacrifices on behalf of the people.

During his lifetime of ministry, the Israelites were constantly attacked and threatened by their enemy, the Philistines. In his book (I Samuel), Samuel describes the state of affairs taking place as the Jews suffered defeat after defeat at the hands of this enemy. The climax occurs when the pagan nation actually captures the Ark of the Covenant from the Jews.

The ark was a box-like container with angelic statues on the cover, and originally housed the stone tablets of the commandments, Aaron’s rod and a jar containing manna. The Jews had come to believe that if this vessel was in their possession, they were invincible in battle. Of course, it was obedience to the Lord and faith in Him that guaranteed victory, but the Jews had wandered away from this reality and had begun to trust the object representing God’s presence instead of God Himself. The loss of the ark was a great psychological blow to the Jews and demoralized them in the face of their enemy.

A little later in chapters 5-7 of I Samuel we see how God punished the Philistines for keeping the ark, to the point where they actually gave it back to the Jews because it was causing so many problems for them. In I Samuel 7 we see Samuel himself lead the nation in a period of repentance and restoration which ultimately produces a temporary peace between themselves and their enemies, especially the Philistines. Later in life, Samuel appointed his sons as judges over Israel, but they

were not anointed by God and proved to be corrupt as leaders of the people.

It seemed to the nation that Samuel's sons would not be as effective in leadership as Samuel had been so the people (not waiting on God's direction) demanded that Samuel appoint them a king to rule over the land. In other words, they took matters into their own hands.

Samuel warned the people that a human king would create as many problems as he would solve, but the people were adamant in wanting a rulership style resembling that of their pagan neighbors. God instructed Samuel to go ahead in his search for a Jewish king to lead the nation and reminded him that in doing this thing, the Jewish people were not rejecting Samuel and his work among them, but rather were rejecting God Himself who had been their King. Into this historical context stepped Saul, the first human king of Israel.

## **SAUL'S EARLY YEARS AND FINEST HOUR**

The story of Saul's time as king is described in I Samuel 9-11.

### **The Choice of Saul as King**

We begin with his original anointing by Samuel and Saul's reaction.

<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> Now the donkeys of Kish, Saul's father, were lost. And Kish said to his son Saul, "Please take one of the servants with you, and arise, go and look for the donkeys." <sup>4</sup> So he passed through the mountains of Ephraim and through the land of Shalisha, but they did not find them. Then they passed through the land of Shaalim, and they were not there. Then he passed through the land of the Benjamites, but they did not

find them.<sup>5</sup> When they had come to the land of Zuph, Saul said to his servant who was with him, "Come, let us return, lest my father cease caring about the donkeys and become worried about us."

- I Samuel 9:1-5

We learn that he was from the smallest of the tribes located in the western part of Judah (nearest to the Philistine nation). His father was respected for his courage and honor. Saul was taller than average and good looking. He was also quite attached to his father.

As we read the rest of the chapter, we also find out that although he believed in God and the Law, he was not well-versed in the words and commands of God. We catch a glimpse of this lack of instruction when we see Saul relying on a lowly servant to explain to him how one was to approach a prophet.

As the story of chapter 9 continues, we see Saul and his servant detour from their original task of finding lost donkeys to seeking out a prophet who might give them help in their journey. This was an unusual request for a prophet, and in it, we see Saul's penchant for using "spiritual" powers to serve purely financial or physical ends. In verse 15 of chapter 9, the writer informs us that Samuel is told by God that a certain man will come to him from the land of Benjamin (where Saul was from) and Samuel is to anoint him king. Upon meeting him, Samuel reassures him that the animals are safe at home and continues by pronouncing a gracious blessing on him. Saul is confused and a little suspicious and responds warily to Samuel's words.

<sup>17</sup> 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." <sup>18</sup> Then Saul drew near to Samuel in the gate, and said, "Please tell me, where is the seer's house?" <sup>19</sup> Samuel answered Saul and said, "I am the seer. Go up before me to the high place, for you shall eat with me today; and tomorrow I will let you go and will tell you all that is in your heart.

<sup>20</sup> But as for your donkeys that were lost three days ago, do not be anxious about them, for they have been found. And on



whom is all the desire of Israel? Is it not on you and on all your father's house?" <sup>21</sup> 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?"

At the dinner they share later on, Samuel gives Saul the honored place at the table and the choicest portion signifying his new role as leader. Later on in chapter 10, Samuel anoints Saul as king and describes to him several things that will take place that day, which will prove that his appointment is from God:

- He prophesies that his animals have been found.
- He describes his father's feelings about him.
- He even explains in detail the people he will meet and the event that will take place in the hours to come, on his return home.

The most significant of these events will be that at some point Saul will meet a group of prophets and will himself begin to prophesy along with them. Remember now, he is a person who didn't know how to approach a prophet and now he is going to speak like one. All of these signs are given to him in order to confirm that his anointing is from God. Finally, after all of this is explained, Samuel instructs Saul on what he must do in response:

You shall go down before me to Gilgal; and surely I will come down to you to offer burnt offerings and make sacrifices of peace offerings. Seven days you shall wait, till I come to you and show you what you should do.  
- I Samuel 10:8

(Remember this command. We will come back to it in our next chapter.)

After his meeting with Samuel, Saul returns home and experiences all of the things predicted by Samuel, but he does not report to his family what took place concerning his anointing as king. He is still reluctant to believe and accept what has taken place.

In 10:17 and forward, we read about the public selection of Saul as king. Samuel calls a gathering of all the people and begins by chastising them for having rejected the Lord's rulership over them and demanding to have an earthly king instead. He then informs them that despite this rejection God has granted their request and will furnish them with a king.

At this point Samuel proceeds to take lots from among the tribes to narrow down the field of contenders, then from the heads of families in order to bring the choice to one particular person among them. We see that even through this selection process, Saul is still the one that is chosen. Of course, the people see this as a drawing of lots to choose a leader, but Samuel and Saul know it is yet another sign from God confirming his anointing. And once again, we see Saul's reluctance. When the people searched for Saul in order to inform him of his selection, they found him hiding among the baggage (I Samuel 11:21-24). Once he accepted his position, Samuel writes that there were some who refused to accept Saul as king and others who, by God's influence, supported him immediately and wholeheartedly.

## **SAUL'S FINEST HOUR**

If one were writing a book about Saul's life and reign as king, a good title would be: "On the Edge of Greatness." This title would work because very early on Saul showed a glimmer of being a great king and a great man of God. Samuel describes his finest hour in chapter 11:1-14:

<sup>1</sup> Then Nahash the Ammonite came up and encamped against Jabesh Gilead; and all the men of Jabesh said to Nahash, "Make a covenant with us, and we will serve you." <sup>2</sup> And Nahash the Ammonite answered them, "On this condition I will make a covenant with you, that I may put out all your right eyes, and bring reproach on all Israel." <sup>3</sup> Then the elders of Jabesh said to him, "Hold off for seven days, that we may send messengers to all the territory of Israel. And then, if there is no one to save us, we will come out to you." <sup>4</sup> So the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul and told the news in the hearing of the people. And all the people lifted up their voices and wept. <sup>5</sup> Now there

was Saul, coming behind the herd from the field; and Saul said, "What troubles the people, that they weep?" And they told him the words of the men of Jabesh. <sup>6</sup> Then the Spirit of God came upon Saul when he heard this news, and his anger was greatly aroused. <sup>7</sup> So he took a yoke of oxen and cut them in pieces, and sent them throughout all the territory of Israel by the hands of messengers, saying, "Whoever does not go out with Saul and Samuel to battle, so it shall be done to his oxen." And the fear of the Lord fell on the people, and they came out with one consent. <sup>8</sup> When he numbered them in Bezek, the children of Israel were three hundred thousand, and the men of Judah thirty thousand. <sup>9</sup> And they said to the messengers who came, "Thus you shall say to the men of Jabesh Gilead: "Tomorrow, by the time the sun is hot, you shall have help.'" Then the messengers came and reported it to the men of Jabesh, and they were glad. <sup>10</sup> Therefore the men of Jabesh said, "Tomorrow we will come out to you, and you may do with us whatever seems good to you." <sup>11</sup> So it was, on the next day, that Saul put the people in three companies; and they came into the midst of the camp in the morning watch, and killed Ammonites until the heat of the day. And it happened that those who survived were scattered, so that no two of them were left together. <sup>12</sup> 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." <sup>13</sup> But Saul said, "Not a man shall be put to death this day, for today the Lord has accomplished salvation in Israel." <sup>14</sup> Then Samuel said to the people, "Come, let us go to Gilgal and renew the kingdom there."

Saul manages to rise to the challenge of the enemy. He galvanizes his forces and wages a successful war against the Ammonites. When victory is in hand, Saul shows that he can be gracious by sparing the lives of those who were opposed to his selection as king. Finally, he gives glory to God for the victory and shows great spiritual leadership at a critical moment in the nation's history.

We note that this happy episode ends well as the people unanimously confirm Saul's anointing as king with sacrifices and joyful praise to God.

The chapter ends with a final warning by Samuel to the people that in order to continue the blessings and protection of the Lord, they and their new king must obey Him and serve Him. If not, even their new king won't be able to save them.

This chapter ends with Saul at a high point in his rule having consolidated his power and position with the people through this swift victory and statesmanlike conduct towards his detractors. All is well in Israel for the moment, but following events will plot Saul's tragic decline into madness.

## **LESSONS**

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Even though Saul lived 3000 years ago, we can draw very relevant lessons which apply to our lives today:

### **LESSON #1**

#### **THE WORLD USUALLY REJECTS GOD'S SERVANTS**

Saul was not unanimously accepted at first and even he himself had trouble believing that God had chosen him. This is quite normal for those who are called into God's service. They doubt themselves and are not always accepted by others.

- If you've become a Christian or if you've tried to convince others of your faith, don't be surprised if not many are happy for you.
- If you stake a claim to be with God, to now walk with the Lord in obedience or service, this means that you reject the world and thus reject the values of the world. Be prepared, therefore, for the world to reject you back and disown you for your newfound faith.

## LESSON #2

### **BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU ASK FOR**

The people, against God's wishes, asked for a king. Samuel warned them that a human king would devour their wealth (taxes), take their daughters (servants/wives) and turn their sons into soldiers (wars). However, the people persisted in their demand and received their king and all of the problems along with him.

The point here is that God will allow you to pursue people and things that are bad for you, if you insist on doing it. Unless you are intensely seeking His will in a matter, He will allow you to choose and obtain your heart's desire, even if it destroys you. This is the down-side of free will. This is why Jesus instructs us to pray, "...Lead us not into temptation" Matthew 6:13, so that God will help us seek after those things that come from above, not below.

## LESSON #3

### **WAIT FOR GOD'S ANOINTING**

Note in the story that Samuel tried to anoint his own sons to succeed him (and they were unsuitable for leadership). He failed to remember his own experience where God called him to serve as a judge, prophet and priest, and not Eli the priest he had served under as a boy. Note also that the people chose for themselves the type of leader to succeed Samuel, not waiting for God to send them a successor. They received a king, but only by default. Had they waited for God's anointing, they would have saved themselves a lot of grief. God's anointing is God's blessing, God's choice, God's way.

- Sometimes we can know it because it is clearly spelled out in His word.
- Sometimes the word provides principles to guide us.
- And sometimes we have to wait for events and circumstances to move in order to know God's anointing.

Whether it be a call to ministry, or finding a marriage partner, or deciding on a career, a move, or a purchase...if we seek God's anointing and are patient to wait for it, we will receive it. When Jesus says, "Ask and it shall be given to you, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened," Matthew 7:7, He's not referring to cars and money or health, He's talking about the anointing.

Ask, seek, knock in your search for God's way in your life and you will receive the answer, find the way and discover the right door that God will open for you.

## 2. **King Saul: On the Edge of Greatness - Part 2**

We are studying the life of King Saul under the title, “On the Edge of Greatness.” I have given it this title because as Israel’s first king, Saul showed great promise. After his anointing as king by Samuel and confirmation by the people, Saul mobilized the nation to defeat one of Israel’s fearsome enemies, the Ammonites. Saul even resisted the temptation to punish those among his own people who originally opposed his coronation and spared their lives giving glory to God instead.

We left the story at the point where the people were reaffirming their allegiance to Saul before God with prayer and sacrifice. This heady time would soon give way to darker periods as Saul would begin his slow descent into madness and loss.

## EARLY DECLINE

When we look at Saul's actions and decisions as king, we begin to recognize a number of patterns that led to his downfall.

### 1. A Pattern of Disobedience – I Samuel 13

<sup>1</sup> Saul reigned one year; and when he had reigned two years over Israel, <sup>2</sup> Saul chose for himself three thousand men of Israel. Two thousand were with Saul in Michmash and in the mountains of Bethel, and a thousand were with Jonathan in Gibeah of Benjamin. The rest of the people he sent away, every man to his tent. <sup>3</sup> And Jonathan attacked the garrison of the Philistines that was in Geba, and the Philistines heard of it. Then Saul blew the trumpet throughout all the land, saying, "Let the Hebrews hear!" <sup>4</sup> Now all Israel heard it said that Saul had attacked a garrison of the Philistines, and that Israel had also become an abomination to the Philistines. And the people were called together to Saul at Gilgal.

- I Samuel 13:1-4

The Philistines were the Jewish nation's most powerful enemy. In the passage above we read that Jonathan, Saul's son, and heir to the throne, mounts a foolish attack on a garrison of Philistine soldiers and wins this minor skirmish. This provokes an all-out war with the mighty Philistines, and Saul (without any guidance or plan) calls on the Israelites to prepare for war.

<sup>5</sup> Then the Philistines gathered together to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen, and people as the sand which is on the seashore in multitude. And they came up and encamped in Michmash, to the east of Beth Aven. <sup>6</sup> When the men of Israel saw that they were in danger (for the people were distressed), then the people hid in caves, in thickets, in rocks, in holes, and in pits. <sup>7</sup> And some of the Hebrews crossed over the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. As for Saul, he was still in Gilgal, and all the people



followed him trembling. <sup>8</sup> 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.

Very quickly the Jewish army sees that it is outnumbered and outmatched. Saul, as he waits upon Samuel to seek God's help and blessings, notes that his forces are beginning to desert him.

<sup>9</sup> So Saul said, "Bring a burnt offering and peace offerings here to me." And he offered the burnt offering. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> 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, <sup>12</sup> 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." <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> 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."

Afraid that he would lose his following, Saul disobeys Samuel (who told him to wait) and offers the sacrifice himself. Aside from Samuel's instruction, the fact that Saul was not a priest prohibited him from performing this act. Upon his arrival, Samuel rebukes Saul and tells him that because of his disobedience God would remove the kingdom from him and give it to one who would obey Him.

This pattern of disobedience to God's commands would continue throughout Saul's lifetime, and he would never truly repent of it.

Another pattern evident in Saul's life and rule was...

## 2. A Pattern of Instability – I Samuel 14

In chapter 14, we see what happens after the disaster of the sacrifice offered by Saul instead of Samuel. Jonathan goes ahead and attacks a small contingency of Philistine soldiers and succeeds in winning another small victory. This sudden and unexpected defeat demoralizes the entire Philistine army to the point where they become afraid, vulnerable and ready to retreat. One of the reasons for this was that there were no swords or weapons in Israel at that time since the Philistines controlled the making and repair of iron-based tools and instruments of war. Jonathan and a few others were the only ones who possessed their own armor, so a defeat against an enemy that supposedly had no weapons rattled the Philistines to the point of panic.

### ...THE SAD PART...

While this was going on, Saul, undecided about what to do, made a foolish oath forbidding his people to eat until a complete victory was in hand, once again using a spiritual thing (fasting) to achieve a strictly physical end (military victory). This fast weakened the people and led to several problems:

- When the Philistines were demoralized and vulnerable, the Jews could not take advantage of their opponents' weakness. They were too faint from hunger to capitalize on their advantage.
- The people were so hungry that when they took the spoil left behind by the enemy that ran away, they ate the blood of the animals and disobeyed God in the process (food laws prohibited them from eating the blood of animals).
- Jonathan, who did not know about the oath to fast, ate in ignorance and had to be saved by the will of the people, lest he be executed by his own father.

In this episode, Saul showed how unstable his character was becoming. He was king, but he was supposed to be serving by the will and guidance

of God through the prophet Samuel. He showed his irreverence and arrogance when he offered a sacrifice in disobedience and committed his nation to a foolish oath. Both actions done without the guidance of the prophet or the approval of God. He didn't follow through to a complete victory against the Philistines and, as a consequence, had to fight them repeatedly in the years to come.

Yet, despite this pattern of instability, God continued to give Saul success in his other military campaigns. We can draw several lessons from this episode:

- God can use you despite your flaws.
- Even under God's grace, you do suffer the consequences of your mistakes.
- Uncorrected sins and weaknesses tend to repeat themselves and grow stronger and more pervasive with time.

This last lesson was especially true in Saul's life:

### **3. A Pattern of Open Rebellion – I Samuel 15**

In chapter 15 we read about Saul's increasing disregard for the commands of God.

After their partial defeat, the Philistines remain quiet leaving the Israelites alone for the time being. At this point, Samuel comes to Saul with a message from God to go and destroy one of Israel's old enemies, the Amalekites (a nation that had caused problems for the Jews while they wandered in the desert during the time of Moses). Samuel specifically instructs Saul to completely wipe out the entire nation:

<sup>3</sup> 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.

No trace of the Amalekites was to remain because God was judging them for their pagan religion and opposition to His people. Their time of judgment had come. In response to Samuel's instruction Saul raises an army and defeats the people militarily, but he does not do exactly as God commands. He keeps the king of the Amalekites alive and spares the best of the flocks of sheep and oxen. What makes matters worse is that when he is confronted with the evidence of his disobedience by Samuel, Saul refuses to acknowledge his sin.

<sup>20</sup> And Saul said to Samuel, "But I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, and gone on the mission on which the Lord sent me, and brought back Agag king of Amalek; I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites."

Note that in the defense of his actions Saul rewords the command of God to make it comply to his actions. God had originally commanded him to destroy all of the Amalekites, including the king.

<sup>24</sup> Then Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice."

Note also that he blames the people for his sin. He acknowledges that his action was wrong, but it was the people who pressured him into doing it who are really to blame. He refuses to accept responsibility for his actions.

<sup>30</sup> Then he said, "I have sinned; yet honor me now, please, before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, that I may worship the Lord your God."

Saul expresses sorrow, but only for the consequences of his sin. He has lost the respect of the people, this is his fear. Samuel pierces his denials and defenses with the truth about what his sins really are in verse 23.

<sup>23</sup> 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.

**A. Rebellion** is divination, in that you rely on some other source of power (in his case self/others/or seek out spirits, etc.) instead of God's power. It is the allegiance to power from below rather than power from above. Rebellion is the attempt to overthrow the balance and order of God's power and institute another power in His place.

**B. Stubbornness** — Samuel equates this characteristic to the sins of idolatry and iniquity. It is a direct refusal to submit to God's authority.

- Idolatry when done in ignorance.
- Iniquity when done despite knowing the truth.

**C. Rejection** — Refusing to follow the path that God has laid out for you in His word is essentially the rejection of God. Here Samuel lays out the final consequence of this which will be God rejecting you.

Saul had arrived at a point in his life where his arrogance made him sin without recognizing the consequences or nature of his sins. In the end, he did not see the price that his disobedience was costing him: not just the respect of the people, but the complete loss of God's favor and the privilege of serving Him as well as the loss of the kingdom for his son, Johnathan.

#### **4. A Pattern of Fear — I Samuel 16**

Disobedience led to instability which produced open rebellion and, in turn, created this intense paranoia in Saul. He was too proud to repent so he forged ahead without God's blessing. This was a sure recipe for depression and fear.

In chapter 16 we see that Saul is now violent and out of control. He threatens to kill any who oppose him. He has now become a ruler

keeping his position by force and not by grace. He rules only because God allows him to do so, but he is far from God's will and purpose.

We also discover that he now begins to seek out secular things (like music - David's harp) to soothe his troubled soul rather than pouring out his heart in repentance to God. Saul has rebelled against the Lord and is attempting to rule without reference to God's will or direction.

In our next chapter we will see how this will lead to his final downfall.

## LESSONS

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Saul's tragic life is so full of important lessons for us today, even though we live in a much different culture and time:

### LESSON #1

#### **SUCCESS IS NO GUARANTEE AGAINST JUDGMENT**

Saul continued to reign, continued to have the allegiance of the people, continued to win military battles, but this was not because God was pleased with him. It suited God's overall purpose to keep him there and to protect the nation, but Saul's judgment was coming.

This should help us to realize that we must not judge our standing with God based on how we feel or how successful we are. The basis for our judgment will be our obedience to His word (John 12:48).

### LESSON #2

#### **OBEDIENCE IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN RITUAL**

In both the Old and New Testaments God has ordained certain rituals that express deeper meanings and truths:

- The sacrificing of animals to represent the result of sin and need for atonement (Leviticus 4:35; 5:10).

- Baptism in water to express removal of impurity and transition between the old and new life (Romans 6:3-5).
- Communion to represent and remember the body and blood of Jesus offered for us (I Corinthians 11:23-26).

Rituals are important and central to our religion, but they are not the substance of our religion. Obedience to God, this is what our faith is about. This is the story that our rituals tell.

Some people think that performing the rituals of our faith in exact accordance to the Bible is what our religion is about. When we take this approach, we eventually make the ritual our god and sacrifice our time, our life and our passion to its promotion and repetition. Rituals are important, but only in the sense that they represent our daily effort to obey God and follow His will for our lives.

Saul thought he would cover his disobedience with an elaborate and expensive sacrifice. He excused his disobedience by claiming that he kept the animals alive so he could offer sacrifice (ritual) to God. But God had told him to destroy them, not use them for sacrifice. Samuel cut to the heart of the matter when he said in chapter 15:

<sup>22</sup> 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.

## LESSON #3

### **THERE IS ALWAYS HOPE**

Even after Saul disobeyed the first time in the matter of the sacrifice, God gave him another chance with the military campaign against the Amalekites. Who knows if God would have spared Saul if he would have done right the second time around? God kept him alive and on the throne for 32 years (I Samuel 13:1) and at any time Saul could have repented, could have asked God to re-direct his way, but he didn't.

Many times, it is not our sins that defeat us, it is our refusal to ask God for help to change that does us in. He who made the moon and stars, can He not change a man's heart? Saul did not avail himself of God's mercy, not because the mercy was not there, he just did not ask for it.

There is always hope despite our failures. The God of hope, the Lord of love, the Father of mercy wants to give us another chance, we simply have to ask in humble obedience.



# 3.

## King Saul: On the Edge of Greatness - Part 3

We are studying the life of King Saul as a way to learn what not to do with our own lives and how to avoid wasting our potential for spiritual greatness as he did. We've seen how God chose him to be king and how, at the very beginning, he showed great promise as a leader of God's people. In the previous chapter we also reviewed his unfortunate decline in favor with God and the people as four patterns of destructive behavior emerged:

1. **A pattern of disobedience** — He wouldn't do things exactly as God wanted him to.
2. **A pattern of instability** — He became flighty and foolish in his decision-making because he didn't seek God's counsel.
3. **A pattern of open rebellion** — He refused to take responsibility for his actions, blaming others and rejecting God's discipline.
4. **A pattern of fear** — The early stages of insanity set in as Saul becomes paranoid about his position, seeing everything as a threat.

This fear so immobilizes Saul that he is no longer able to lead effectively. It is at this moment in his life that David steps into the picture.

## **SAUL AND DAVID — I SAMUEL 16-17**

In the midst of Saul's paranoia God tells Samuel, the prophet, to go and anoint a new king. In I Samuel 16, Samuel is led by God to a man called Jesse and his family of eight sons. After meeting seven of Jesse's sons, God instructs Samuel to anoint the eighth and youngest son, David, to become the next king of Israel. The Bible says that from this day forward the Spirit of God was with David, and he grew in strength and wisdom.

The story now switches back to King Saul, and we see his mental state deteriorating quickly. Desperate to soothe his nerves, Saul asks his men to find a good musician to play for him. In a providential coincidence they recommend David, son of Jesse, and with the king's permission, bring David to serve Saul as court musician. At this point, even though he has been anointed by Samuel, David is dividing his time between tending sheep for his father and occasionally providing music to comfort the troubled king.

There is calm for a period, but a very real threat from the Philistines is brewing that would thrust David into the spotlight and make him Saul's enemy and target for many years.

## **THE ALLIANCE AND THE ANNIHILATION — I SAMUEL 17-20**

Saul and David begin as allies when the nation is threatened by Goliath and the Philistines. This is the well-known story where David single-handedly kills the giant and saves the Israelite army from shame and loss. What we realize, because of our study of Saul, is that the reason the Jews were in such trouble was the pathetic state of fear and conflict that their king was in. Saul still believed in the presence of God, but no longer relied on God's saving power. He trusted in military might, and because of this was paralyzed by fear and had poor judgment.

We know that David won the battle against Goliath, the Philistine champion, and because of this he also won the hearts of the people. Saul

took him into his family and his court, but eventually would grow jealous of David's success and potential threat to the throne. (He didn't realize that God had already chosen David to succeed him.) Later on, we see Saul try to kill David or send him on suicide missions in order to get rid of him, but David survives and grows stronger.

One of David's strongest allies and friends during this time is Saul's son, Jonathan. Despite his father's murderous plots against David, a beautiful friendship develops between the young prince and the heir to the throne. So united are they that Jonathan actually defends David to Saul. So demented is Saul that he even attacks his own son because of his defense of David. In the end, Jonathan protects David but even this is not enough to keep the future king safe from Saul's jealous rage.

## **SAUL'S TOTAL MADNESS — I SAMUEL 21-24**

By the time we get to chapter 21, Saul is completely out of control. He is continually focused on finding David and destroying him. His reasoning is that if David becomes king (by popular acclaim) his son Jonathan will lose the throne. Of course, he doesn't realize that it is not David's popularity with the people that will gain him the crown, it is God's anointing that will put him on the throne, and he already has this! Saul's constant campaign against him is forcing David to continually be on the move, to collect an army loyal to him, to learn about military strategy, diplomacy, management, all done while on the run.

In chapter 21 we read of an episode where David entered a town to search for food for himself and his men. The only food available at this place was the "showbread" that the priests ate after a sacrifice was made. Since there was nothing else available David took this and continued his journey. Saul found out that the priests in this town had provided David with food and, as retaliation for an imagined act of treason, massacred all of the priests serving the Lord there. This was his most despicable act. It was so bad that even some of Saul's men refused to carry out the execution order when it was first given. By this point Saul had truly become mad, killing not only his so-called enemies, but also murdering the servants of the Lord. After this event, Saul steps up his relentless pursuit of David and seeks the aid of his countrymen in

tracking him down. He is out of control and completely fixated on destroying David. Thankfully, God thwarts Saul's campaign by sending the Philistines to attack once again. This diverts Saul's attention from David for a while as he leads the troops against this old enemy.

In chapter 24 there is a poignant moment where David comes into contact with Saul without Saul's awareness. Saul is relieving himself in a cave where David happens to be hiding with his men. David could easily kill the king but chooses to spare his life. After their encounter, David (from a distance) shows Saul a piece of his cloak that he had secretly cut away in the darkness of the cave. This he did to demonstrate how close he had been to him and how easily he could have killed him.

Saul has a moment of clarity and recognizes that David is truly innocent and without evil intentions towards him, and he tells him so. Unfortunately, this softening is short lived and his mad and jealous self returns in short order. Seizing the opportunity, he takes advantage of David's goodness by extracting a promise from him not to harm his family in the future. The evidence of David's true intentions and character are before him, but Saul reverts to his old fears quickly renewing his vow to kill David in a foolish attempt to hold on to a crown that he has lost long ago.

## **FINAL STAGES — I SAMUEL 25-31**

In chapter 26 we again read of an opportunity that David has to kill Saul and end his problems, but he refrains from doing so out of respect for the role of the king anointed by God. In this instance, Saul again acknowledges that he is wrong, blesses David and actually prophesies concerning his future success. In this we see God continually working in both men's lives: David, through God's help, has an opportunity to take matters into his own hands but he doesn't. This is a great example of God allowing someone to choose a lesser opportunity, a "plan B" solution for their lives, but refusing it in order to wait on God's blessing and full will to be done. Saul, on the other hand, is granted a reprieve, a chance to repent and change, which he does for the moment but soon falls back. Repentance would have him hand the kingdom over to David, then he would gain peace of mind and entry into the true kingdom in the

process. Unfortunately, he exchanged his soul for a kingdom that really wasn't his to hold on to anymore.

As we move into chapter 28 the Philistines are attacking once again and now Saul has no one to help.

- Not David, who at least helped him fight this common enemy.
- Not Samuel, who provided guidance in the past (he has died).

Saul is now mortally afraid and without a plan, so he turns to a "medium" or witch for advice which is against the law and he knew it! He is as low morally as he can go. Even though she is a medium, God uses this woman to speak to the king through the voice of Samuel. God tells Saul why he has failed and what will happen to him the next day. Even here God reaches out to Saul, but he refuses to repent and cast himself on God's mercy.

In chapters 30 and 31 we see a final contrast between Saul and David as David goes forward and defeats the Amalekites while Saul and Jonathan are both killed in their battle against Israel's other enemy, the Philistines. Saul is wounded and commits suicide rather than be taken prisoner, but right until the end there is no call out to God for help or forgiveness. His death is not noble in that he falls on his own sword in defeat and his body is desecrated by the enemy (head cut off and body hung on a wall for display). Soon after, however, Saul's body is recovered by his men, cremated, and buried under a tree. Certainly not a dignified way for a Jewish king to be buried.

Even though his life was a failure and his death dishonorable, David eulogizes him and his son after their death (II Samuel 1). What is interesting in his eulogy is not what is said, it is what is left unsaid:

David says that Saul was:

- A handsome man
- A good soldier
- A king who brought prosperity
- He will be missed

But David didn't say that:

- He was a man of God
- He was a man of faith
- He was a man of honor

When you compare what was said about Saul to what later was said about David:

- That he was God's son
- That he was God's servant
- That he was God's friend

You realize that Saul had a chance at greatness but never truly arrived at the level that his successor, David, finally achieved.

## LESSONS

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As we complete this brief study of Saul's life and rule, I'd like to draw a couple of general lessons that we can all apply:

### LESSON #1

#### **GREATNESS CAN ONLY BE ACHIEVED ON GOD'S TERMS, NOT OURS**

In order to be successful in God's eyes, we must do things according to God's commands and for His purpose. In the world we celebrate rebels, those who break all the rules and defy authority, but we can't impress God with this type of behavior. He wants the complete opposite, a

person who is hungry to do what is right, a person who yearns to know and do His will, not our will.

Saul tried to reign and be a great king according to his own terms, and he failed miserably. A person's stature with God is directly proportionate to his/her obedience to God's will. Don't misunderstand me here, we are saved by faith and faith is what God wants from us, but faith is expressed through our attempt to do God's will. To be a great person of faith one must be a great person of obedience.

## LESSON #2

### **THE WAGE OF SIN IS DEATH**

Paul explains in Romans 6:23 that the end result of sin in our lives is death. We need to understand that death isn't simply the final separation of the soul from the body. Death has many forms, all of which eventually culminate in the separation of the body and spirit. We see the face of death:

- In war, hatred, and violence
- In laziness and despair
- In dishonesty and immorality
- In pride, foolishness, and disbelief
- In sorrow, pain, and loss

These and so many others are the effect of death on our lives, and sin is the root cause of all. Saul never weighed the consequences of his sins (he was arrogant and foolish) and these brought failure, fear and ultimately led to his death. If we learn anything from Saul, we should learn that there are always consequences for our sins, always. This should make us think twice before we knowingly disobey or ignore the Lord's commands.

## LESSON #3

### **GOD WANTS TO SAVE US**

Look at all the times God reached out to Saul in order to save him.

- Chances to do better
- Chances to reconcile with David
- Chances to repent and start over

Saul ignored or rejected every opportunity set before him by God. God treats us the same way; we also have many chances to do better, start over, make things right:

- Every time your conscience twinges, God is calling you.
- Every time you are convicted by something in the Bible, God is calling you.
- Every time you attend services, God is calling you in the “invitation.”

Every day we have ample opportunity from God to be saved, to be restored, to deepen our commitment to Jesus Christ. The same God who reached out to Saul reaches out to us today (because He loves us and wants to save us).

We’ve learned a valuable lesson if, unlike Saul, we respond to God in allowing Him to save us, correct us and direct us to the greatness He wants for each of us.



# 4. Giant-Killer: David and Goliath

I SAMUEL 17

What does it take to be a winner? Some say it is a combination of skill and luck. To be a winner you have to be good at something, work hard and be at the right place at the right time. This, people say, is what makes a winner in sports.

Of course, not everything in life is about sports. What about winning a war, or winning over discouragement, illness, or loneliness, what about winning over fear, bad habits or dangerous situations? Sometimes ordinary people have to face extraordinary challenges in life, situations that seem impossible to overcome. In order to find inspiration for moments like these I want to retell the familiar story about a “little guy,” a “nobody,” who faced a great challenge and won the day. This is the story of David and Goliath.

## THE SCENE — I SAMUEL 17:1-3

First of all, let us set the scene:

<sup>1</sup> Now the Philistines gathered their armies together to battle, and were gathered at Sochoh, which belongs to Judah; they encamped between Sochoh and Azekah, in Ephes Dammim.

<sup>2</sup> And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered together, and they encamped in the Valley of Elah, and drew up in battle array against the Philistines. <sup>3</sup> The Philistines stood on a mountain on one side, and Israel stood on a mountain on the other side, with a valley between them.

The Philistines were the archenemy of the Israelites. These people lived on a strip of territory with the Mediterranean Sea on one side and the Israelite nation on the other. They continually tried to expand their territory by attacking their Jewish neighbors to the east. In addition to this, the Bible says that God often used the Philistines' aggression to punish the Israelites because of their unfaithful and disobedient conduct.

When Saul, the first king of Israel, was anointed many of his initial military campaigns were aimed at pushing back the Philistines into their own territory. When he succeeded, there would be peace. This period of peace did not last long however since Saul himself disobeyed God and the Lord roused the Philistines to once again come and attack Israel, this time with a new secret weapon.

This is the situation we find as we begin reading chapter 17 in the book of Samuel. The opposing armies were grouped on two ridges facing each other with a valley separating them. They could see and hear one another but had to go down into the valley to fight. It was a feature of ancient warfare that opposing armies would face, examine, and taunt each other before entering combat. Today we would call this "talking trash" to each other. So, this is the scene before us as we see the Philistines roll out a new weapon of war.

## THE CHAMPION — I SAMUEL 17:4-7

This fearsome weapon was a giant fighter named Goliath.

<sup>4</sup> And a champion went out from the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath, from Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span. <sup>5</sup> He had a bronze helmet on his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail, and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of bronze. <sup>6</sup> And he had bronze armor on his legs and a bronze javelin between his shoulders. <sup>7</sup> Now the staff of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and his iron spearhead weighed six hundred shekels; and a shield-bearer went before him.

Try to imagine an age where there were no long-range weapons, where the majority of the fighting was hand-to-hand combat. Now imagine how intimidating this champion was. At a time where men's average height and weight were around 5'6" and 150 pounds, Goliath, the champion was:

- 10 feet tall (3m)
- Weighed 400 pounds (180kg)
- Carried 125 pounds of armor (60kg)
- His spear was 12 feet long (4m)
- The tip of the spear weighed 15 pounds (7kg)
- He even had someone else carry his shield

This was the secret weapon that the Philistines unveiled on this battlefield. A giant champion superior to any man in either army!

## THE CHALLENGE — I SAMUEL 17:8-11

I believe that most of us are familiar with the idea of psychological warfare. Tricks and ideas used to discourage or confuse the enemy. This

type of approach is nothing new. Armies were using it thousands of years ago, and the Bible records a prime example of it here.

<sup>8</sup> Then he stood and cried out to the armies of Israel, and said to them, “Why have you come out to line up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and you the servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. <sup>9</sup> If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants. But if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us.” <sup>10</sup> And the Philistine said, “I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together.” <sup>11</sup> When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.

Each day Goliath, the massive Philistine champion, would come out and challenge someone from the Israelite side to come out and fight one-on-one, man-to-man (winner take all). Whoever won became master and whoever lost became a slave. With one contest the Israelite nation could lose its freedom.

In verse 16 of this passage, it says that this taunting, this trash-talk, went on every day, morning, and night for 40 days. Talk about mind games! Who could fight a giant? What was worse was that each day as the giant came out to taunt Saul and his army, other nations were getting the news that Israel, God’s people, were being humiliated and defeated by a single man, and defeated without a single battle! Every day as Goliath came forth to successfully face them down, the Israelite army could feel their courage and self-esteem shrinking as their fear and shame grew. No one dared answer the call of the giant, except one.

## **THE CHALLENGER — I SAMUEL 17:12-24**

In verses 12-24, the writer introduces a new character on the scene as the story shifts gears. David is the youngest of eight sons. He wasn’t permitted to go to the battle, he had to stay home to take care of his father’s sheep. As the youngest, his father used David as a messenger boy to bring food and get information from his other sons who are at the front lines. David was a teenager at this time.

At this point, David is a shepherd boy not aware of the great challenge that will face him the next time he goes on an errand to the battlefield and for his father.

## THE TRANSFORMATION — I SAMUEL 17:25-37

As we continue reading, we see three things that happen to transform this humble shepherd boy into one of the greatest heroes/winners of all time. The first step in this transformation:

### 1. He hears and accepts the challenge

<sup>25</sup> So the men of Israel said, "Have you seen this man who has come up? Surely he has come up to defy Israel; and it shall be that the man who kills him the king will enrich with great riches, will give him his daughter, and give his father's house exemption from taxes in Israel." <sup>26</sup> Then David spoke to the men who stood by him, saying, "What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" <sup>27</sup> And the people answered him in this manner, saying, "So shall it be done for the man who kills him." <sup>28</sup> Now Eliab his oldest brother heard when he spoke to the men; and Eliab's anger was aroused against David, and he said, "Why did you come down here? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your pride and the insolence of your heart, for you have come down to see the battle." <sup>29</sup> And David said, "What have I done now? Is there not a cause?" <sup>30</sup> Then he turned from him toward another and said the same thing; and these people answered him as the first ones did.

By now, the army is visibly afraid, another day or so and the Philistines will cross the valley and destroy them all. Notice that his brothers are angry that he is there to witness their shame. King Saul is offering a reward to someone who will fight the giant. Actually, he is offering a position in the royal family and the money to fit in. The problem is that

he is desperately looking for someone to do what he himself should be doing!

David, however, hears and accepts the challenge. He doesn't just hear the words of the giant; he is able to see exactly what the problem is. Despite his youth and inexperience at warfare, he recognizes that the insult isn't only directed against the army, the king or even the nation of Israel; the insult is actually against God because if you insult God's army or king, you insult God Himself.

And so, David's transformation begins with a vision, an understanding of what the true problem is, and how serious it is.

The second step in David's transformation:

## **2. He decides to do something**

<sup>31</sup> Now when the words which David spoke were heard, they reported them to Saul; and he sent for him. <sup>32</sup> Then David said to Saul, "Let no man's heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine."

David doesn't react with fear. This young man burns with righteous indignation (holy anger). It was so wrong to insult God, and someone had to do something about that. He decided that if no one else was going to, he would do something about it.

This brings us to the third and most important step in David's transformation; he saw the problem, he decided to do something:

## **3. He put his confidence in God for victory**

<sup>33</sup> And Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are a youth, and he a man of war from his youth." <sup>34</sup> But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep his father's sheep, and when a lion or a bear

came and took a lamb out of the flock, <sup>35</sup> I went out after it and struck it, and delivered the lamb from its mouth; and when it arose against me, I caught it by its beard, and struck and killed it. <sup>36</sup> Your servant has killed both lion and bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God.” <sup>37</sup> Moreover David said, “The Lord, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.” And Saul said to David, “Go, and the Lord be with you!”

David had faced danger and death from wild animals while guarding his sheep and had defeated them with his bare hands! He had spent many lonely nights by himself in the mountains, and these had given him a lot of time to be with God, to know and trust Him for protection. What was the difference: a lion, a bear, or this Philistine animal? David would risk his life and go down into the valley to fight, and he was ready for battle because the transformation from shepherd boy to warrior was complete:

### **A. He was right**

- Insulting God was wrong, and this guy had to be put down.
- “Rightness” gives you power.

### **B. He was set**

- Action was needed and he made the decision to act.  
(So many whine or criticize, but few take action.)

### **C. He was confident**

- David knew that his victory would come from God, not himself or his strengths; so he went into battle with the right kind of confidence.

Transformations occur when we make up our minds to do right and trust God for the strength to do what is right.

## THE VICTORY — I SAMUEL 17:38-52

Our story now shifts back to the scene of battle.

<sup>38</sup> So Saul clothed David with his armor, and he put a bronze helmet on his head; he also clothed him with a coat of mail.

<sup>39</sup> David fastened his sword to his armor and tried to walk, for he had not tested them. And David said to Saul, "I cannot walk with these, for I have not tested them." So David took them off.

<sup>40</sup> Then he took his staff in his hand; and he chose for himself five smooth stones from the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag, in a pouch which he had, and his sling was in his hand. And he drew near to the Philistine.

At first King Saul gives David his armor, sword, and helmet, but this equipment proves to be too bulky for David. He chooses to fight with his own weapon which is the shepherd's sling:

- This was a primitive slingshot where you placed a rock in a patch of leather connected by two lengths of rope and swung the rock in a circular motion over your head to create speed of delivery before releasing.
- These were deadly and very accurate within 100 feet.
- This is how David had killed animals that had attacked his sheep.

<sup>41</sup> So the Philistine came, and began drawing near to David, and the man who bore the shield went before him. <sup>42</sup> And when the Philistine looked about and saw David, he disdained him; for he was only a youth, ruddy and good-looking. <sup>43</sup> So the Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods.

<sup>44</sup> And the Philistine said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field!"



David and Goliath confront each other. They're like two prize-fighters trying to psyche each other out. Goliath is angry that the Israelites have sent a mere boy with no weapons to fight him. He curses David and threatens to kill him and give his body to the animals to eat.

<sup>45</sup> Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. <sup>46</sup> This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. <sup>47</sup> Then all this assembly shall know that the Lord does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's, and He will give you into our hands."

David is not afraid and pronounces not a curse, but a judgment on Goliath in the name of the Lord. He tells him that because he insulted the Lord, both he and his army will be defeated by the Lord. This is exactly why a teenager with no weapons of war was sent, to show where the power for victory was really coming from. David had five stones but needed only one, knocking out the giant with his first shot. He then jumped on the fallen warrior and cut off his head with his own sword. (This was akin to being shot with your own weapon; talk about humiliation.)

When Goliath's men see that their secret weapon has been defeated, they lose courage and run, chased back to their boarder by the jubilant Israeli army.

## SUMMARY

Literary historians tell us that this story is the basis for every story where the "little guy" takes on the "big guy" and wins. This is where the idea comes from. But this story is special because it also teaches us what it takes to win spiritual, emotional, and social battles, not just sporting events or wars. In David's case, he defeated the giant because:

## **1. He was a child of God**

- The real difference between Goliath and David was not size or strength, it was who they were.
- Goliath was a pagan, a blasphemer, a sinner.
- David was one of God's chosen people, a believing, obedient, holy child of God.

Power to overcome is given because of our relationship with God, not our personal strength. All the working out in the gym won't help if God is not your helper!

## **2. He was zealous for God**

The word "zealous" means jealous. It means that the things of God are important to you. David respected the things and the person of God. He was concerned about an insult to God and His people. This zeal is what inflamed his courage to go out and fight, even if he was outmatched! He was spiritually pumped!

It is this same quality that moved Noah to build the boat; John the Baptist to preach; Jesus to go to the cross for our sins; the Apostles to risk their lives preaching the gospel. Zeal is that quality that separates those who are just fooling around for Christ from those who are becoming fools for Christ.

David was a fool for God because only a fool, a zealous fool, would go fight a giant with a sling shot.

## **3. He had confidence in God**

- The Philistines relied on size and strength alone; David relied on God for His size and strength.
- David knew from experience that the Lord saved those who called upon Him for help.

David was confident because with the God of salvation on his side, he could not lose.

All right, now you have the story of David and Goliath, an event that took place some 3000 years ago. Let us bring this battle into the twenty-first century and see if it is relevant to us today by asking the following questions:

## “WHO IS YOUR GOLIATH?”

Each person has his/her own personal Goliath facing them each day:

- Worry, bad habits, family problems
- Fear of death, money problems, issues dealing with sex

You see, every day our own personal Goliath gets up with us in the morning and challenges us to come out and fight. And every night he taunts us for having refused.

Let me ask you when it comes to your personal Goliath, “Are you winning?” “Have you cut off his head yet?” Or are you like Saul, shrinking back in fear, paralyzed by his size and power?

## **DO YOU REALLY WANT TO BE A GIANT KILLER?**

Well, I have good news for you: you can become a victor, today! The challenge and the victory came in one day for David and it can come in one day for you. Here’s where and how to start:

### **1. Become a child of God today**

You can’t defeat Goliath unless you are a child of God. And you become God’s child when you are born again by the water and the Spirit (John 3:5). The water and Spirit John refers to here are further explained by Peter when he was encouraging the people he had just preached to, to become Christians. In Acts 2:37-38 he tells his audience that those

who repent and are baptized in the name of Jesus receive not only forgiveness for their sins but the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as well. It is with the confidence of a forgiven sinner and the power of God's Spirit living inside of us that we are thus able to take on the Goliaths in our lives.

*The victory is yours if...*

## **2. You become zealous for God**

Become a fool for God in your good conduct, your attitude, your Bible study, your worship, your efforts to bring others to Christ. Zeal for God generates courage, and courage moves us into the arena to fight our personal Goliaths.

*You'll cut off his head if...*

## **3. You trust in God for the final victory**

If God can create billions of stars each larger than the earth; if God can create a human life from the dust of the ground; surely, He can give you the strength to take care of a few puny giants! The final victory may be long in coming, but when you put your trust in God, you know that the first and most crucial step towards victory has been taken.

So, what will it be? What will you choose? Are you going to come down into the valley to fight, or are you going to stay up on the hill and remain afraid and defeated? Will this be the day that you become a giant killer?

# 5.

## David and Abigail

I SAMUEL 25:1-42

This is the second lesson in the section of this book that looks at the life of King David as we examine various kings in the Bible to not only familiarize ourselves with their lives but also to learn something about our own lives from studying theirs.

The story of King David's relationship with Abigail not only teaches us about him but also reveals what is pleasing to God in a man or woman who claims to be a believer.

Abigail's story is neatly laid out in I Samuel 25:

<sup>1</sup> Then Samuel died; and the Israelites gathered together and lamented for him, and buried him at his home in Ramah. And David arose and went down to the Wilderness of Paran. <sup>2</sup> Now there was a man in Maon whose business was in Carmel, and the man was very rich. He had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. And he was shearing his sheep in Carmel.

<sup>3</sup> The name of the man was Nabal, and the name of his wife Abigail. And she was a woman of good understanding and beautiful appearance; but the man was harsh and evil in his doings. He was of the house of Caleb.

The first verses situate us as far as time is concerned. David has been anointed king and heir to Saul's throne because God was displeased with Saul's disobedient spirit. During this time, however, Saul continues to reign over the land and maintains an insane jealousy of David and his favor from God and the people. We know that Saul continually seeks to kill David thinking this will preserve his hold on power. As a result, David is forced to stay on the run with his band of volunteers dodging Saul's troops.

David and his men survive in the countryside by providing protection to small villages against foreign raiders and thieves. In return for this protection, he is provided food and supplies as well as a network of informers who protect him from the king and his many efforts at capturing him.

This is the situation as Samuel, the prophet and judge who anointed both Saul and David, dies. David, feeling the loss, heads out into the desert to hide from Saul and plot out his next move. We see David approach this rich businessman for a share of the profits made possible because of the protection afforded his employees as they worked with the animals. This was not extortion, there was no threat here. Without David's protection, this man would have lost men and animals to thieves and raiding parties. David simply came to claim a share of the profits and to celebrate with the others a good and profitable day.

<sup>9</sup> So when David's young men came, they spoke to Nabal according to all these words in the name of David, and waited.

<sup>10</sup> Then Nabal answered David's servants, and said, "Who is David, and who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants nowadays who break away each one from his master. <sup>11</sup> Shall I then take my bread and my water and my meat that I have killed for my shearers, and give it to men when I do not know where they are from?" <sup>12</sup> So David's young men turned on their heels and went back; and they came and told him all these words. <sup>13</sup> Then David said to his men, "Every man gird on his sword." So every man girded on his sword, and David also girded on his sword. And about four hundred men went with David, and two hundred stayed with the supplies.

Note the insult in Nabal's response to David's request:

- He doesn't plead poverty or inconvenience.
- He knows who David is (son of Jesse) and his position, but he refuses to acknowledge David's anointing by God.
- He says that David is nothing more than a runaway slave, not the future king of Israel.
- Nabal even dismisses David's efforts to help him and refuses to give him any food or reward.

David's men return and tell David of this insult. David straps on his sword and prepares horsemen to go and destroy Nabal and his entire household. Note here that there is cause for David to be angry, but killing everyone in Nabal's house is not justified. Nabal is a fool, but being a fool is not a capital offense.

In doing this thing David's work in helping and protecting the people does turn into extortion. In effect, he is saying, "If you don't pay me, I'll kill you."

<sup>14</sup> Now one of the young men told Abigail, Nabal's wife, saying, "Look, David sent messengers from the wilderness to greet our master; and he reviled them. <sup>15</sup> But the men were very good to us, and we were not hurt, nor did we miss anything as long as we accompanied them, when we were in the fields.

<sup>16</sup> They were a wall to us both by night and day, all the time we were with them keeping the sheep. <sup>17</sup> Now therefore, know and consider what you will do, for harm is determined against our master and against all his household. For he is such a scoundrel that one cannot speak to him." <sup>18</sup> Then Abigail made haste and took two hundred loaves of bread, two skins of wine, five sheep already dressed, five seahs of roasted grain, one hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs, and loaded them on donkeys. <sup>19</sup> And she said to her servants, "Go on before me; see, I am coming after you." But she did not

tell her husband Nabal. <sup>20</sup> So it was, as she rode on the donkey, that she went down under cover of the hill; and there were David and his men, coming down toward her, and she met them. <sup>21</sup> Now David had said, “Surely in vain I have protected all that this fellow has in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that belongs to him. And he has repaid me evil for good. <sup>22</sup> May God do so, and more also, to the enemies of David, if I leave one male of all who belong to him by morning light.”

The writer now focuses on Nabal’s wife as she finds out what her husband has done and begins the attempt to save him, her household and herself.

The writer explains that David’s request was just, and Nabal’s response quite rude and ungrateful. So, Abigail sends a large provision of food (which Nabal should have done) and prepares to go to David to plead their case in person. Note also how “self-righteous” David feels (verse 22).

<sup>23</sup> Now when Abigail saw David, she dismounted quickly from the donkey, fell on her face before David, and bowed down to the ground.

Abigail greets him with great respect, respect reserved for a king.

<sup>24</sup> So she fell at his feet and said: “On me, my lord, on me let this iniquity be! And please let your maidservant speak in your ears, and hear the words of your maidservant. <sup>25</sup> Please, let not my lord regard this scoundrel Nabal. For as his name is, so is he: Nabal is his name, and folly is with him! But I, your maidservant, did not see the young men of my lord whom you sent.”

Note also how she takes the blame for the negligence and insult towards David and his people. By taking responsibility, she makes David deal



with her now. This was not manipulative on her part, some of the blame did lie with her:

- She could have made the gift in advance; she had the power to do so.
- She either was not informed of David's work or had overlooked the payment.

Either way, she is here now, takes the blame now, makes things right now, and is ready for the consequences now.

<sup>26</sup> Now therefore, my lord, as the Lord lives and as your soul lives, since the Lord has held you back from coming to bloodshed and from avenging yourself with your own hand, now then, let your enemies and those who seek harm for my lord be as Nabal. <sup>27</sup> And now this present which your maidservant has brought to my lord, let it be given to the young men who follow my lord.

Abigail shows both her submissiveness and her intelligence as she puts the issue into perspective for David. She appeals to him, not to take his own revenge. This would be wrong. What her husband did was wrong, she admits it, but taking revenge would make two wrongs. She says, in effect, Nabal is so evil he's not worth it. Allow the gift I have brought to cover the offense.

<sup>28</sup> Please forgive the trespass of your maidservant. For the Lord will certainly make for my lord an enduring house, because my lord fights the battles of the Lord, and evil is not found in you throughout your days. <sup>29</sup> Yet a man has risen to pursue you and seek your life, but the life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living with the Lord your God; and the lives of your enemies He shall sling out, as from the pocket of a sling.

Unlike her husband, she recognizes his anointing as king and praises his future rule. She also acknowledges her loyalty and belief in him, unlike her husband who followed Saul and his rule.

Note also her use of the imagery of a slingshot in dealing with his enemies, something David would recognize and appreciate (giant-killer). That's really what this was all about: Nabal didn't believe.

<sup>30</sup> And it shall come to pass, when the Lord has done for my lord according to all the good that He has spoken concerning you, and has appointed you ruler over Israel, <sup>31</sup> that this will be no grief to you, nor offense of heart to my lord, either that you have shed blood without cause, or that my lord has avenged himself. But when the Lord has dealt well with my lord, then remember your maidservant."

Here Abigail makes her second appeal, this time based on David's future leadership. She points out that when he does ascend to the throne, it shouldn't be with innocent blood on his hands. She also asks him to remember her when all of this comes about.

<sup>32</sup> Then David said to Abigail: "Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me! <sup>33</sup> And blessed is your advice and blessed are you, because you have kept me this day from coming to bloodshed and from avenging myself with my own hand. <sup>34</sup> For indeed, as the Lord God of Israel lives, who has kept me back from hurting you, unless you had hurried and come to meet me, surely by morning light no males would have been left to Nabal!" <sup>35</sup> So David received from her hand what she had brought him, and said to her, "Go up in peace to your house. See, I have heeded your voice and respected your person."

Have you ever dodged a bullet by listening to a friend's advice?

- Don't marry that person.

- Don't invest in that stock.
- Don't buy that car.

The relief and joy you feel when the advice turns out to be true. This is how David feels and reacts when he realizes that he could have wrecked his entire future with one rash act provoked by a fool. David acknowledges that she is sent by God. He is amazed, delighted, relieved and merciful.

<sup>36</sup> Now Abigail went to Nabal, and there he was, holding a feast in his house, like the feast of a king. And Nabal's heart was merry within him, for he was very drunk; therefore she told him nothing, little or much, until morning light. <sup>37</sup> So it was, in the morning, when the wine had gone from Nabal, and his wife had told him these things, that his heart died within him, and he became like a stone. <sup>38</sup> Then it happened, after about ten days, that the Lord struck Nabal, and he died.

As it is written, "Revenge is Mine sayeth the Lord."  
(Deuteronomy 32:35)

And so, it is with Nabal as he dies from a heart attack after a drunken party. It wasn't that he was just a fool, it was that he treated God's servant badly, that's always dangerous, then and now.

<sup>39</sup> So when David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, "Blessed be the Lord, who has pleaded the cause of my reproach from the hand of Nabal, and has kept His servant from evil! For the Lord has returned the wickedness of Nabal on his own head." And David sent and proposed to Abigail, to take her as his wife. <sup>40</sup> When the servants of David had come to Abigail at Carmel, they spoke to her saying, "David sent us to you, to ask you to become his wife." <sup>41</sup> Then she arose, bowed her face to the earth, and said, "Here is your maidservant, a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord." <sup>42</sup> So Abigail rose in haste and rode on a donkey, attended by five of her maidens;

and she followed the messengers of David, and became his wife.

David rejoices that God has avenged him and that he has been spared making a terrible mistake. His offer of marriage to a rich widow also solves his food and supply problem and guarantees that he won't be put into this position again.

Note how beautifully Abigail answers his proposal, with confidence and submission, true to her nature as a noble woman of her time. She was David's second wife and with her he had one son named Chilean (Daniel).

## **ABIGAIL'S QUALITIES**

This is a wonderful story on many levels, but I think it especially develops the character of what a godly woman can aspire to be. When we look at Abigail in this passage, we see several characteristics that are quite appealing in a woman, aside from her great beauty:

### **1. She was decisive**

Once she knew the problem, she made a decision and set her entire household into action.

### **2. She was brave**

- She didn't know what to expect when she met David. He could have just killed her on the road.
- One woman vs. 400 armed men.
- Bravery is facing your fear, instead of running away from it.

### **3. She was wise**

- Without being dishonest or manipulative, she showed that she could respond to a foolish husband or a young king.

#### **4. She was diplomatic**

- Her approach and attitude toward David was respectful without being cloy or syrupy.
- She talked to a king with confidence and even with a little aggressiveness.

#### **5. She was pure**

- Abigail didn't depend on sex-appeal or beauty to win David over.
- She remained faithful to her husband, even if he was insufferable.

#### **6. She was insightful**

- Notice how she put her finger on the real danger.
- The disaster awaiting was David's potential sin in taking his own revenge. She made him see this, despite his hurt pride and anger.

#### **7. She was honest**

- She was honest with both David and her husband.
- She acknowledged her husband's fault and her responsibility with David.
- She also told her husband the truth about what she had done. Both these situations involved great risk for her.

#### **8. She was humble**

- Her attitude was filled with meekness and submissiveness with both men, David and Nabal.

- Note how none of her other qualities are diminished in any way by her humility. As a matter of fact, her other virtues are heightened when seen alongside her submissiveness.

## **9. She was patient**

- Let's face it, she was married to an evil boor of a man.
- She had no children.
- She could have cried, she could have left, she could have conspired to have him killed. After all, David was on his way to do just that.
- She could have pleaded for her own life (kill him, let me live), but she didn't, she saved her husband and household's lives.
- She didn't excuse him, she worked with what she had, patiently waiting upon the Lord.

## **10. She was truly spiritual**

- Her appeal to David was based on scripture, Deuteronomy 32:35, Revenge is mine...
- Her encouragement to David was an acknowledgment of God's choice of David as king, something her husband could not see.
- She knew the Word, the Lord, the Lord's anointed and was a willing servant of all three.

I want you to note that Abigail's beauty was not listed as one of her qualities in my observation of her. So many women today focus so much of their time, effort and attention on beauty rather than the things that Abigail possessed which surpassed her beauty and made it a non-issue. You see, Abigail's beauty did not factor into what:

- Saved her life and the life of her household.

- Drew her to David. In praising her, David never mentioned her beauty.
- It wasn't beauty that made her a useful and pleasing servant of God.

## **LESSONS FROM ABIGAIL**

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There are some important lessons we can learn from Abigail, not just lessons for women, but lessons for everyone.

### **LESSON #1**

#### **GOD CAN USE YOU NO MATTER WHO YOU ARE MARRIED TO**

Abigail had an unhappy marriage, but her goal was not how to have a good marriage or how do I get out of her marriage. Her goal was, "How do I serve the Lord despite the marriage I am in?" Many people think only about the marriage and how to solve the "problem." They go for counseling to learn:

- How do I change my mate?
- How do I get out without feeling guilty?
- How do I find a new partner?

If people concentrated more on how they could personally be more focused and devoted to the Lord in love and service:

- This would help their existing marriages.
- This would help single people get their priorities straight.
- This would prepare unmarried people to succeed in subsequent marriages.

I mean, what good is finding a new partner for a few years if you lose your spiritual focus and even your soul?

The lesson Abigail teaches us is that it is possible to be focused on God, fruitful in His service and growing spiritually while being in a terrible marriage.

## LESSON #2

### **GOD'S WOMAN CAN FUNCTION IN ANY SITUATION**

In those times women were not formally educated, had no legal rights and no real social position. Despite these obstacles, look at what Abigail was and what she did. Her devotion to God and knowledge of His Word enabled her to deal with a complex negotiation and become an inspiration to generations after her.

- What man wouldn't want to have this kind of wife today?
- What corporation wouldn't want to hire this person today?
- What home wouldn't benefit from such a one as mother?

Modern society puts down homemakers and religious women as marginal, without impact or influence. But God's woman has:

- The spirit of God to strengthen her.
- The Word of God to guide her.
- The promise of God to encourage her.
- The family of God to surround her.

God's woman can function dynamically in every situation, whether it be in the home or in the outside world — she is always God's woman.



## LESSON #3

### **ABIGAIL'S BEAUTY WAS A BONUS**

Yes, Abigail was beautiful but:

- This is not what saved the day.
- This is not what impressed David.
- This is not why her story is in the Bible.

We are always first impressed by beauty, we easily focus on beauty, but in the long run we find out that beauty doesn't accomplish anything, doesn't really produce anything.

Abigail saved her family, her soul, the future king's integrity because she was wise, insightful, humble, etc., not because she was beautiful. You see, we remember beauty, but we don't admire it. It doesn't inspire us. Abigail shows women how to deal successfully with men without relying exclusively on outward beauty.

In the end, David married a beautiful woman, but he didn't marry her because she was beautiful.

# 6.

## A Model for Repentance

PSALMS 39:1-13

<sup>36</sup> “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” <sup>37</sup> Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” <sup>38</sup> Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

- Acts 2:36-38

In Acts 2:38, we read a key passage concerning a person's response to the gospel. It is key because in it the Apostle Peter answers the crucial question, “What must I do to be saved?” Most of the time when we use Acts 2:38, we quickly explain that “repentance” means turning away from sin and then focus most of our teaching on the subject of baptism. Instruction on the role and method of baptism is necessary, of course, but in order to keep these two in perspective we need to understand that baptism is the witness of our faith while repentance is the actual inner working of our spirit as we turn to God in faith and thus should receive closer analysis. For this reason, I'd like to study a good model for repentance given to us by King David in Psalm 39.

Psalm 39 was written by David approximately 800 years before Christ. He was a great warrior and dynamic ruler who was loved by his people.

He was also a man who had terrible weaknesses and succumbed to pride and sexual lust which eventually produced tremendous problems for his family and nation. He was also an eloquent poet and musician through whom God provided many beautiful psalms and songs for His people. One of these psalms, Psalm 39, was written during a time when David was very ill or threatened by a dangerous enemy. This predicament caused him to pause and reflect upon his life and the condition of his soul.

During this time, we observe, through his Spirit guided writing, several elements that come together to produce true and effective repentance, the kind of repentance that God desires from all of those who have sinned against Him. In this brief psalm we can trace the process that took David from sin to sincere repentance, the type of repentance that prepares one for the baptism that Peter spoke of in Acts 2:38.

## 1. David Tried to Fix it Himself

<sup>1</sup> I said, "I will guard my ways  
That I may not sin with my tongue;  
I will guard my mouth as with a muzzle  
While the wicked are in my presence."

<sup>2</sup> I was mute and silent,  
I refrained even from good,  
And my sorrow grew worse.

Whenever we are caught in a sin or gaze inwardly and see that we've been wrong, our first impulse is to be self-righteous. This effort at doing and saying what is right and avoiding further wrong on David's part produced two results:

A. He began to see the wicked before him as truly wicked. His attempt at doing right highlighted the evil that was around him. It was a case where he didn't realize how bad things were until he himself tried to do something good.

B. This effort began to stir greater feelings of guilt and sorrow within him. In other words, he realized that he did not have a handle on this “sin” thing in his life. He might be silent, he might make an effort at thinking and doing right, but in making the effort he saw how weak and vulnerable to sin he really was.

An effort to fix it himself yielded the frightening result that he had no power to control or remove his own sinfulness or desire to sin. (This brings him to the next stage.)

## 2. David Recognizes the Effect of Sin

<sup>3</sup> My heart was hot within me,  
While I was musing the fire burned;  
Then I spoke with my tongue:

<sup>4</sup> “Lord, make me to know my end  
And what is the extent of my days;  
Let me know how transient I am.

<sup>5</sup> “Behold, You have made my days as handbreadths,  
And my lifetime as nothing in Your sight;  
Surely every man at his best is a mere breath. Selah.

David sees the ravages of sin and iniquity within him. He doesn’t even try to justify himself with the doing of good anymore since he sees it is now useless. He realizes that his only hope is to appeal to God, therefore, he asks God to let him know the final results of his own life of sin.

He recognizes that even at his very best he is not worthy of God, so in his present state there surely is no hope. David experiences the awful realization that life is not only fleeting, but sinful life is unacceptable before God and will be punished. The most discouraging aspect of all of this is that there is not much he can do about it.

### 3. David Asks for Forgiveness

<sup>6</sup> “Surely every man walks about as a phantom;  
Surely they make an uproar for nothing;  
He amasses riches and does not know who will gather them.

<sup>7</sup> “And now, Lord, for what do I wait?

My hope is in You.

<sup>8</sup> “Deliver me from all my transgressions;  
Make me not the reproach of the foolish.

<sup>9</sup> “I have become mute, I do not open my mouth,  
Because it is You who have done it.

<sup>10</sup> “Remove Your plague from me;  
Because of the opposition of Your hand I am perishing.

Once he recognizes his helplessness to actually live up to God’s standards, regardless of his efforts, David is ready to humble himself and ask for what he cannot achieve through personal effort.

He sees that his own end is shared by others, even those who make a great show of their righteousness by equating it to success in this life. The reason for this is that at that time poverty and oppression were considered a sign of God’s displeasure with you because of your sins. For example, this was the attitude of Job’s friends who reasoned that his trials were due to some secret or unconfessed sin that he was guilty of, and much of the discourse between them was a debate about this type of reasoning.

Being rich and successful on the other hand were equated with right living. In his psalm David writes that this was not so (he was a king, a rich king, and yet saw himself as a guilty sinner before God). From this insight he comes to the realization that all are sinners (rich and poor) and unworthy of God. At this point David changes his focus in life; no longer will he try to achieve his own righteousness by self-willed effort, he will now put his hope for salvation into the hands of a merciful God.

Because of this change in thinking, David gives up trying to justify or deflect blame and throws himself completely upon the mercy that God offers to sinners who acknowledge their sins and turn away from them

(repentance). First, he asks God to forgive him, for it is God's laws that are broken to begin with. He then asks God to protect him from enemies who are searching to take advantage of his weakness. Finally, he pleads with God to remove the weakness within him that made him vulnerable to attack and death in the first place. His troubles force him to examine his life and move him to finally acknowledge his need for God's mercy and personal need to change.

In these few lines of poetry, we observe that David appeals for mercy and changes his attitude, two necessary actions for sincere repentance to take place.

#### **4. David Demonstrates the Fruit of that Repentance**

<sup>11</sup> "With reproofs You chasten a man for iniquity;  
You consume as a moth what is precious to him;  
Surely every man is a mere breath. Selah.  
<sup>12</sup> "Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry;  
Do not be silent at my tears;  
For I am a stranger with You,  
A sojourner like all my fathers.  
<sup>13</sup> "Turn Your gaze away from me, that I may smile again  
Before I depart and am no more."

In repentance there needs to be a calling out to God for forgiveness and a willingness to change, but the biblical model of repentance always includes a real and abiding example of change in the sinner's life and attitude. David comments on how his life has changed because of his own repentance before God.

We note that he has a new view of himself. He has seen that God's testing strips a person to the core in that exterior beauty, strength and ability to cope are removed. He has understood that this change is necessary for a person to truly see his weakness and need before God. David now understands how all men are helpless and in need of God's mercy having gone through the experience himself. He has a much clearer vision of life, its meaning and ultimate conclusion:

- All (not just the poor and needy) are strangers and separated from God. Our true condition should bring us to sorrow and tears before God in repentance.
- Only God can heal us and deliver us from a wounded conscience damaged by sin.
- The time is short. While we have breath we need to appeal to God for mercy because there is no chance for repentance after we die.

David not only recognized the need for repentance and change in his life, he produced the kind of thoughts and actions showing that true repentance was actually taking place within him.

## SUMMARY

Of course, our job is not to try to determine if true repentance is taking place in others; our responsibility is to make sure that we are experiencing true repentance ourselves. And we are, if our repentance sees us...

- Making an honest effort at restitution.
- Turning to God for forgiveness.
- Producing a change of heart that includes a greater sincerity, purity of thought and action, and dependance on God.

If these things are present, then our repentance is true and effective in drawing us nearer to God. I also believe that this kind of repentance needs to precede baptism, and when it does, it usually signals that this person will remain faithful long after they've come out of the water.

# 7.

## David's Charge to Solomon

I KINGS 2:1-4

Our lives are filled with defining moments.

- The moment we decide to become a Christian.
- The moment we realize that we have met the person we want to marry.
- The happy occasion when our first child is born.
- The day of our retirement.

These defining moments are important because it is during these times that the course of our lives changes affecting everything and everyone around us. I suppose this is why we create memories and make speeches at these times since each occasion provides us an opportunity to teach valuable lessons that may be needed along the way.

In this final lesson looking at King David, I'd like to focus on one such defining moment as his life and rule were coming to an end. This was the



moment when he gave a charge to his son, Solomon, who would rule after he was gone.

David's life had its share of "defining moments:"

- When he went out to face and defeat Goliath. He went from being an obscure shepherd boy to a national celebrity.
- When Samuel anointed him to become future king. He went from a favored military leader to hunted outlaw always in fear for his life.
- When Saul died and he became king. He took on responsibility for the entire nation, not just the band of rebels he led while hiding out from Saul.

Through each of these changes God was shaping and defining David's character and spirit so that he could become a man after His own heart. When David was old and at the end of his reign, he handed the kingdom over to his son Solomon. This was a final "defining moment" for David and one of the first for Solomon. During this important exchange there was a charge that David made to Solomon which contained a pearl of wisdom that can be passed on to those who will be the leaders of the church in the future. The charge to Solomon by David is contained in I Kings 2:1-4.

<sup>1</sup> "Now the days of David drew near that he should die, and he charged Solomon his son, saying: <sup>2</sup> "I go the way of all the earth; be strong, therefore, and prove yourself a man. <sup>3</sup> And keep the charge of the Lord your God: to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His judgments, and His testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn; <sup>4</sup> that the Lord may fulfill His word which He spoke concerning me, saying, 'If your sons take heed to their way, to walk before Me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul,' He said, 'you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.'"

David had reigned for 40 tumultuous years during which time he had secured peace for the nation and had amassed great wealth. Now it was time for Solomon to take over, and so at this critical moment David provides him with a charge that instructs his son to do three things in order to succeed in the future:

## **1. Grow Up (vs. 2)**

In the Hebrew, the word strong meant to establish yourself, to stand on your own two feet. “Show yourself a man” was the Hebrew way of saying, “Act like an adult.” Solomon had been groomed for the throne but was always in the shadow of his father. He could practice being king, but he didn’t have to really make the decisions and abide by the consequences. David’s first charge, then, is to take off the training wheels; cast off the safety net of childhood; begin acting like an adult because now it was for real, he was going to be the king.

I suppose this would also be my first charge to the future leaders of the church and their wives. The time to grow up spiritually is now, not sometime in the future when there’s more time or opportunity!

- Young mothers need to realize that the critical training of their children’s spiritual lives happens now, not when they are teenagers. By then, it will be too late in many cases.
- Young men and fathers need to realize that elders and deacons who are serving now will not serve forever. They will need to be replaced by men who are learning about these roles today.
- In many cases the building and the congregation itself were established and built by people who decided to “grow-up” spiritually and take responsibility for their church and its needs.

Of course, this charge goes both ways. For example:

- David didn’t just pretend to give Solomon the crown, he actually gave his son the nation to rule, and took himself off of the throne.

- Present leaders and teachers should actively search for and encourage those who are willing and able to take the lead in ministering to the church and gradually allow them to take full responsibility. Congregations should be aware of not only who the leaders are, but who are the future leaders.

## 2. Obey the Lord (vs. 3)

David says it in a variety of ways:

- Keep the charge of the Lord
- Walk in His ways
- Keep His statutes, ordinances, testimonies

In the end, however, it was all the same charge, obey the Lord in all that you say and do because without obedience you will fail.

It is interesting to note that Solomon lived out this very charge. He began well by obeying the Lord and was blessed in every way possible. Then he fell into idolatry, and his disobedience led the nation and his own household into ruin. At the end of his own life he wrote that to obey God and keep His commands were all that really mattered in life.

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter:  
 Fear God and keep His commandments,  
 For this is man's all.  
 - Ecclesiastes 12:13

This particular charge is relevant for young people. Certainly, to obey the Lord is a priority at any age, but it is especially important for those who are either young in years or young in Christ. You see, it is at the beginning of something that one creates habits and ways of acting that will repeat themselves all through life. Learning the habit of obeying God is critical if one is to have a successful Christian life.

Parents and grandparents can vouch for this. If young people put God first in life, they will be blessed. If they abandon the Lord, forsake His church, and disobey His word their lives will be filled with sorrow, trouble, uncertainty, and an emptiness inside. Studies show that young people who begin well as Christians usually fall away after they graduate from high school or college. Along with the responsibility for being a young independent adult comes the responsibility for maintaining one's faith and choosing to obey the Lord in all things. Parents are less able to encourage their children to go to church once they become young adults. The responsibility for faithfulness now falls to the young adults once they leave home and start their independent lives.

It is at this important time in life when we really find out if our faith, our commitment, and our love for Christ are really ours or just something borrowed from our parents.

No matter who one becomes, no matter how much success or failure one experiences, remember that it will all be for nothing if you are not a faithful Christian at the end of your life. How faithful a person is at the end of their life depends on how faithful and obedient they choose to be at the critical time: when they were young.

You can't put it off (I'll start going to church later, I'll get involved later, I'll become more spiritual when I'm older). Solomon warned that if you didn't choose to do it when you were young, you might not have the chance to do it when you become older (Ecclesiastes 12).

### **3. Teach Your Children Well (vs. 4)**

David tells Solomon that he is giving him this charge because God charged him with the same charge. He now tells Solomon that he too must pass along these things to his own children if he wishes to continue God's blessings upon them.

Again, we see that Solomon in all of his wisdom did not see fit to teach his own children and they fell into idolatry and divided the kingdom into two after Solomon's death. Solomon had 1000 wives and concubines,

most of whom were pagan. This is how the influence of idolatry came into his house and the nation.

David addresses this point in his son's life by reminding him how he was taught and how he is to teach his own children. This is a good lesson to encourage young singles to marry men and women who are faithful to Christ, faithful to His Word and faithful to His church. If they do:

- They will be able to teach their children without conflict in the home.
- They will be able to share and encourage each other's faith.
- They will have a marriage that has more peace, more joy, more success because God promises this to you if you obey Him in this.

Our children are never too young to hear this message because you date who you hang around with and you marry who you date. I would encourage young people to decide early on that they will only marry a faithful Christian because this will set the course of their friendships, their lives, and the lives of their children forever.

## SUMMARY

After David's charge, Solomon went on to be a great king, but because he failed to listen to his father's voice, he suffered depression, trouble in his family and ultimately destruction of the great kingdom established by his father. He did repent in the end to save his soul, but much suffering had already happened by then.

If we are to gain anything from the experience of these kings, we should recognize that their lessons affect all of us:

- **To the leaders:** Be on the look-out for and cultivate tomorrow's leaders today. Neglecting to do so will create a leadership vacuum in the future, a dangerous thing.

- **To everyone:** Make the obeying of the Lord a priority in your life, and a priority lesson you teach your children. This is the gateway to so many blessings, and neglecting to do so is the path to so many sorrows.
- **To young people:** Choose friends and marriage partners who can help you remain faithful to Christ and support your ministry in the church. No other choice will affect your life more than this one.

This is the end of the section on David. Our next king will be one that very few people know about but who teaches many lessons about trust: King Hanun.

# 8.

## King Hanun's Suspicious Mind

I CHRONICLES 19:1-20:3

<sup>1</sup> It happened after this that Nahash the king of the people of Ammon died, and his son reigned in his place. <sup>2</sup> Then David said, "I will show kindness to Hanun the son of Nahash, because his father showed kindness to me." So David sent messengers to comfort him concerning his father. And David's servants came to Hanun in the land of the people of Ammon to comfort him. <sup>3</sup> And the princes of the people of Ammon said to Hanun, "Do you think that David really honors your father because he has sent comforters to you? Did his servants not come to you to search and to overthrow and to spy out the land?" <sup>4</sup> Therefore Hanun took David's servants, shaved them, and cut off their garments in the middle, at their buttocks, and sent them away. <sup>5</sup> Then some went and told David about the men; and he sent to meet them, because the men were greatly ashamed. And the king said, "Wait at Jericho until your beards have grown, and then return."

<sup>6</sup> When the people of Ammon saw that they had made themselves repulsive to David, Hanun and the people of Ammon sent a thousand talents of silver to hire for themselves chariots and horsemen from Mesopotamia, from Syrian Maacah, and from Zobah. <sup>7</sup> So they hired for themselves

thirty-two thousand chariots, with the king of Maacah and his people, who came and encamped before Medeba. Also the people of Ammon gathered together from their cities, and came to battle. <sup>8</sup> Now when David heard of it, he sent Joab and all the army of the mighty men. <sup>9</sup> Then the people of Ammon came out and put themselves in battle array before the gate of the city, and the kings who had come were by themselves in the field.

<sup>10</sup> When Joab saw that the battle line was against him before and behind, he chose some of Israel's best and put them in battle array against the Syrians. <sup>11</sup> And the rest of the people he put under the command of Abishai his brother, and they set themselves in battle array against the people of Ammon.

<sup>12</sup> Then he said, "If the Syrians are too strong for me, then you shall help me; but if the people of Ammon are too strong for you, then I will help you. <sup>13</sup> Be of good courage, and let us be strong for our people and for the cities of our God. And may the Lord do what is good in His sight." <sup>14</sup> So Joab and the people who were with him drew near for the battle against the Syrians, and they fled before him. <sup>15</sup> When the people of Ammon saw that the Syrians were fleeing, they also fled before Abishai his brother, and entered the city. So Joab went to Jerusalem.

<sup>16</sup> Now when the Syrians saw that they had been defeated by Israel, they sent messengers and brought the Syrians who were beyond the River, and Shophach the commander of Hadadezer's army went before them. <sup>17</sup> When it was told David, he gathered all Israel, crossed over the Jordan and came upon them, and set up in battle array against them. So when David had set up in battle array against the Syrians, they fought with him. <sup>18</sup> Then the Syrians fled before Israel; and David killed seven thousand charioteers and forty thousand foot soldiers of the Syrians, and killed Shophach the commander of the army. <sup>19</sup> And when the servants of Hadadezer saw that they were defeated by Israel, they made peace with David and became his servants. So the Syrians were not willing to help the people of Ammon anymore.

<sup>20</sup> It happened in the spring of the year, at the time kings go



out to battle, that Joab led out the armed forces and ravaged the country of the people of Ammon, and came and besieged Rabbah. But David stayed at Jerusalem. And Joab defeated Rabbah and overthrew it. <sup>2</sup> Then David took their king's crown from his head, and found it to weigh a talent of gold, and there were precious stones in it. And it was set on David's head. Also he brought out the spoil of the city in great abundance.

<sup>3</sup> And he brought out the people who were in it, and put them to work with saws, with iron picks, and with axes. So David did to all the cities of the people of Ammon. Then David and all the people returned to Jerusalem.

- I Chronicles 19:1-20:3

If you've lost the story because of the strange names, this is basically what happened:

When David was on the run from Saul, he received help from Nahash who was Hanun's father. They joined together against Saul's forces. When Nahash died, David tried to form an alliance with his son Hanun as a favor (because he was much stronger). Hanun and his advisors were suspicious of David's intentions because there was a time when these two nations had been at war. They humiliated the ambassadors (made them return without pants and shaved their beards) as a way of rejecting the offer of peace and alliance. Once they realized the possible ramifications of their offense, Hanun and his advisors prepared for war by hiring mercenaries from surrounding nations to fight the Israelites. The rest of the story describes how David destroyed these people in three separate phases:

1. Joab, David's chief military commander, defeated the Ammonite army and local mercenary forces in an initial battle.
2. Then David himself led the troops against Hadadezer, a more powerful Arabian king, brought in by Hanun.
3. The final stage came in the spring as the war stopped because of winter. It was during this spring campaign, while Joab was making a final attack on Hanun's capital city, that David had his

affair with Bathsheba. Joab did defeat the city and David went to remove Hanun's crown and put his people into slavery. David did not cut the people up with saws and axes as the wording suggests but rather made them tear down the walls of their own homes and fortress.

From David's perspective, this story is a good historical account of how the king and the military carried out diplomacy and war almost 2,700 years ago.

From Hanun's perspective, it teaches us a valuable lesson on the dangers that result from having a suspicious mind.

## **SUSPICION VS. CAUTION**

It would have greatly helped Hanun if he knew the difference between suspicion and caution.

### **Suspicion**

- Is based on feelings and intuition.
- It is subjective in nature.
- It is an impression based on external signals mixed with our pre-conceived ideas and character. For example, Hanun was a pagan, insecure (new to his job), knowing that the Israelites had once been enemies.
- David's offer, through these eyes, was seen as suspicious and threatening.

### **Caution**

- Is based on fact and communication.
- It is not what we feel about something but what we know to be true about something because of knowledge, usually through

investigation or communication. Hanun could have reserved judgement until he had direct communication with David and made up an agreement to protect his interests. That would have been cautious.

The Bible says that caution or prudence seeks knowledge and avoids needless battles (Proverbs 13:16; 22:3). Caution has a “go slow” approach, reserves the decision or judgment until enough facts can be gathered. Suspicion goes by feeling and usually wants to believe the worst.

## **HANUN'S SUSPICIOUS MIND**

Hanun was obviously a very suspicious man, and his attitude and actions provide important lessons for us today because many of us struggle with the problem of having a suspicious mind.

### **1. Suspicion Leads to Trouble**

Hanun found out that groundless suspicion often leads to trouble. He let others feed his suspicious mind with false information. If you are suspicious by nature, then everyone and everything seem to have evil motives. This kind of attitude doesn't allow for the building of relationships with people because you're always fearing what you feel will be the worst about them. It also leads to quick accusations and unfair judgments of people and situations. Suspicious people already have their minds made up so there is no room for explanations or the benefit of the doubt. Suspiciousness will cause us to make rash and unfair judgments, and decisions we are likely to regret.

### **2. Don't Cover a Mistake with Another Mistake**

A suspicious mind often leads us to make mistaken judgments and then pride will lead us to try to cover that mistake with more bad decisions. Hanun made a dreadful mistake in judgment and a deadly move in humiliating David's emissaries. Instead of acknowledging the mistake and making an attempt at an apology and reconciliation, he chose to

multiply his errors by going to war. I've seen this happen when people make a bad decision and then lie to cover it up.

- A single couple goes too far sexually and then gets an abortion to eliminate the problem.
- Two friends argue and begin to tear each other down to others in an effort to show that they were right and end up ruining a longtime relationship.

Two wrongs certainly don't make a right, but suspicious people have a hard time with this concept because their basic problem is that they believe that they are always right and anyone else who disagrees with them immediately becomes suspect.

### **3. When You're Wrong, No Amount of Power Will Make You Right**

Hanun made a foolish decision because he was naturally suspicious. When it became evident that this was a fatal choice, he tried to use force to confirm his convictions. The Bible tells us that he lost the war, he lost his nation and his own personal freedom and position.

Nietzsche, the philosopher, proposed the idea that the most powerful people should make the rules and establish what is right and wrong. This is morality by force or might makes it right.

What is essentially right, however, has been established by God from the beginning of time and no human power or might is able to change what is basically right or wrong. (To lie and steal is wrong no matter what.)

Even if Hanun had won the war against David, he still would have been wrong and would have had to answer for it to God eventually.

## HOW TO DEAL WITH SUSPICION

The story is ancient, but the problems and lessons are contemporary and relative. How can we avoid Hanun's mistakes and neutralize our own suspicious nature?

### 1. Check it Out

- Solomon says that "...A prudent man acts with knowledge." Proverbs 13:16
- If you are not sure, if your intuition sends out a warning, check it out so you can base your feelings on facts and not simply facts on feelings.

Taking the time to know the facts will help you avoid jumping to hasty conclusions.

### 2. Take People as They Are

- Not everyone is like us or lives up to our criteria for the perfect person.
- Allow people to be themselves. Allow situations to explain themselves until proven otherwise.

We save ourselves and others a lot of pain and trouble if we avoid second-guessing everyone else's motives.

### 3. Trust God

- The essential difference between Hanun and David was not military or culture, it was faith.
- David trusted God to protect and guide him in his affairs, Hanun trusted human advisors and his own suspicious mind.

Suspicion is a sign of fear and insecurity. Faith in God is the greatest antidote to these and the only way to calm a suspicious mind.

## SUMMARY

Suspicious minds can lead us to make bad decisions about people and keep us isolated and perpetually stuck in the vicious cycle of fear and insecurity. When you make a mistake or hurt someone because of this weakness:

- Apologize and acknowledge the reasons why you did what you did.
- Cut your losses and make things right as soon as you can. Don't bluff or make it worse.

If you're looking for a change of heart in this area:

- Replace suspicion with caution. This is the true and biblical virtue perverted into suspiciousness by fear and poor self-worth.
- Be more accepting and forgiving of people as they are and you will see that others will begin treating you in the same way.
- Have more faith in God to protect your life and interests. Trust Him to help you discern what and who is good and evil. This will prove a powerful antidote to a suspicious mind.

# 9.

## Solomon's Strategy for Success

ECCLESIASTES 11:1-10

No series on ancient wisdom, especially wisdom from Jewish kings, would be complete without a contribution from Solomon, son of David. The one thing that everybody knows about Solomon is that he was very wise. When he was anointed king, he asked God to give him the wisdom to govern the people, and God answered his prayer.

In I Kings 4:31 we read, "...He was wiser than all men..." This wisdom was exercised in many ways aside from leadership. Solomon studied botany, built the temple and other great edifices, wrote poetry, and made a lot of money.

So King Solomon surpassed all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom.

- II Chronicles 9:22

You could say that he had the golden touch because his wisdom gave him the ability to succeed in everything he did. As a supremely successful individual Solomon was well equipped to give advice to others on how to attain and maintain success. In our time of economic

stress and uncertainty I believe it would be profitable for us to review Solomon's strategy for success found in Ecclesiastes 11:1-10.

The book of Ecclesiastes is much like a personal diary. In his wisdom, Solomon tried to find out what life was really all about and if it was possible to be truly happy without God. He purposefully experimented with all of life's great attractions:

- Sensual and sexual pleasures of every kind
- Strong drink and its effect
- Creative building projects
- Acquiring knowledge in the sciences of his day
- The pursuit and exercise of political power

While experimenting with these Solomon was careful to record his observations concerning what he felt and learned from his experiences. Near the end of the book there is a chapter describing how to achieve and maintain success throughout one's life. Here, in short form, are Solomon's seven strategies for success:

## **1. You've Got to Give in Order to Get**

<sup>1</sup> Cast your bread upon the waters,  
For you will find it after many days.

This is a business principle that all successful people learn right away. There is no return without investment, no reward without risk. This is true if you want to succeed as a business executive as well as a student or a partner in a marriage. There are no opportunities for success in any of these or other ventures without an investment of time, effort, self-discipline and general giving of self.



People who fail usually have excuses and blame, resentment and anger. Those who succeed, on the other hand, do so because they were willing to give up something of themselves in order to achieve their goals. The old saying is as true today as it was in Solomon's day, "The more you give, the more you get."

## 2. Diversify

<sup>2</sup> Give a serving to seven, and also to eight,  
For you do not know what evil will be on the earth.

Successful people understand the reality of the world, that sometimes (more often than not) bad stuff happens. Being prepared for this is wise. It's smart to have a back-up plan, a second window of opportunity. Success doesn't always come with the first career, the second try or the third idea. Sometimes it comes later, after several tries and in an area we never would have imagined. For example, the IBM Company believed that there would only be a market for two or three of their computers back in the 1950s, but they continued to develop and expand their products and applications anyways and grew into the international leader it is today.

Successful people develop as many of their talents, and pursue as many opportunities as time and energy permit.

## 3. Don't Worry About What You Can't Change

<sup>3</sup> If the clouds are full of rain,  
They empty themselves upon the earth;  
And if a tree falls to the south or the north,  
In the place where the tree falls, there it shall lie.

Solomon uses examples from nature to demonstrate situations over which we have no control and cannot change once they take place. The idea is that we don't always succeed at every step. Things happen that we can't control and when they do, we have to roll with the punches.

Successful generals choose when and where they will fight. They rarely go into battles that they don't believe they will win. In worst case scenarios they are able to recognize when they can't win and try to cut their losses in order to survive and fight another day.

To succeed, we need to invest our energy into viable causes, and not worry about past mistakes or the lack of resources and talent. To succeed, we need to use what we have, where it will do the most good, without regard for those things that are impossible for us to control.

## 4. Do it Now

4 He who observes the wind will not sow,  
And he who regards the clouds will not reap.

There is never a perfect time to begin. In most instances we simply need to begin or else lose the opportunity at hand. There is always a reason to put off doing something, always a pretty good excuse for not starting something challenging, difficult or life changing. This is why there are only a few who make it to the Olympics, only a few who have been to the moon, only one Mona Lisa. Successful people act on their dreams, their goals, and their vision right away.

I remember having a dream and in this dream, I had a terrific idea for a lesson and series about a certain Bible topic. The outline was perfectly visible in my dream. I half awoke and asked God to remind me in the morning to write down the material I had thought of. The next morning when I tried to recall the idea and outline, I was completely blank! I have spent many hours awake since then writing outlines, ideas and devotional articles that have come to me in the middle of night, not waiting for a more convenient time the next day.

The best time to begin succeeding at your dream or goal is now. Putting it off until tomorrow is the lazy person's way of avoiding the burden of success.

## 5. You Never Know Until You Try

<sup>5</sup> As you do not know what is the way of the wind,  
Or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child,  
So you do not know the works of God who makes everything.

<sup>6</sup> In the morning sow your seed,  
And in the evening do not withhold your hand;  
For you do not know which will prosper,  
Either this or that,  
Or whether both alike will be good.

Some things you don't see (the wind and, before x-rays, an unborn child) but they are never-the-less real. Success cannot be obtained or even seen until a person actually tries. Other people may be blind to the possibility of your success because they don't share your vision or lack confidence in you. Many won't support your efforts because they are jealous that your success will reveal their failure or weakness.

Solomon tells us to believe the evidence of the unseen, believe the evidence of God and the power of faith. Trying is another way of saying, "I believe," "I see," "I know," when others disbelieve, are blind or refuse to understand.

You never know until you try, but if you don't try, you'll never know.

## 6. Remember God's Judgment

<sup>7</sup> Truly the light is sweet,  
And it is pleasant for the eyes to behold the sun;  
<sup>8</sup> But if a man lives many years and rejoices in them all,  
Yet let him remember the days of darkness,  
For they will be many.  
All that is coming is vanity.  
<sup>9</sup> Rejoice, O young man, in your youth,  
And let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth;  
Walk in the ways of your heart,

And in the sight of your eyes;  
But know that for all these God will bring you into judgment.

Success is marvelous and was meant to be this way by God. He didn't create us to be failures or to be unhappy, but rather to be productive and joyful, to enjoy the things that He gives us while we can. However, the pleasure that comes from success is not the end of life, nor is it the goal of life. In Ecclesiastes 12:13 Solomon says that the goal of life is to know and obey God.

Success is a by-product of the life lived to please, know and serve God. The danger lies in making success the goal of life rather than a benefit of a good and obedient life before God. Successful people understand that their success is a gift, and they don't become so enthralled by success that they will do anything in order to obtain or keep it. Many who are rich and famous confess that they are often unhappy and dissatisfied because they sold their souls in the chase for success and learned that success, all by itself, was not worth the cost.

## **7. Success is Sweet but Success is Short**

<sup>10</sup> Therefore remove sorrow from your heart,  
And put away evil from your flesh,  
For childhood and youth are vanity.

Who won the gold medal for gymnastics ten years ago? Who was the richest man in the world 75 years ago? Someone has said, "If you want to judge the value of something or how much of yourself to put into it, see what meaning it will have 100 years from today."

Solomon's advice to the successful is to enjoy their success while they have it, because very soon it will be gone. Good advice for many who work hard to build families, homes, careers, but spend so little time enjoying the fruit of their labor.

What good is success and what honor does God receive if we don't take the time to smell the roses while they are in bloom?

## SUMMARY

What is interesting about this passage of Scripture is its worldly tone. Solomon writes about the things we need to know, remember, and do in order to succeed in this world, whether one is a child of God or not. The strategy works either way. One thing not mentioned here, however, is that success in this world does not guarantee success in the next world. Jesus told us that there is nothing in this world, no degree of success or wealth, that will guarantee our soul's entry into the heavenly realm.

If we study Solomon's life, we find out that despite his great wisdom and incredible success, he failed in the one thing that was needed: obedience to God. His wealth and desire for pleasure led him to marry many foreign wives who eventually influenced him to sin by worshiping pagan gods, the one thing God warned him to avoid.

There is nothing wrong with pursuing success using Solomon's strategy to achieve our goals and dreams. After all, God is the one who gave him this wisdom which he passed on to us. But in doing this, let us remember that in order to achieve final success, which is to live forever with God, we must follow His strategy for heavenly success, not earthly success. This strategy can be summarized in the following way:

1. We must believe that Jesus Christ is God and Savior (Acts 8:37)
2. We must confess our belief in Him (Matthew 10:32)
3. We must repent of our sins (Acts 2:37-38)
4. We must be immersed/baptized in water in Jesus' name (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38)
5. We must remain faithful to Jesus by following His commands and leadership our entire lives (Matthew 10:22)

This strategy may not lead to monetary wealth, may not put our names in the history books, but it will put our names into the Book of Life and guarantee our eternal existence with God in heaven.

If you have been struggling or discouraged, I hope this lesson from King Solomon will help you learn how to better succeed in your family, career, business or character. What I truly hope for everyone, however, regardless of success on this earth is that all succeed in going to heaven with Jesus when He comes.

# 10.

## The Life and Times of Hezekiah: Part 1

We now begin a three-chapter study of the life of King Hezekiah who the Bible describes as the greatest of the kings to rule during the period of the Divided Kingdom.

### REVIEW BACKGROUND

After the reign of Solomon, a civil war erupted that ultimately split Israel into what was referred to as the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, each with their own kings. The Northern Kingdom quickly fell into idolatry and, as punishment, God allowed it to be conquered by the Assyrian nation who were now threatening the security of the Southern Kingdom as well. The Southern Kingdom was surrounded by strong world empires, Egypt to the south and the Assyrians and Babylonians to the north. Into this turbulent time Hezekiah was installed as the thirteenth king of the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

## **AHAZ — 735 BC**

Hezekiah's father was Ahaz. He was an evil king who brought much trouble upon the kingdom of Judah. Ahaz had two main problems:

1. He refused the advice of the prophets to trust in the Lord, instead relying on the agreements he formed with other nations to keep the country safe. His treaty with Assyria to protect him from the Northern Kingdom of Israel and Syria cost the nation much of its wealth, with the nation having to pay tribute for over a century. In the end these payments did not help because Assyria turned on Judah and attacked it anyway.

2. He was an idolator. He placed an Assyrian type of altar in the temple at Jerusalem. He also used the original temple altar for divination purposes and closed the temple and sanctuary for regular worship to God. Despite warnings from Isaiah the prophet, Ahaz continued in this type of activity. He became king in 735 BC. Thirteen years later in 722 BC, the Northern Kingdom fell to the Assyrians. Ahaz continued to reign in the Southern Kingdom for another six years and died in 716 BC.

This is the year that Hezekiah, his son, took over control of the country. He was 25 years old at the time. Unlike his father, Hezekiah was determined to turn the people back to the worship and service of the Lord.

## **HEZEKIAH IN THE OLD TESTAMENT**

There are many references to Hezekiah in the Old Testament, but the main information about him is contained in three areas: II Kings 16-21, II Chronicles 28-33 and Isaiah 36-39.

These passages do not list all of his activities and the details of his life in chronological order; however, they do provide the three most important events of his life:



1. His efforts at reforming the nation.
2. His response to the Assyrian army when they threatened to destroy the nation.
3. His restoration by God from a terminal illness.

## HEZEKIAH'S RESTORATION CAMPAIGN

It is interesting to note that despite the political and financial mess that Judah was in, the very first effort made was to restore the moral and spiritual life of the nation. This restoration effort was described in two Old Testament books, II Kings and II Chronicles. II Kings gives a general summary of Hezekiah's reforms and II Chronicles provides a more detailed account of his work with the temple and the priests as well as his attempts to build religious unity among the people.

### II KINGS 18:1-8

Verses 1-3 summarizes his life and background.

<sup>1</sup> Now it came to pass in the third year of Hoshea the son of Elah, king of Israel, that Hezekiah the son of Ahaz, king of Judah, began to reign. <sup>2</sup> He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abi the daughter of Zechariah. <sup>3</sup> And he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father David had done.

A judgment on his reign is given at the beginning, and it is a favorable one comparing him to David and declaring that he was righteous in the sight of the Lord. The Zechariah mentioned here is not the prophet who lived later on. Abi or Abijah means God is my father. It suggests that his religious influence came from his mother (we know it wasn't from his father Ahaz).

<sup>4</sup> He removed the high places and broke down the sacred pillars and cut down the Asherah. He also broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the sons of Israel burned incense to it; and it was called Nehushtan.

The writer describes some of the things that Hezekiah began to do in order to begin his reform. Before establishing the good, you have to clean house, and this is what he did religiously. Judah was in the grips of idolatry, so this is what he struck at first:

### 1. Removed high places

- These were altars in the hills and mountains where sacrifices were offered to pagan gods.

### 2. Asherah poles

- Asherah poles were carved wooden poles representing female deities.
- Both the Asherah poles and the high places were remnants from the Canaanite religion which the Jews had failed to completely remove when they first arrived in the land.

### 3. Destroyed the Nehushtan

- In Numbers 21:8-9, there is the account of the Israelites in the desert complaining about their lot and God punishing them by sending poisonous snakes into the camp. Many were bitten and became ill so when Moses intervened on behalf of the people God instructed him to fashion a bronze snake and put it up in the camp. When people looked at the snake they were healed. The Jews had kept this bronze snake over the centuries but had begun to worship it as an idol. Hezekiah destroyed this object (used as a symbol for medicine or doctors today).

This type of action seems easy enough for us, but for a new king this was pretty risky since he was not only destroying images, icons and altars that were important to the people, he was also saying to them that they had been wrong in doing these things. It required great courage for a young king to confront the nation and go against its traditions and practices because they were wrong. Great leaders do what is right, not what is safe or popular.

<sup>5</sup> He trusted in the Lord God of Israel, so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor who were before him.

The inspired writer (probably a contemporary of the prophet Jeremiah) pays him a high compliment by declaring him the greatest of all the kings of the Southern Kingdom, and greater than any of his contemporaries including the leaders of the Northern Kingdom.

<sup>6</sup> For he held fast to the Lord; he did not depart from following Him, but kept His commandments, which the Lord had commanded Moses.

The writer explains that what Hezekiah did, he did because he trusted the Lord (something necessary when you go against what is popular and accepted) and he followed God's commands. He defended what he did by citing God's existing Word, not special revelation, or prophecy. His reform was based on God's Word, not a private vision known only to himself.

<sup>7</sup> The Lord was with him; he prospered wherever he went. And he rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him. <sup>8</sup> He subdued the Philistines, as far as Gaza and its territory, from watchtower to fortified city.

As a result, God blessed him:

- The finances of the nation began to prosper. The Lord can bless you financially (not always, but he can) for spiritual renewal.

- They managed to break off 100 years of domination by Assyria (the writer explains later how it was done and what resulted from this).
- They defeated their age-old enemy, the Philistines, who took advantage of their past financial and spiritual weakness to attack and plunder them.

Although his reforms were risky and demanded great changes, they were successful and blessed by God.

## II CHRONICLES 29-31

In II Chronicles, the writer not only gives more details about the reforms done by Hezekiah, he also focuses on the reforms effected in the areas of temple worship and national unity.

<sup>3</sup> In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the Lord and repaired them. <sup>4</sup> Then he brought in the priests and the Levites, and gathered them in the East Square, <sup>5</sup> and said to them: "Hear me, Levites! Now sanctify yourselves, sanctify the house of the Lord God of your fathers, and carry out the rubbish from the holy place. <sup>6</sup> For our fathers have trespassed and done evil in the eyes of the Lord our God; they have forsaken Him, have turned their faces away from the dwelling place of the Lord, and turned their backs on Him. <sup>7</sup> They have also shut up the doors of the vestibule, put out the lamps, and have not burned incense or offered burnt offerings in the holy place to the God of Israel. <sup>8</sup> Therefore the wrath of the Lord fell upon Judah and Jerusalem, and He has given them up to trouble, to desolation, and to jeering, as you see with your eyes. <sup>9</sup> For indeed, because of this our fathers have fallen by the sword; and our sons, our daughters, and our wives are in captivity. <sup>10</sup> Now it is in my heart to make a covenant with the Lord God of Israel, that His fierce wrath may turn away from us. <sup>11</sup> My sons, do not be negligent now, for the Lord has chosen you to stand

before Him, to serve Him, and that you should minister to Him and burn incense.”

Hezekiah groups the priests and Levites together and appeals to them to repair and cleanse the temple. He also requires them to purify themselves and renew their worship to God. He refers to what has happened as an encouragement to be restored to the Lord.

In verses 12-19 we see the Levites get to work and prepare the temple and themselves for worship.

<sup>20</sup> Then King Hezekiah rose early, gathered the rulers of the city, and went up to the house of the Lord.

Once all was consecrated, Hezekiah invites the leaders of the city to a special worship service. The writer describes an elaborate worship that resembled the type that existed in the days of the United Kingdom. Hezekiah encourages this in order to re-dedicate the temple and its leadership to the Lord.

## II CHRONICLES 30:1-27

Once the temple and priests were ready, Hezekiah made a bold attempt to re-unite the people on a spiritual basis, even if they were separated politically. He sent messengers not only to cities in the Southern Kingdom, but also to the remnant in the former Northern Kingdom to come and celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem. This was a homecoming of sorts where along with the invitation to worship, Hezekiah offered an olive branch of peace to brethren who were former enemies. Many in the north scoffed at the invitation, but a great number came nevertheless. In this way God provided a chance at unity to those who were willing to obey Him.

<sup>12</sup> Also the hand of God was on Judah to give them singleness of heart to obey the command of the king and the leaders, at the word of the Lord.

When the time for the feast came about, many had not purified or prepared themselves in the proper manner. Hezekiah prayed for them so that they could go ahead anyway. In this instance, God set aside the regulations because their hearts were right, and Hezekiah asked in prayer. In the end, there was so much rejoicing that they decided to continue celebrating the feast for another seven days.

<sup>27</sup> Then the priests, the Levites, arose and blessed the people, and their voice was heard; and their prayer came up to His holy dwelling place, to heaven.

God heard the prayer of the people who worshiped Him with a sincere heart, not just proper ritual.

Once the great feast and rededication was complete, Hezekiah made provisions so that the worship and work of the temple would go on. He instructed the people to support the temple and priests with their gifts, and organized the priests and Levites so that they could account for and use the gifts brought to them. He also reapportioned the lands and duties to the priests and Levites so that the work of the temple would be carried on in the future in a decent and orderly way.

The story of the restoration stops here as we see that people from both north and south, the priests, the leaders and king united and serving the Lord once again.

## **SUMMARY**

Hezekiah has long been used as a model for revival and restoration. Not only the revival and restoration of the church, but a model for personal as well as national revival. As we close this chapter I want to share some of the basic principles of revival that we learn from Hezekiah's life and times.

# PRINCIPLES OF REVIVAL

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<sup>20</sup> Thus Hezekiah did throughout all Judah, and he did what was good and right and true before the Lord his God. <sup>21</sup> And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, in the law and in the commandment, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart. So he prospered.

- II Chronicles 31:20-21

## 1. Revival is a seeking after God

It is not the emotion or excitement that makes or creates a revival in a person's life, in the church or in a nation. It is not about an event (i.e. "Million Man March"). Revival happens when there is an honest desire to seek and find God and His will because God searches the hearts of those who seek Him and His will. Hezekiah began with an earnest desire to find God and what He wanted, and then God led him to accomplish it. In doing so God blessed Hezekiah with clear thinking, courage, prosperity, and mercy. In addition to this, all of these gifts were given in times of trouble (II Chronicles 31-32).

## 2. Revival requires total commitment

All the altars, all the Asherah poles, all the pagan traditions and all the old practices were removed. The entire temple was cleansed, all the people were encouraged to return for a spectacular service and provision for perpetual temple worship were put into place. Hezekiah did not hold back. He went about restoring the temple and worship of God with all of his heart.

Many resolutions to do better, to grow in Christ or to change things usually go nowhere because we do not go at it with all of our hearts. Revival requires an absolute dedication and a total removing of what is unacceptable in order to work. Revival is a fire and spreads like fire.

### **3. Revival restores God's Word**

The purpose of revival or restoration is to go back and do what God has told us to do in His Word, not invent new things! Hezekiah's revival restored God's commands concerning worship in the seventh century BC.

The Restoration Movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries from which the Churches of Christ were first established was an effort to restore and teach the Bible as God's Word and eliminate human traditions in the church. Every generation has to work at maintaining or restoring obedience and teaching of God's Word.

When we seek Him and His will, this is where He will lead us every time.



# 11.

## The Life and Times of Hezekiah: Part 2

We are studying the life and times of one of the greatest kings of the Jewish people: Hezekiah. His name meant “strengthened by God” and we see this featured throughout his reign. He became king of Judah (Southern Kingdom) as a co-regent in 729 BC with his father, Ahaz. When his father died, he became sole king.

At that time, the Southern Kingdom of Judah was isolated between the two great world powers of Egypt to the south and Assyria to the north, both vying for this land as a buffer zone and jumping off place to attack the other.

Hezekiah’s father, Ahaz, had been an evil king and led the nation to idolatry and foolish political alliances against God’s will and the

warnings He gave through the prophets. When Hezekiah took over, he began an immediate national reform which included several important initiatives:

1. He tore down the altars and images where the people had been worshipping.
2. He restored the temple, the work of the priests and Levites, and encouraged the people to return to a faithful worship of the Lord. He even attempted to unite the remnant in the former kingdom of the northern tribes who had been separated from the Southern Kingdom for decades.
3. With this national renewal came a renewal of the economy which enabled him to mount up an army and defeat their traditional enemies: the Philistines (a regional power and nuisance).
4. He also stopped paying tribute to the Assyrians who guaranteed peace in exchange for huge amounts of the national wealth. Hezekiah felt confident enough to throw off the yoke of slavery and break free from Assyrian threats and domination. This action brought about the most serious crisis in his reign and the Bible describes how Hezekiah responded to the resulting Assyrian threat.

## **THE ASSYRIAN THREAT**

The story of this response is found in three places: II Kings 18-19, II Chronicles 32 and Isaiah 36-37. It is interesting to note that the details are similar in II Kings and II Chronicles, however, the account given in Isaiah 36-37 is identical to the one recorded in II Kings. Since Isaiah was an eyewitness of the events, his record is the original one (even if his book appears after in the Old Testament). I and II Kings were compiled at a later date (after Isaiah) by a number of writers who were writing about Jewish history. Some believe that Jeremiah is the author and that it was written during the exile in order to pursue the history of the Jewish Kingdom.

We will use the accounts of this event in Kings and Chronicles because they include more information than the original in Isaiah which was the eyewitness account but does not have certain speeches and details compiled by the later authors of Kings and Chronicles.

## **1. Response to Hezekiah's Rebellion – II Kings 18:13-16 and II Chronicles 32:1-8**

<sup>13</sup> Now in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and seized them. <sup>14</sup> Then Hezekiah king of Judah sent to the king of Assyria at Lachish, saying, "I have done wrong. Withdraw from me; whatever you impose on me I will bear." So the king of Assyria required of Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. <sup>15</sup> Hezekiah gave him all the silver which was found in the house of the Lord, and in the treasuries of the king's house. <sup>16</sup> At that time Hezekiah cut off the gold from the doors of the temple of the Lord, and from the doorposts which Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid, and gave it to the king of Assyria.

Hezekiah refuses to pay anymore tribute money, so in response, the Assyrians come into Judah and take over the fortified cities. These were cities that were strategically located in order to protect main roads, supplies and troops in case of attack. They were not very large by today's standards; perhaps five to ten acres and were surrounded by thick walls with towers and a gate wide enough to let in a chariot. The point of taking these cities first was to demonstrate Assyria's total military dominance over the Jews and the helplessness of the main city: Jerusalem. God was originally displeased with the building of these cities because they symbolized the nation's trust in their own strength and not in the power of God to save them. Their taking was also an act of judgment by God on the Jews for their faithfulness.

Hezekiah realizes the danger and hopelessness of the situation and seeks to humble himself and work out a peace treaty with the Assyrians. In return for a promise of peace the Assyrians demand an enormous

payment (millions in today's currency). In order to comply, Hezekiah is forced to remove the gold from the temple.

## **2. Sennacherib's Treachery – II Kings 18:17-25**

After receiving this money, the Assyrians change their minds and decide to attack Jerusalem anyways. In II Chronicles 32:1-8, the writer describes the preparations Hezekiah made to protect his city from Sennacherib's army:

- Strengthened the walls and doors of the city
- Encouraged the people to trust and live in the Lord
- Severed the city's water supply

The problem with the city was that its water supply was outside the walls. When Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib was going to lay siege, he devised a plan to stop up the spring that provided the water and divert it through a tunnel into the city (no water for Assyria, but plenty for the Jews). Two crews dug the tunnel, one beginning at the springs and one from inside the city and they met in the middle.

In 1880, this tunnel was accidentally re-discovered by a young boy swimming in the area. The boy found an inscription on a rock which read, "The tunnel was completed while the workers wielded the ax, each man toward his fellow. There was heard a man's voice calling his fellow. The workers hacked toward each other, ax against ax, and the water flowed spring against pool, a difference of 1200 cubits." This inscription that describes the successful building of the tunnel is now in the Istanbul Museum (in Turkey, formerly known as Constantinople).

By doing this Hezekiah denied water to the enemy but provided it to the city during the siege. The tunnel is still in existence today and can be visited. It is 300 yards long, big enough that a person could walk through and all underground.

<sup>17</sup> Then the king of Assyria sent Tartan and Rab-saris and Rabshakeh from Lachish to King Hezekiah with a large army

to Jerusalem. So they went up and came to Jerusalem. And when they went up, they came and stood by the conduit of the upper pool, which is on the highway of the fuller's field.

<sup>18</sup> When they called to the king, Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who was over the household, and Shebna the scribe and Joah the son of Asaph the recorder, came out to them. <sup>19</sup> Then Rabshakeh said to them, "Say now to Hezekiah, 'Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria, "What is this confidence that you have? <sup>20</sup> You say (but they are only empty words), 'I have counsel and strength for the war.' Now on whom do you rely, that you have rebelled against me? <sup>21</sup> Now behold, you rely on the staff of this crushed reed, even on Egypt; on which if a man leans, it will go into his hand and pierce it. So is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who rely on him. <sup>22</sup> But if you say to me, 'We trust in the Lord our God,' is it not He whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah has taken away, and has said to Judah and to Jerusalem, 'You shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem'? <sup>23</sup> Now therefore, come, make a bargain with my master the king of Assyria, and I will give you two thousand horses, if you are able on your part to set riders on them. <sup>24</sup> How then can you repulse one official of the least of my master's servants, and rely on Egypt for chariots and for horsemen? <sup>25</sup> Have I now come up without the Lord's approval against this place to destroy it? The Lord said to me, 'Go up against this land and destroy it.'""

The king sends his official to negotiate a surrender in order to avoid a long drawn-out siege. The speech by the Assyrian is a model of the tactics of humiliation and bullying. He tells them they are foolish to trust in Egypt with whom they had an alliance. He also says they are foolish to trust in God. Assyria mistakenly thought that God was angry with the Jews for removing the altars and idols revealing their ignorance of the true God.

They also suggested that it was God who had sent them on this mission. How little they realized how close they were to the truth (they were trying to laugh at and confuse the Jews, but the joke was on them).

At this point in time, the Assyrian king was securing one of the fortified cities and had sent his envoys ahead to prepare Jerusalem for surrender at his arrival.

### **3. The Envoy's Insult** **– II Kings 18:26-37 and II Chronicles 32:19**

<sup>26</sup> Then Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, and Shebnah and Joah, said to Rabshakeh, "Speak now to your servants in Aramaic, for we understand it; and do not speak with us in Judean in the hearing of the people who are on the wall." <sup>27</sup> But Rabshakeh said to them, "Has my master sent me only to your master and to you to speak these words, and not to the men who sit on the wall, doomed to eat their own dung and drink their own urine with you?" <sup>28</sup> Then Rabshakeh stood and cried with a loud voice in Judean, saying, "Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria. <sup>29</sup> Thus says the king, 'Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be able to deliver you from my hand; <sup>30</sup> nor let Hezekiah make you trust in the Lord, saying, "The Lord will surely deliver us, and this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria." <sup>31</sup> Do not listen to Hezekiah, for thus says the king of Assyria, "Make your peace with me and come out to me, and eat each of his vine and each of his fig tree and drink each of the waters of his own cistern, <sup>32</sup> until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive trees and honey, that you may live and not die." But do not listen to Hezekiah when he misleads you, saying, "The Lord will deliver us." <sup>33</sup> Has any one of the gods of the nations delivered his land from the hand of the king of Assyria? <sup>34</sup> Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena and Ivvah? Have they delivered Samaria from my hand? <sup>35</sup> Who among all the gods of the lands have delivered their land from my hand, that the Lord should deliver Jerusalem from my hand?" <sup>36</sup> But the people were silent and answered him not a word, for the king's commandment was, "Do not answer him." <sup>37</sup> Then

Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who was over the household, and Shebna the scribe and Joah the son of Asaph, the recorder, came to Hezekiah with their clothes torn and told him the words of Rabshakeh.

Here we see the envoy really indulging in provocation and crossing the line in provoking the Lord. He speaks to the people in their own language in order to intimidate and spread propaganda among them. He tells the people that Hezekiah is a liar and that if they surrender, they will be taken care of. The envoy goes even further by telling the people not to trust in the Lord saying that if He didn't protect their other victims, He won't be able to protect them either. Of course, he didn't really understand who God was and who these people were.

<sup>19</sup> They spoke of the God of Jerusalem as of the gods of the peoples of the earth, the work of men's hands.

Hezekiah's officials are, at first, insulted, then they mourn the impending attack while the people remain silent.

#### **4. Hezekiah's Response – II Kings 19:1-19 and II Chronicles 32:23**

When Hezekiah hears the news, he goes immediately to the temple to humbly seek God's help. He then finds Isaiah in order to receive instruction from the Lord (same as going back to the Bible today). Isaiah receives a word from the Lord which tells Hezekiah three things:

1. Do not be afraid.
2. Assyria has not simply attacked the Jews; it has attacked God Himself with its arrogance.
3. Isaiah even describes how God will deal with them.
  - a. They will withdraw from the city to fight on another front.
  - b. The king will return to his city and be killed then.

In response to this Hezekiah is encouraged to hold fast and he tells the people to trust in the Lord.

We read in chapter 19 that the Assyrian army is called back to fight on another front (the Egyptian army reacts to the proximity of the Assyrian army by launching forth its troops), but the envoy continues to threaten the Jews by telling them not to think that this is a sign from God and that they'll be back to destroy them just like they destroyed the others. When Hezekiah receives this message, he once again goes to the Lord in prayer. In his prayer, we see that Hezekiah realizes the main difference between the Jewish nation and the other nations destroyed by the Assyrians. These other nations are lost because their god was not the Lord. Hezekiah knew this and it gave him confidence. His answer in verse 19 shows that he put his full confidence in God for deliverance despite the very real physical threat before him.

## 5. Isaiah's Prophecy – II Kings 19:20-28

Once Hezekiah prays and puts his confidence in God for salvation, he receives a word of confirmation from Isaiah the prophet. Note that Hezekiah first took a step of faith before God responded to him in reassurance. Isaiah's message is threefold:

<sup>20</sup> Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah saying, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Because you have prayed to Me about Sennacherib king of Assyria, I have heard you.' <sup>21</sup> This is the word that the Lord has spoken against him:

'She has despised you and mocked you,  
The virgin daughter of Zion;  
She has shaken her head behind you,  
The daughter of Jerusalem!

<sup>22</sup> 'Whom have you reproached and blasphemed?  
And against whom have you raised your voice,  
And haughtily lifted up your eyes?  
Against the Holy One of Israel!

<sup>23</sup> 'Through your messengers you have reproached the Lord,  
And you have said,  
"With my many chariots I came up to the heights of the



mountains,  
To the remotest parts of Lebanon;  
And I cut down its tall cedars and its choice cypresses.  
And I entered its farthest lodging place, its thickest forest.  
<sup>24</sup> "I dug wells and drank foreign waters,  
And with the sole of my feet I dried up  
All the rivers of Egypt."

He cites Assyria's sin which was insulting the Lord.

- Calling Him weak
- Comparing Him to other gods
- Not respecting His people and His power

<sup>25</sup> 'Have you not heard?  
Long ago I did it;  
From ancient times I planned it.  
Now I have brought it to pass,  
That you should turn fortified cities into ruinous heaps.  
<sup>26</sup> 'Therefore their inhabitants were short of strength,  
They were dismayed and put to shame;  
They were as the vegetation of the field and as the green herb,  
As grass on the housetops is scorched before it is grown up.  
<sup>27</sup> 'But I know your sitting down,  
And your going out and your coming in,  
And your raging against Me.  
<sup>28</sup> 'Because of your raging against Me,  
And because your arrogance has come up to My ears,  
Therefore I will put My hook in your nose,  
And My bridle in your lips,  
And I will turn you back by the way which you came.

He tells Hezekiah what He will do with the Assyrians. The same treatment they have given to their conquered nations will now be meted out to them.

<sup>29</sup> “Then this shall be the sign for you: you will eat this year what grows of itself, in the second year what springs from the same, and in the third year sow, reap, plant vineyards, and eat their fruit. <sup>30</sup> The surviving remnant of the house of Judah will again take root downward and bear fruit upward. <sup>31</sup> For out of Jerusalem will go forth a remnant, and out of Mount Zion survivors. The zeal of the Lord will perform this. <sup>32</sup> “Therefore thus says the Lord concerning the king of Assyria, “He will not come to this city or shoot an arrow there; and he will not come before it with a shield or throw up a siege ramp against it. <sup>33</sup> By the way that he came, by the same he will return, and he shall not come to this city,” declares the Lord. <sup>34</sup> “For I will defend this city to save it for My own sake and for My servant David’s sake.”

He reassures Hezekiah that no one in Jerusalem will be harmed and they will not suffer because of the Assyrian threat. As a matter of fact, the city will prosper and continue to be blessed by God. Hezekiah acted by faith on what he knew to be true about God. Isaiah comes to confirm that his prayer and faith were heard and answered.

## **6. God Destroys the Assyrians** **— II Kings 19:35-37 and II Chronicles 32:21-23**

<sup>35</sup> Then it happened that night that the angel of the Lord went out and struck 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians; and when men rose early in the morning, behold, all of them were dead. <sup>36</sup> So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and returned home, and lived at Nineveh. <sup>37</sup> It came about as he was worshiping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer killed him with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son became king in his place.

Some commentators think it was a plague of some kind that killed them, but archaeological records show that after their initial siege, the Assyrians did not complete their attack. Normally, they would have

described it in detail. This marked the beginning of the end for the Assyrian empire because approximately 70 years later it fell to the Babylonians never to recover.

II Chronicles 32:21-23 describes the destruction in detail and Hezekiah's subsequent blessings. Their destruction began with Hezekiah's prayer to the God who had the power to overthrow them or any nation He chooses to lower and humble.

## LESSONS

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Many wonderful and helpful lessons can be drawn from Hezekiah's experience with the Assyrians. Here are two:

### LESSON #1

#### **IF IT'S NOT PROTECTED BY GOD, IT'S NOT PROTECTED**

I think God allowed the Jews to be stripped of every outward protection before He saved them in order to show that if you're not protected by Him, it doesn't matter who is protecting you. I'm not saying we should eliminate armies and defense (God used these to accomplish His will). I'm saying that if you have not put your life in God's hands, your army, your wealth, your strength, your ability, or your company will not be **enough** to protect you.

### LESSON #2

#### **GOD WATCHES OUT FOR HIS OWN**

We think that God caring for His people is only an Old Testament concept. If God took this kind of care for the people who served to prepare for the coming of the kingdom, imagine the kind of care and interest He takes in the people of the kingdom!

David said,

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His godly ones.  
- Psalms 116:15

God cares about us in a way that He doesn't for unbelievers. He is not partial. He will lavish His care and grace on **all** who believe and obey Him.

# 12.

## The Life and Times of Hezekiah: Part 3

We've looked at the life of Hezekiah as described in several Old Testament passages. These do not recount everything that happened, but they do describe three of the most significant times in his life:

**1. Reformation** — When Hezekiah became king at 25 years of age, he began one of the most ambitious religious and social reform programs in Jewish history. Because of these, the nation prospered economically and spiritually.

**2. Response to Assyria** — In the previous chapter we looked at what took place when the Assyrians laid siege to Jerusalem. Hezekiah refused to surrender and instead put his trust in God to save the nation, and God did save them by sending an angel to destroy 185,000 Assyrian soldiers.

Eventually, the Assyrian king returned home and was also killed, thus putting an end to the constant threat of this neighbor to the north. The interesting thing about this particular episode is not the fact that Hezekiah resisted the Assyrians. That he resisted was not what saved him and the nation, what saved him was that he sought the will of the Lord in what to do in the matter and obeyed Him. Years later when the

Babylonians were threatening Judah, the prophet Jeremiah was telling the people to surrender and submit to this foreign nation, but the people were stubborn and didn't listen and tried to do what Hezekiah did but failed. As a result, the city was destroyed, and many were killed or taken into captivity.

The difference was not whether they chose to resist or surrender, the difference was whether they sought the Lord and followed His instructions or not. Hezekiah succeeded because when he saw his predicament, he went immediately to the Lord in prayer to seek His help and counsel. God told him to resist, and if he obeyed, he would succeed.

Success is not based solely on the plan we choose to execute. For the believer, success comes when we seek and follow God's plan. Some will say, "Well, it was easy for Hezekiah because he had Isaiah to actually tell him what to do." True, but many kings and leaders didn't listen to the prophets and did their own thing even after the prophets spoke. We read in King Saul's case that he disobeyed even after the prophet Samuel told him what to do.

Today we can still go to God in prayer to ask for direction, and He still answers us in a variety of ways:

- **His Word**, if we read it and know it, He will provide the answer and direction we should take.  
(II Timothy 3:16, teaching, reproof, correction)
- **His church**, the leaders and teachers in the church can be counselors to help find solutions and direction.  
(Ephesians 4:11-12)
- **His Holy Spirit**, that convicts our hearts and moves us to search and do what is right before God.  
(Romans 8:14 "...led by the Spirit")

Like Hezekiah, we can succeed in facing our greatest trials and challenges not by figuring out the best plan of attack or devising coping

strategies, we succeed when we go to God **first** in prayer asking for His direction and His solution to our problem.

The final episode of Hezekiah's life that we will examine involves one more example of Hezekiah going to God in need. This time for a very personal matter.

## HEZEKIAH'S ILLNESS

In II Kings 20, the author simply states that Hezekiah became mortally ill (at about age 39-40). The remainder of the information about Hezekiah tells of how he prayed to God to be healed and after he was, the foolish way he acted with foreign envoys from Babylon.

<sup>1</sup> In those days Hezekiah became mortally ill. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him and said to him, "Thus says the Lord, 'Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live.'"

Hezekiah was ill, but there was a question of how serious it was. Isaiah announces that it is terminal.

<sup>2</sup> Then he turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord, saying, <sup>3</sup> "Remember now, O Lord, I beseech You, how I have walked before You in truth and with a whole heart and have done what is good in Your sight." And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

A familiar response from Hezekiah is his immediate turning to God for help. Note that he is grieving his imminent death and his prayer is typical of one "bargaining" with God (one of the five steps in the grieving process). Perhaps Isaiah's announcement brought him out of the denial stage. He is telling God that he doesn't deserve this and that he has been good and done his best.

<sup>4</sup> Before Isaiah had gone out of the middle court, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, <sup>5</sup> "Return and say to Hezekiah the leader of My people, 'Thus says the Lord, the God of your

father David, "I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; behold, I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of the Lord. <sup>6</sup> I will add fifteen years to your life, and I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for My own sake and for My servant David's sake." <sup>7</sup> Then Isaiah said, "Take a cake of figs." And they took and laid it on the boil, and he recovered.

At exactly that moment, the Lord spoke to Isaiah and gave him a message for Hezekiah: it is the true God (of David and fathers) who speaks to you concerning this matter, God has heard the request, God has been moved by Hezekiah's grief and tears (not by his argument). We don't appeal to God with logic or arguments, but with a broken heart and a humble spirit.

God makes certain promises to Hezekiah:

- He will be well enough to go to the temple in three days.
- He will add 15 years to his life.
- He will save the city from the Assyrians.
- He will continue to protect Jerusalem.

These promises reveal that the illness took place during the episode with the Assyrians but was explained later on in the book of Kings. The writer reveals that Hezekiah suffered from an infected boil of some kind, and fig cakes (often used to draw infection) were used to treat it.

God provides the manner of healing, and more importantly, the promise that it would work. This is why we pray for doctors and their care of us today. They have the treatment, surgeries and medication, but we pray for God to provide the results.

<sup>8</sup> Now Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "What will be the sign that the Lord will heal me, and that I shall go up to the house of the Lord the third day?" <sup>9</sup> Isaiah said, "This shall be the sign to you from the Lord, that the Lord will do the thing that He has



spoken: shall the shadow go forward ten steps or go back ten steps?" <sup>10</sup> So Hezekiah answered, "It is easy for the shadow to decline ten steps; no, but let the shadow turn backward ten steps." <sup>11</sup> Isaiah the prophet cried to the Lord, and He brought the shadow on the stairway back ten steps by which it had gone down on the stairway of Ahaz.

Hezekiah cannot simply wait the three days for his healing to take place; he wants a sign right away. The Lord obliges him by telling him to choose what sign he would like to see: the shadow of the sundial move forwards or backwards?

Unlike Joshua's sign where the sun stood still as a sign to the people, this sign was private in nature and only for Hezekiah. He chooses that what was presently in shadow be illuminated on the steps of the palace. This also signified that extra time was given him, like the clock being turned back.

In Isaiah 38:9-20, Isaiah records a prayer written by Hezekiah where he praises and thanks God for his healing and extended life. In this poem or song:

- Hezekiah grieves over the sudden end to his life. It is interesting that he equates dying with not seeing God anymore. It was with David that the thought of life after death and a continuing relationship with God began to be fully expressed in writing.
- The king also pleads to live since this was the only way he could please and praise God. He says that after death there would only be silence. Again, no concept (like Paul) that death brought you into God's presence.

<sup>12</sup> At that time Berodach-baladan a son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he heard that Hezekiah had been sick. <sup>13</sup> Hezekiah listened to them, and showed them all his treasure house, the silver and the gold and the spices and the precious oil and the house of his armor and all that was found in his treasuries. There was nothing in

his house nor in all his dominion that Hezekiah did not show them. <sup>14</sup> Then Isaiah the prophet came to King Hezekiah and said to him, “What did these men say, and from where have they come to you?” And Hezekiah said, “They have come from a far country, from Babylon.” <sup>15</sup> He said, “What have they seen in your house?” So Hezekiah answered, “They have seen all that is in my house; there is nothing among my treasuries that I have not shown them.”

After his recovery, and after the city was saved from Assyrians, Babylonian envoys were sent to visit with him. The Babylonians were a rising power at the time, not as strong as the Assyrians yet, but becoming more powerful. They were scouting the area for potential allies or future conquests. Hezekiah had prospered with his reforms and was showing off the wealth of his nation in an attempt to build political friendships with these people. He quickly forgot that he had no need for political alliances with pagan nations. He didn't realize that he was setting himself up for a future attack. He may have been overconfident because God had promised 15 more years of life and protection to the city (contingent on trust and obedience). He enthusiastically recounts to Isaiah what he did with the envoys.

<sup>16</sup> Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, “Hear the word of the Lord. <sup>17</sup> ‘Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house, and all that your fathers have laid up in store to this day will be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left,’ says the Lord. <sup>18</sup> ‘Some of your sons who shall issue from you, whom you will beget, will be taken away; and they will become officials in the palace of the king of Babylon.’” <sup>19</sup> Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, “The word of the Lord which you have spoken is good.” For he thought, “Is it not so, if there will be peace and truth in my days?”

Isaiah predicts what the Babylonians will do to the Southern Kingdom in about one century:

- He predicts the utter destruction of the city.

- He predicts the exile of its people.
- He even predicts the eventual influence of Daniel and the three young nobles from Jerusalem who were Hezekiah's royal descendants.

In Isaiah, it is after this event that the prophet begins to prophesy and lament over the future sufferings of the people and the coming of the ultimate Savior centuries later. For his part Hezekiah has a rather short-term view of what Isaiah has said. He believes and accepts it, but since it is in the future, he is relieved, even happy that he can look forward to 15 years of peace and prosperity.

He probably thought that Babylon's becoming a great power was good since he wouldn't have to worry about Assyria, but we know from history that they became Judah's worst enemies later on.

<sup>20</sup> Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah and all his might, and how he made the pool and the conduit and brought water into the city, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah? <sup>21</sup> So Hezekiah slept with his fathers, and Manasseh his son became king in his place.

This summarizes and finalizes his life.

## SUMMARY

These have been stories that give us insights into a man who did great things and from whom we can learn much. His experiences and reactions to things are really the teachers in these stories. For example, they teach us about being God's person and what that means:

### 1. God's person is very human

Looking at what Hezekiah did does not reveal him to be some kind of superhero. It shows someone with a spotty record with some great, some good, some bad and some stupid moments:

- Cutting off the Assyrians — bad
- Getting rid of idols — good
- Obeying God in a crisis — great
- Showing off his wealth — stupid
- Did a bad job raising his son, Manasseh, who went back to idolatry and evil

Being God's person doesn't mean being perfect, it means that we remain God's person despite our successes and failures.

## **2. God's person relies on God**

Hezekiah had an automatic reaction whenever something bad happened: he went straight to the temple to pray about it. His first response was always prayer and seeking God's will, and the times he failed we see it was because he failed to do this.

Not all of God's people are kings, but if a king felt the need to rely on God, shouldn't the rest of us be prepared to go to God first when trouble comes?

## **3. God's person lives by grace**

Despite his mistakes, even compound mistakes (showing off, then being glad that punishment is only after you die to other people), God blessed Hezekiah.

He lost as many as he won, but God blessed him anyway. It made no sense, it didn't add up, the blessings compared to the track record. Grace doesn't add up, isn't logical, and is not based on scores or what you deserve. As I've said before, grace is getting what you don't deserve.

The only reason Hezekiah survived the revolt of his own people when he tore down their altars; survived the Assyrian army; survived a terminal

illness; survived a diplomatic blunder, was because God decided to extend His grace to him.

The only reason we will ever survive our past mistakes, present weaknesses and future failures is because, as God's people in Jesus Christ, God has decided to extend His grace toward us.

This is the greatest lesson we can learn from this king and the most important lesson we can learn from the Bible as a whole!

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