

A MAN AFTER THE HEART OF GOD

When the children of Israel first insisted on being governed by a king, to be like their neighbors, they spoke to Samuel, God's prophet and judge:

1 Samuel 8:5 *They said to him, "You're old, and your sons don't live as you do. Give us a king to rule over us like all the other nations."* [EXB]

Samuel was displeased, but God consented:

1 Samuel 8:7 *And the Lord said to Samuel, "Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them."* [NKJV]

At the time, Kish was a rich and influential man from the tribe of Benjamin,

1 Samuel 9:2 *And he had a son, whose name was Saul, a choice young man, and a goodly: and there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he: from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people.* [KJV]

Saul was the extraordinary man God selected to be their king:

1 Samuel 9:17 *When Samuel saw Saul, the Lord said, "That's the man I told you about! He will rule my people."* [NLT]

Samuel anointed Saul and gave him charge:

1 Samuel 10:6a *"Then the Lord's Spirit will come on you with great power. You will be changed. You will be like a different man."* [ERV]

The spirit of God did come upon Saul and he won many victories for Israel: first against the Ammonites, then against the Moabites, the Edomites and, most admirably, against the Amalekites.

Indeed, Saul was selected directly by God; however, worldly and military successes led Saul to be proud and reliant on his own savvy, rather than obedient to God's will and commands. So Saul chose not to do the will of God, but to follow his judgment and do his own will, when he offered sacrifices himself, rather than risk waiting for Samuel's arrival, as he had been instructed.

As a consequence:

1 Samuel 13:13-14a *Samuel said to Saul, "You have done foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which he commanded you. The Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever, ^{14a}but now your kingdom will not continue."* [NRSV]

Later, Saul — again relying on his judgment — did not destroy the enemies of Israel completely, as God had commanded, but kept some of the spoils to accommodate his troops and to offer them as sacrifices, thus substituting his own liturgy to the clear and precise will of God.

Immediately,

1 Samuel 15:10-11a *The word of the Lord came to Samuel: ^{11a}"I regret that I made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me, and has not carried out my commands."* [NKJV]

Samuel then upbraided Saul:

1 Samuel 15:22-23; 16:14 *And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. ²³For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king. [KJV] **16:14**Now the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him. [NRSV]*

The criterion for the selection of Saul's successor was much different and it was a surprise even for Samuel, God's prophet. God had told Samuel that the following king would be one of the sons of Jesse of Bethlehem. So Samuel began with the first of Jesse's sons:

1 Samuel 16:7 *But the Lord said to him, "Pay no attention to how tall and handsome he is. I have rejected him, because I do not judge as people judge. They look at the outward appearance, but I look at the heart."* [GNT]

Samuel proceeded to examine the other sons, but none was suitable, until he met David, the last born, a little kid tending flocks in the fields.

1 Samuel 16:13a *Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward. [KJV]*

The Spirit of the Lord — Who had departed from Saul — never left David, who was a man after God's own heart, as the Apostle Paul preached in the synagogue of Antioch of Pisidia:

Acts 13:22 *"After removing Saul, he made David their king. God testified concerning him: 'I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.'" [NIV]*

David was a man after God's own heart. God had identified a spiritual disciple.

As we know, David was not without sin: indeed, David committed sins, during his life — as we all do — grievous sins, but God never regretted of having made him king. The spirit of the Lord was with David from the day of his anointing and never left David, but was always with him: "from that day forward."

So I may ask what may I learn from the example of David: the man, whom God declared to be after God's own heart.

First, I may see the contrast with Saul: when faced with a decision, David depended on the Lord and not on his own skills or judgment; nor on the judgment of others, as when — for example — he prepared to battle Goliath, the Philistine giant:

1 Samuel 17:33, 37 But Saul replied, "You can't go fight this Philistine. You're just a youth, and he's been a warrior since he was young."
37 Then David said, "The Lord who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine." [HCSB]

Again, when facing Goliath directly:

1 Samuel 17:45 David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with sword and spear and 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." [NRSV]

Because David believed God — as he sang:

Psalms 118:8–9 It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man. ⁹It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in princes. [ESV]

David depended on God for everything and anything.

Second: although anointed king in his youth, David waited patiently for more than a dozen years while serving and ultimately suffering persecution by Saul, who even sought, more than once, to murder him. David even had to save his life by seeking protection among the enemies of Israel.

1 Samuel 27:1–2, 7 But David kept thinking to himself, "Someday Saul is going to get me. The best thing I can do is escape to the Philistines. Then Saul will stop hunting for me in Israelite territory, and I will finally be safe." ²So David took his 600 men and went over and joined Achish son of Maach, the king of Gath. ⁷and they lived there among the Philistines for a year and four months. [NLT]

Furthermore, during the persecution, David had opportunities to kill Saul, but he did not take advantage of them:

1 Samuel 24:6 And [David] said to his men, "The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord." [NKJV]

Years later, David had to flee Jerusalem to escape the rebellion led by his own son Absalom, whom he loved dearly:

2 Samuel 15:13–14, 16a A messenger soon arrived in Jerusalem to tell David, "All Israel has joined Absalom in a conspiracy against you!" ¹⁴"Then we must flee at once, or it will be too late!" David urged his men. "Hurry! If we get out of the city before Absalom arrives, both we and the city of Jerusalem will be spared from disaster." ^{16a}So the king and all his household set out at once. [NLT]

All throughout the trials, David never complained to the Lord for such evils, nor even asked "why" God would allow such suffering to come his way. All along, David only asked for God's protection, while singing praises to the Lord for His goodness and mercy.

Psalms 23:1, 4–5a The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. ⁴Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. ^{5a}You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; [NASB]

Third, David was sensitive and quick to recognize the hand of the Lord in the events of his life, as when (after having begun to march with 400 troops to punish Nabal, a mean descendent of Caleb, who had treated David and his people unjustly during the persecution by Saul) he was met, in the way, by Nabal's wife, Abigail, who pleaded for mercy.

David understood immediately this was not an obvious, cunning ploy contrived to protect her family, rather it was the hand of the Lord at work in his life.

1 Samuel 25:32–34 Then David said to Abigail: "Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me! ³³And 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. ³⁴For 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!" [NKJV]

Finally: when David did yield to temptations, he was quick to repent — as soon as he was confronted with his sin.

2 Samuel 12:13 *David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." Nathan said to David, "Now the Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die."* [NRSV]

Even more revealing is the fact that — although his sin caused great injuries to others (in this case, Uriah and Bathsheba) — David first and foremost recognized that his sin was against the Lord, because the Lord was the center of his life, of his thoughts and of his heart.

David's faith and trust in the Lord was so determinant that at the end of his life he could sing:

2 Samuel 22:24 *"I was also perfect toward him. I kept myself from my iniquity."* [WEB]

Because David fully believed that "the Lord ha[d] put away [his] sin":

Psalms 118:18 *The Lord has disciplined me severely, But He has not given me over to death.* [NASB]

In conclusion: David's heart had the Lord's presence at heart; he trusted God (as Abraham also did) not because of any reason or any theology, rather only because he knew Him.

While being after the heart of God did not prevent David from sinning — only the Son of God is

without sin — David's example is to "know" the Lord, to be quick to recognize the Lord's presence in the events of his life, to repent when found to be sinning and to heed His will.

Do I understand the central, critical role that obedience has for the Lord? Do I recognize the Lord's presence and actions in all that occurs to me and around me? Am I in constant communion with the Lord all day long?

John 21:6-7a *He said to them, "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. ^{7a}That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!"* [NRSV]

As a new creature, I have received a new heart: let it be a heart after the heart of God that I may be able to recognize the Lord and also say: "It is the Lord!" as did the disciple whom Jesus loved.

Because:

1 Corinthians 8:6 *yet for us there is one God, the Father. All things are from Him, and we exist for Him. And there is one Lord, Jesus Christ. All things are through Him, and we exist through Him.* [HCSB]

So that, as David did, I also may sing:

Psalms 40:8 *"I delight to do Your will, my God; Your instruction lives within me."* [HCSB]