

KING SAUL, KING DAVID AND THE LORD

The lives of the two kings teach a valuable lesson.

Both kings were selected and appointed directly by God, Who charged the same prophet, Samuel, with anointing first Saul (**1 Samuel 10:1**) — when the Israelites wanted a king, as the neighboring nations had — and then David (**1 Samuel 16:13**), after God rejected Saul, because he had disobeyed.

Saul, son of Kish, was an athletic man: the tallest and the most handsome in Israel. David was small boy, the youngest of the sons of Jesse: his qualification was not his stature nor his looks, but his heart. He was a man after the heart of God, Who had thus warned Samuel:

1 Samuel 16:7 *But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or his stature, Man does not see what the Lord sees, for man sees what is visible, but the Lord sees the heart."* [HCSB]

Saul began humbly and was incredulous of having been chosen for such a great role.

The Lord instructed Saul to destroy completely the Amalekites, including their king Agag, for they had obstructed His purposes all along.

1 Samuel 15:3 *"Now go and completely destroy the entire Amalekite nation—men, women, children, babies, cattle, sheep, goats, camels, and donkeys."* [NLT]

However, after the Lord had granted him many military victories, success led Saul to become confident in his own judgment, rather than in the Lord's commands.

1 Samuel 15:9 *Saul and his men spared Agag's life and kept the best of the sheep and goats, the cattle, the fat calves, and the lambs — everything, in fact, that appealed to them. They destroyed only what was worthless or of poor quality.* [NLT]

Saul's sin was disobedience of God's explicit command.

David was also enjoying the fruits of military successes, but he was in tranquility in his kingdom when he sinned:

2 Samuel 11:2, 4–5 *Late one afternoon, after his midday rest, David got out of bed and was walking on the roof of the palace. As he looked out over the city, he noticed a woman of unusual beauty taking a bath. ⁴Then David sent messengers to get her; and when she came to the palace, he slept with her. She had just completed the purification rites after having her menstrual period. Then she returned home. ⁵Later, when Bathsheba discovered that she was pregnant, she sent David a message, saying, "I'm pregnant."* [NLT]

Then David commanded Bathsheba's husband, Uriah to return from the battlefield and attempted to convince him to have sexual intercourse with her and thus claim paternity. When that failed, David sent a letter to Joab, his commander, to murder Uriah:

2 Samuel 11:15 *The letter instructed Joab, "Station Uriah on the front lines where the battle is fiercest. Then pull back so that he will be killed."* [NLT]

David — chosen as the "man after the heart of God" — sinned by violating not a direct personal command, but two of God's Ten Commandments: "you shall not commit adultery" (**Exodus 20:14**) and "you shall not murder" (**Exodus 20:13**).

Back to Saul: God sent Samuel to confront him.

1 Samuel 15:20–21 *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. ²¹But the people took of the plunder, sheep and oxen, the best of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice to the Lord your God in Gilgal."* [NKJV]

Saul denied his sin and misrepresented the situation:

- 1]** by declaring his complete obedience;
- 2]** by categorizing the obvious falsehood as something insignificant that "his people" did and
- 3]** by manufacturing a feigned last minute justification of sacrifices to the Lord, to cover the disobedience.

This was the second time Saul substituted his judgment — about what was important — for the explicit command of God. The first time was when he did not wait, as instructed, for Samuel to arrive at the site of a battle and offer sacrifices, but offered them himself (**1 Samuel 13:8–12**).

God sent another prophet, Nathan, to confront and reprove David by telling him the story of a rich man, who took away the only little lamb of a poor man, who owned nothing else. David was furious and vowed the rich man must die.

2 Samuel 12:7a *Then Nathan said to David, "You are that man!"* [NLT]

Being "after the heart of God" did not make David immune to sin, but "after the heart of God" he was and we know this by comparing how David responded when confronted with his sins with how Saul responded:

2 Samuel 12:13a *Then David confessed to Nathan, "I have sinned"* [NLT]

David did not explain, justify, hide or cover up. He did not say: let's face it, the poor Bathsheba was lonely, she felt abandoned and my seducing her was really an act of compassion. No, David immediately acknowledged with a single unequivocal sentence that his action was a sin.

More important yet, is the second part of David's single sentence. He could have said: "I have committed sin against Uriah, because I ordered his assassination," or "I have sinned against Bathsheba by seducing and dishonoring her." Not so:

2 Samuel 12:13ab *Then David confessed to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord"* [NLT]

Yes, David did injure human beings, but even in his guilty condition, he recognized — and he did it immediately — that his transgression was first and foremost against God: God, the priority for David's will and life.

Psalm 51:4a "Against you, and you alone, have I sinned; I have done what is evil in your sight." [NLT]

We may remember that the original sin also did not hurt anyone directly: it was a sin against the Lord. Even in sin, God was present in David's heart as the supreme priority: higher than any person — no matter how deeply hurt. Even in his sin, David was "a man after the heart of God" and God honored David's sincere confession and did not reject him as king — although the consequences of sin (the death of the child of adultery) stayed with David:

2 Samuel 12:13c–14 *And Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has taken away your sin; you shall not die. ¹⁴However, because by this deed you have given occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born to you shall surely die."* [NASB]

On the other hand, Saul forgot the sovereignty of God: he did not take God's command seriously, but followed his own judgment. Saul did not understand what obedience means and was rejected as king:

1 Samuel 15:22–23 *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." [NKJV]; ²³Rebellion is as sinful as witchcraft, and stubbornness as bad as worshiping idols. So because you have rejected the command of the LORD, he has rejected you as king."* [NLT];

Saul did not deliberately set out to violate God's command — rather, he did not take God's command seriously. To Saul obedience became secondary to his own considered rational judgment; but obedience is never secondary with God, because disobedience is as idolatry (witchcraft). It is as obeying another god other than the Lord: that is, obeying one's self. Saul never recovered.

There are four important lessons for me:

1] Saul offered a rational justification for his actions, whereas David repented immediately.

2] This reveals that the nature of Saul's sin was different from that of David's. David yielded to temptation; Saul substituted his own judgment for obedience. This is not to imply that one sin is better or worse than another. Rather to note that Saul believed that "reasons" could exist ("offering sacrifices") that were of higher value than God's commands and thus would supersede them.

That is the original sin. Let us remember: Eve sinned because she deemed the forbidden fruit had qualities that made it superior to the Lord's commandment.

Genesis 3:6 *When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she*

took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. [NASB]

Of course, this kind of reasoning is tantamount to worshipping another god (that is, one's own judgment being higher than God). God, as we know, has zero tolerance for the worship of other gods and He banned Adam, Eve and their descendants from the Garden.

3] David repented immediately, after his sin was declared to him. Saul argued to no end.

This is not to imply that there are limits to God's love and mercies: indeed they are unfathomable and everlasting; rather that I am well advised to repent right away if I sin and not to wait and taste of His chastisement.

I do not know that God has a time clock to count the days, before forgiveness ends. However the quicker I repent and confess my sin, the less time there will be to concoct excuses, justifications and attenuating circumstances.

4] David's repentance was the consequence of his love for the Lord:

Psalm 51:10, 12–13 *Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me. [NLT] ¹²Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, And uphold me by Your generous Spirit. ¹³Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners shall be converted to You.* [NKJV]

David — by faith — understood the Lord's taking away his sin so thoroughly that at the end of his life, many years later, he could sing: since the Lord took it away, there is no sin in me.

2 Samuel 22:21–24 *The LORD rewarded me for doing right; he restored me because of my innocence. ²²For I have kept the ways of the LORD; I have not turned from my God to follow evil. ²³I have followed all his regulations; I have never abandoned his decrees. ²⁴I am blameless before God; I have kept myself from sin.* [NLT]

On the other hand, we must remember that if we try to cover and justify our sin, as Saul tried, we are far away from God and facing condemnation, as the apostle John, a thousand years later, wrote in his letter:

1 John 1:10 *If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.* [NASB]

However, David understood well that:

1 John 1:9 *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* [HSCB]

If we confess our sins, God does forgive us, owing to Jesus' sacrifice on the cross and His forgiveness is complete: there is total cleansing, the sins are "taken away" and no trace is left.