

### THREE GREAT FAILURES

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on February 15, 1959 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P.M.

From time to time it serves a good purpose to review some of the things that happened to God's people in the long ago. The apostle Paul writing to the Corinthians in I Cor. 10:11, said, "These things happened unto them by way of example, and are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come." The Old Testament totals nearly three-fourths of the entire Bible, and we read it for inspiration and for instruction. We find in the Old Testament some examples that inspire us and other examples that warn us. In this study we take three Old Testament examples and feel the impact of their lives.

Israel became a great nation under God's guidance and blessing. The zenith of its power was reached while Saul and David and Solomon sat on the throne. At that time the nations around Israel brought tribute to God's people and there was a vast influence emanating from Jerusalem through most of the inhabited earth. Never again, after the division of the kingdom which followed Solomon, did Israel regain its power and its prestige. I want to review something of the story of those first three kings of Israel.

These kings have many things in common. They were chosen of God to become kings of his people. They had also in common the fact that they were men of great ability. Single out any one of them and he towers above his contemporaries because of his ability. They were also alike in that each one did some outstanding things during his reign. They were also alike, and I say this with regret, in that each one of them was a failure.

Each one of them began his life with great promise. It would be hard to think of a better beginning than each of these kings had when he became king of God's people. It would also be hard to think of a more disappointing failure than each became sometime during his life. These men inspire us in some ways; they warn us in others. But let us begin with the first of the three, king Saul, and read a little of the story.

#### Israel Desires A King

The story begins in the eighth chapter of I Samuel. Prior to this time God's people had been ruled by judges and not by kings, but the Canaanitish nations round about had kings and the people wanted to be like them. I Sam. 8:5 describes how "The people came to Samuel and said: Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto Jehovah. And Jehovah said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee; for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not be king over them." Actually, God had been their king, but they became desirous of having an earthly king, so God indulged them in this desire.

Samuel, the great prophet and priest of God, made a speech to plead with the people not to take an earthly king and reject God as their real king. The people's hearts had already been set, so Samuel's persuasive words fell on deaf ears. Here is the account, "But the people refused to hearken unto the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay, but we will have a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles. And Samuel heard all the words of the people, and he rehearsed them in the ears of Jehovah. And Jehovah said unto Samuel, Hearken unto their voice, and make them a king. And Samuel said unto the men of Israel, Go every man unto his own city." (I Sam. 8:19-22).

#### King Saul

The opening verse of chapter nine tells about the man whom God selected to be that first king. "Now there was a man of Benjamin, whose name was Kish ... And he had a son, whose name was Saul, a 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." (I Sam. 9:1-2). Not only was he physically fine, he was fine in many other ways. He was modest, for when he had been told that he was to be king, and when the people had been brought together, Saul slipped away and hid in the baggage. His modesty was rather impressive, though he was not able to keep it throughout his life. In chapter ten, verse twenty-four says, "And Samuel said to all the people, See ye him whom Jehovah hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people? And all the people shouted, and said, Long live the king."

Israel now had its king. This great young man went out immediately and rallied the people together to throw off the yoke of their conquerors. Saul was a fine, promising young man, but we soon find that Saul did not remain as modest and self-effacing as he had been at the beginning. It was unlawful under Moses' law for any but a priest to offer sacrifices. Saul faced a situation where he thought a sacrifice needed to be offered. He waited for the priest and the priest did not come. Then, impetuously, he took the matter into his own hands and offered the sacrifice--an ill-advised, unlawful sacrifice. Samuel, God's prophet, came and said to Saul, "Thou hast done foolishly, thou hast not kept the commandment of Jehovah thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would have Jehovah established thy kingdom upon Israel forever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue: Jehovah hath sought him a man after his own heart, and Jehovah hath appointed him to be prince over his people because thou hast not kept that which Jehovah

commanded thee.” (I Sam. 13:13-14). From the young, inexperienced, modest boy he has grown into a man who feels that he has the right to set aside God’s commandments and do as he pleases.

### Self-Exaltation

It is only a short step to the 15th chapter and there we find the second glaring evidence of the change in the thinking of this young man. God commanded Saul to go down and destroy a long-standing enemy of Israel, the Amalakites. He was to destroy all of them and to bring back nothing. When Saul got there he liked the looks of some of the things and wanted to bring them back, so he brought them back. Hardly had he returned when Samuel went out to meet him and asked, “What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?” (I Sam. 15:14). In other words, the sounds that preceded Saul told Samuel that he had not kept God’s law. Then comes one of the greatest passages in the whole Bible, “And Samuel said, Hath Jehovah as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of Jehovah? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as idolatry and teraphim. Because thou hath rejected the word of Jehovah, he hath also rejected thee from being king.” (I Sam. 15:22-23).

I can almost see Saul as he grows older. From that timid, modest young giant whom God selected, he becomes proud of his strength, proud of the way he can organize an army and proud of his conquests. A few years pass and he is thinking of Saul more than he ever has before. Saul is the apple of his eye. The problem here is self-centeredness, a problem that can ruin any one of us. It is the problem of thinking more of one’s own will and one’s own desires than the will and desires and commandments of God.

Fritz Kunkel, in his book, *Search for Maturity*, says: “Disintegration results from egocentricity, and destroys human life just as the decay of living tissue ensues whenever a malignant tumor develops.” Egocentricity, self-centeredness, and selfishness are like cancer in a man’s life. There is a destructive power that comes into any man when he begins to feel himself important, when he begins to feel that it is by his own strength and by his own power that accomplishments are made. This is a very old story, but the sin that ruined Saul’s life is also very modern. God, at one time was very great in the eyes of Saul, but later on God was displaced by Saul’s own conception of himself.

We turn a few more pages and in the 18th chapter of I Samuel we read about the jealousy that resulted from this self-centered feeling in Saul’s heart. It happened after the young shepherd lad, David, had killed the giant. On the way back the multitudes came out and sang this song of triumph, “Saul hath slain his thousands, And David his ten thousands. And Saul was very wroth, and this saying displeased him; and he said, They have ascribed unto David ten thousands and to me they have ascribed but thousands: and what can he have more but the kingdom? And Saul eyed David from that day and forward.” (I Sam. 16:6-8). His own self-concern ruined his life and caused God to remove him from being king.

### King David

After a time God allowed David to come into the place of Saul. We read David’s story in II Samuel and it is a wonderful story. He was a fine shepherd boy, brave, courageous and full of faith. He stood alone before Goliath in triumph. He also had many other fine qualities. David had a different kind of failing from that of Saul.

It is in the 11th chapter of II Samuel that we read of David’s mistake. “And it came to pass, at the return of the year, (which means the spring of the year) at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab his servant with him and all Israel ... but David tarried at Jerusalem. And it came to pass at the eventide, that David rose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king’s house; And from the roof he saw a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon. And David sent and inquired after the woman. And one said, Is this not Bathsheeba the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite? And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her; and she returned. to her house. And the woman conceived; and she sent and told David, and said, I am with child.” (II Sam. 11:1-5).

Adultery was followed by murder to cover the sin. David’s sin was not so much being self-centered; David’s sin was the lust of the flesh, another of the great causes of the downfall of men. David lived his life after this to make right his wrong, and we read with a great deal of sympathy his 51st psalm, a psalm of penitence for this sin. How wonderful it would have been if the life of David had not been marred by the events of the 11th chapter of II Samuel. It is a black chapter that stands out to mar the record of God’s great king David.

### King Solomon

In the course of time David grew old and from among his sons Solomon was selected to be king in the place of his father. Solomon must have been a fine looking boy and he must have had many abilities. This is evidenced by the fact that he became so powerful a king. Solomon’s ships were not only in the Mediterranean, sailing as far as Spain, but also down in the gulf of Akaba. Then there were the copper mines, and the tribute brought from many nations. Solomon became very great. Part of his greatness was due to the fact that early in his life he leaned heavily upon God.

Soon after he had been called to be king, God came to him and said, "Ask what I shall give thee. "The answer Solomon gave has become well known. "And now, O Jehovah my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father: and I am but a little child; I know not how to go out or come in. And thy servant is in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude. Give thy servant therefore an understanding heart to judge thy people that I may discern between good and evil; for who is able to judge this thy great people?" (I Kings 3:7-13). He asked for wisdom; God was pleased. God gave him wisdom and also wealth and power.

Then Solomon made his mistake. We read of it a few chapters further in the 11th chapter of I Kings. Solomon brought around him a great many people who did not fear Jehovah and he entered into intimate relationships with these pagans. The result was then as it is now. As Paul said it, "Be not deceived: Evil companionships corrupt good morals." (I Cor. 15:33). Here is the way it happened with Solomon, "Now king Solomon loved many foreign women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites; of the nations concerning which Jehovah said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go among them, neither shall they come among you; for surely they will turn away your hearts after other gods: Solomon clave unto these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. For it came to pass when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not perfect with Jehovah his God, as was the heart of David his father." (I Kings 11:1-4).

### Three Great Mistakes

I wish we had the power to visualize each of these three great kings of Israel. There stands Saul. We look up to him because he is seven or perhaps eight feet tall. What a man! Yet he was a man whose self-centeredness blasted the success that his life might have had. Remember in the New Testament Paul's admonition to the Romans, "For I say to every man that is among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but so to think as to think soberly, according as God has dealt to each man a measure of faith." (Rom. 12:3). Let us remember our own weaknesses. Let us always remember that it is only when we trust in God that we are strong. When we look at David we see him with all of his wonderful virtues, but we also remember the secret sin of his life, weakness of the flesh, which blackened an otherwise beautiful record. Then we remember Solomon, wisest of men, skilled ruler, respected and honored throughout the earth, but a man whose companionships pulled away his heart from that which was right. Evil companionships still corrupt good morals. These men lived and died in the long ago, but their lessons continue until now.

Our prayer is that as each of us listens again to God's story of his broken kings, we may determine to avoid their failures. The best way to avoid any of these faults is to anchor ourselves to Christ. Believe in God with all your heart; believe in Christ; commit yourself unto the Lord and follow his ways; be penitent of past sins. Begin it all by being buried with your Lord in baptism that your sins may be washed away. The invitation of our Lord is now extended to you.