

King Saul

My name is Saul. I was King of Israel for 40 years. I have been allowed to come back to talk to you. Speaking like this is right only when God allows it. That brings up one of my big mistakes. Anyway, you may have read the facts, but I want to give you the inside story – it's not a pretty picture.

I was the first king of the nation of Israel. I did not seek to be king. In fact, it happened in a very strange way. My father was rich and famous, and I had everything I could possibly want. I suppose I might have been a little spoiled. And the fact that I am tall and good looking made people admire me even if I didn't really deserve it.

One day, I was out looking for some missing donkeys from my father's herd. When it seemed hopeless, my servant suggested asking the prophet Samuel. I had never met him and didn't even know who he was. But when we met, he seemed to know me and invited me to eat with him. Then he told me privately that I was chosen to be king.

I was shocked and humbled. Samuel made a string of amazing predictions. Most incredibly, he said that the Spirit of God would come upon me and I would be changed into a different person. "Once these signs are fulfilled, do whatever your hand finds to do for God is with you."

At the actual coronation I was so scared that I hid. When they found me, Samuel declared "Do you see the man that the LORD has chosen?" Then he wrote the regulations of kingship. The reaction of the crowd was mixed. I had supporters and detractors – even though the prophet had chosen me. Politics!!

After that, I went back to my father's farm. I was plowing with the oxen when a distress call came from the city of Jabesh Gilead. Ammonites were besieging them and proposed cruel terms of surrender – gouging out every man's right eye. I became angry and cut my oxen in pieces. I sent the pieces around the country and told the messengers that whoever did not answer the call to arms would have his oxen cut up like this.

Sure enough, we had a huge turn-out. I guess I'd made them an offer they couldn't refuse! We won a great victory. It was obviously with the LORD's help – I was not a trained warrior. After that, my popularity soared, and I even nixed a plan to execute those who had not supported me from the beginning. So far, it was a good start.

Samuel gave his farewell speech as the leader of Israel, and it made me feel a little strange. He reviewed the history of the nation, including all the falling away. He told the people that they should not have asked for a king, but that since they did, here I was, the one chosen by God. I sort of felt like the booby prize. Then he reminded the people that if they – and I -- obeyed God, they would be blessed, but if they did not obey Him, nothing would go right. I figured I had better read those royal regulations again.

I heard what he said but did not really take it to heart, because very shortly after that I decided to make another little war. The first one against the cruel Ammonites had increased my popularity so much that I did not stop to ask the Lord if I should. Instead I gathered a few troops and attacked the Philistines. My troops were quaking with fear and beginning to run away. Samuel had set a time to arrive to perform a sacrifice, but he did not come. As soon as I performed the sacrifice myself, Samuel showed up and swiftly pronounced judgment – my kingdom would not endure.

Yet the Lord still gave us a great victory. Based on the bravery of my son Jonathan and his armor bearer who went out alone and the Lord panicked a much larger force of Philistines. It was clear that the LORD was with Jonathan. Maybe Samuel's advice to "do whatever your hand finds to do for God is with you" was not that simple. The command was given when I had been filled with the Spirit of the LORD.

Another time, fighting the Amalekites, I had been instructed by the LORD to destroy all the people and livestock because they were so very evil. I did not obey completely but when Samuel came, I said that I had done all the Lord commanded. Samuel responded, "Then why do I hear the cattle mooing and the sheep bleating?" My excuse was that I had kept the best to sacrifice to the Lord, but that was just an excuse.

Samuel said the kingdom would be taken from me, but it did not happen right away. I was on the throne for many years after that and accomplished many things, but I was deeply troubled. I would have outbursts of anger or depression and would make some very foolish decisions. The Spirit of the LORD had left me and without him I was nothing. I did not realize the truth until it was too late.

After Samuel died, the Philistines gathered to attack and I got no word from the LORD in any way. Although I had outlawed mediums, I sought the witch at Endor and was actually shown Samuel! It terrified the medium. Samuel predicted my death but also said, "tomorrow you and your sons will be with me." I believe in your day you call that "good news-bad news?" I knew Samuel would be with the LORD, but it could only be by mercy and grace that I would be there too, and I praise his holy name!

My son Jonathan, who should have been king after me, was a good man and could have been a great king. He continued to do what was right, even befriending David, the man who took the place he deserved as king after me. I wish I had been like Jonathan and remained humble rather than becoming proud and careless.

Remember this if God gives you talents, position or responsibility. You can only do good with his help and must always obey him even if you do not understand why. The time may come when it is too late to turn back.

1 Samuel 9 -31, 2 Samuel 1

