

STUDIES IN THE LIFE OF DAVID

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by

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A man after God's own heart is what David is called in I Samuel 13:14. So, it is very helpful to discover that he is not sinless but a man of great passions and driven by great desires. He has a violent temper and is a vicious, cruel killer. However, when the Lord puts the finger on him, he is also completely repentant. He has the whole spectrum of emotions that you and I have, yet God calls him a "man after His own heart," because, even though he fails God many times, he loves God wholeheartedly.

As a background for our study of David, I want to look at a "man after the world's own heart." We will start with a quick review of the life of Saul in order to see the contrast between Saul and David. In putting Saul on the throne, God was giving the Israelites the king they clamored for. Saul was not a straw king nor was he a pawn in the hands of God. God put him on the throne to reign over Israel and to reign forever. God chose him and was committed to him. The problem was Saul's lack of commitment to God. As a result, God had to first disqualify his line from reigning and then to disqualify Saul and actually take him off the throne. We see in Saul a vivid demonstration of the flesh, a picture of a carnal believer, and, according to Samuel, he was a believer. Even though Saul was a prophet of God, God finally had to take him home. Beginning, then, with Chapter 8 of 1 Samuel, we will do a short review of Saul's life to see how the flesh acts so we can get some concept of why God had to disqualify him. Saul just would not deal with the flesh.

If you want a simple definition of the flesh, it is "Me without Christ"; all the great things in a life; all the bad things in a life. It can be giving your body to be burned as a sacrifice to Christ, or it can be taking Bathsheba and murdering her husband to cover up her pregnancy and your adultery. It can be a good thing, self-sacrifice, or a despicable thing, self-centeredness. The flesh runs the whole gambit of human actions, motives, and attitudes, but it is "without God" and "without Christ." That is why it cannot please God. Romans 8:8 says the flesh "cannot" please God. It does not say it "will not." It is not an issue of the will. The flesh wants to please God much of the time, but it cannot..

The flesh "cannot" please Him because instead of allowing God to be God in us, the flesh does its best to be God in God's place. We simply will not believe Scripture, so we try to do our best for God and consequently tell God he is a liar. We are saying that the sacrifice of God's Son, and the risen and indwelling life of his Son is not really enough for everything in our lives. We need to help out a little. We are also telling God that we are not incurably, hopelessly self-centered in our own being, but that somewhere in us is a little bit of good, a little spark of deity. All we have to do is fan it, and it will burst into a beautiful flame with walking on water, healing and everything else. But the fact of Scripture is that we are totally depraved. It does not mean that we are as bad as we could be, but it does mean that there is no possibility of me, in my own strength, ever pleasing God. There is God's standard as God and nothing less than God is acceptable to Him. The sooner we understand this the sooner we will stop trying to be godly in and of ourselves and allow God to be God in us. Since God is God, he can be godly without effort. For Jesus Christ it is easy to be Christlike. Anything he does is Christlike.

So let us take a look at Saul in the flesh. In Chapter 8 we start with the old prophet Samuel who was raised by God to rule the nation of Israel. The Israelites have gone into the land, but they have not taken all the land as

they were instructed. For their own economic benefit, they have allowed the nations in the land to live. Because of this, the nation of Israel is sliding into idolatry chasing foreign gods, as God had warned them they would. In sin and taken captive by invading forces, they are plunged into the pit of despair. So they cry out to God in repentance, and God raises up a Judge [a Leader] who releases them by the power of God. As long as the Judge lives, the Israelites behave. Then down to the pit they go, and again God gives them over to their captors. Again they cry out in repentance, and God responds with a Judge. God raised up Samuel as the last of the Judges and the first of the prophets. God is moving now from a theocracy, by which he governs his nation through these Judges and through the priesthood, to a monarchy where he will rule the nation through kings, prophets and priests. They are all to be equal. The priests mediate between God and man, the prophets speak from God to man, and the kings reign for God over man.

So in I Samuel, Chapter 8 we see the Israelites being threatened by the Ammonites, a vast group of vicious people living across the Jordan River, who came out of the incestuous union of Lot and his youngest daughter. They have been a thorn in the side of the Israelites for years. They worship Molech, a great metal idol with outstretched hands that they heat until it is red hot. Then, as a sacrifice to this god, they lay one of their new born babies on those red hot hands. This is the kind of people they are. The Israelites are not allowed to touch them, however, because they are the children of Lot.

At this time Samuel is old, and his sons are just like the sons of Eli, the priest before him. Samuel was not a good father. Apparently he was too busy about the Lord's work to raise his family properly. Now his sons are dishonest and are taking bribes. The people are saying about Samuel, "You are old. Your sons are dishonest. We do not want you anymore. We want a king to rule over us who will fight our battles and who will deal with the Ammonites." Samuel runs to God feeling very rejected, and God says, "It is not you they are rejecting, Samuel. It is me." Israel wants a king they can see, a king who looks like a king not some God they cannot see. So God warns them, "You asked for a king like all the other nations; I'll give you a king like all the other nations. But he will draft your sons into his army and take them away from the plow. He will take a tenth of all your goods to feed them. Your daughters will become bakers and cooks in his kitchen. He will, if he likes, take a tenth or more of your land to give to his warriors. This is what a king will do for you. As God, I own everything. I'm free. You can have me for nothing, the "grace of God," or you can have a king and a throne and it will cost you everything. What do you want?" "King!" came the reply. So God said, "All right,, I will give you the king you want."

Here you see "the wrath of God" in action. As in Romans 1:18-32, he gave them over to what they wanted. The wrath of God acts in the lives of both believers and unbelievers, and if God wants you to go His way and you insist on going your own way, the worst thing that can happen to you is for Him to let you have your way. That is exactly what he does with the Jewish nation. He gives them what they want, a king just like the nations around them.

In Chapter 9, Saul is sent out by his father to look for some lost donkeys. God brings Samuel and Saul together and tells Samuel, "This is the king." Samuel takes Saul aside for a long discussion, probably laying out his responsibilities as God's king over Israel.

Even though the Israelites have rejected God in favor of a human king, they are still his people, and he does not forsake them. He has committed himself to giving them the king they want and has picked out Saul. Saul is an unusually handsome man, probably the most handsome in all Israel, a choice man in the prime of life, bigger and more comely than any other in Israel; the perfect specimen of a king. He is the son of a valiant father, the ideal picture of a man's man, a martial king coming from a long line of martial men. His father Kish and Abner [later commander-in-chief of Saul's army] are brothers who come from a long line of warriors. Saul is just what the Israelites ordered, but, as we will see, he is a fleshly man.

It would appear "the flesh" fulfills every requirement for whatever is needed. If it would only say, "I am evil," we would not have half the problems we have. But it is so treacherous because it says, "That need out there and my skills here mesh. I don't need God. I can handle this." As a classic example: I have an MBA from Stanford with a major in investment. I had the finest teachers in the land, and all you have to do to make money is buy low and sell high. Simple? But the only major investments I have made in my whole life have failed. Without consulting God I have made investments, and I have had a consistent pattern of failure.

According to my natural strength I should be wealthy. This is the key to the flesh: "Natural Strength" not "Godly strength".

God has chosen a king for Israel, and he intends for him to reign well even though he is a fleshly man. Will the flesh hinder a sovereign God from working out his perfect will for my life, or for the nation of Israel, or for the kingdom of God? No, it will not! Saul is known by God to be a failure, but he has chosen him, and he is committed to him. The Scriptures say so. Actually, Saul is a good king by fleshly standards. He throws off the yoke of all the enemies around him and is certainly no failure in this area. Even in the flesh God can use us to accomplish his will. He used the vicious Assyrians to take the 10 Northern tribes of Israel into captivity. He used the Babylonians to take the 2 Southern tribes of Israel into captivity 125 years later. He used the Medio-Persians to bring the Israelites back into the land. These three nations were totally pagan, and yet they all three did the will of God. So, you see, God can use the flesh. The problem lies in what happens at the judgment seat of Christ. When I stand before the Lord and the things I have done in the body are judged, the question is, "Will they be good or will they be worthless?" If God accomplished them through me when I was acting in the flesh, they are burned up! They are worthless! Do not kid yourself; God will never honor the flesh.

The first person I ever led to Christ was an act of the flesh. There was a file clerk at Standard Oil in Los Angeles who gave me a very bad time when I accepted Christ. Before I became a Christian, I lived a pagan life before my colleagues. After I became a Christian, I tried to undo all I had done, and this file clerk gave me nothing but trouble. She constantly needled me. One day I let fly and told her she was going to hell. I literally scared the hell out of her, and I did it because I was angry as hell. She could not sleep that night and at 6 o'clock in the morning called up her brother, who was a Christian. He took her to his pastor, and she received the Lord. Now I can give you a written guarantee that at the judgment seat of Christ it is my temper that will be discussed not the soul that came to Christ because of my temper. God is not thwarted by us. While acting in the flesh, we have nothing to offer the Lord that warrants a "Well done, thy good and faithful servant" or any reward. I firmly believe the "rewards" at the judgment seat of Christ will come from the ability to glorify the Lord. Therefore, the above is an area of my life in which I could have glorified Christ but did not, so in the area of glorifying Christ, I will be missing something for all eternity.

In Chapter 10 Samuel, as a sign of Saul's kingship, takes a flask of oil, pours it on his head, kisses him and says, "Has not the LORD anointed you a ruler over His inheritance?" He also gives him certain signs, one of which is that he will be filled with the Spirit of God and will prophesy, which he does. Then Samuel warns him saying, "You shall go down to Gilgal."

Gilgal was where the Jews crossed the Jordan River before taking Jericho. Apparently during the 40 years of wandering no circumcision had been done. So at Gilgal, which means "rolling", the whole nation was circumcised, thus rolling away the reproach of the years of disobedience in the wilderness. Before God allows the Israelites to take over any of the Promised Land, he insists that they all be circumcised. Why? Colossians tells us. Circumcision is a deliberate, objective symbol of the removal of the flesh. It is intriguing that Saul makes his headquarters at Gilgal, a symbol of the removal of the flesh, and that he fails every time he goes to Gilgal because of the flesh.

Continuing in Chapter 10, Samuel tells Saul, "There will be a critical time when I will come to Gilgal, offer offerings and show you what to do." But as a prophet of God, God would be the one to instruct him. Saul does experience the enabling power of God, and God does change his heart. Saul was not sent out in the flesh to do the job. God called him and God equipped him.

If God commits himself to Saul, fills him with the Spirit "mightily", allows him to prophesy, to become a prophet of God and changes his heart, who, then, is responsible for the failure of Saul? It cannot be God. So, do not ever accuse God of causing you to fail. We are going to see that Saul does exactly that. Whatever God calls you to do, God equips you to do. Saul understands where the power lies to do the job. Saul, who does not come from a school of prophets, [in fact the people question what he is doing when he prophesies] is allowed to experience the indwelling power of God in a way he has never experienced in his whole life. He gets a taste of what could be his if he obeys. God really wants Saul to succeed. He does not like for Christians to fail. He is a loving father. Therefore, before He does anything with regard to Saul's kingship, he lets Saul

understand all the power of God is at his disposal if he chooses.

In Chapter 11 Nahash the Ammonite surrounds Jabesh-gilead, a town that belongs to Israel. He has so much power and such disdain for the Israelites that when the men of the town wish to make a treaty with him, he says, "I'll make a treaty with you if you let me gouge out your right eyes." [Soldiers in that day protected their left eyes with their shields, and used their right eyes for the sword. Therefore, if the right eye was removed, they could never fight again.] This was a very common way not only of humiliating but also of disarming a people. With only one eye, they also lacked depth perception.

So Jabesh-gilead pleads with Nahash,

"Give us seven days respite that we may send messengers through all the territory of Israel. Then, if there is no one to save us, we will give ourselves up to you."

Nahash, which means "the serpent", says, "Go ahead."

The men of Jabesh send word to Saul, and when Saul hears what has happened, he goes to Jabesh and destroys the Ammonites. It was a tremendous victory. Scripture says "the spirit of God came upon Saul mightily." Now, as king, he has had an experience of the power of God.

There were some people who did not want Saul as Israel's king because he stemmed from Benjamin the smallest of the tribes. When the majority of the people see what a tremendous job Saul has done, they say, "Bring all the people who did not want Saul as king that we may put them to death." Saul says, "Not a man shall be put to death this day, for today the LORD has accomplished deliverance in Israel." At this time, he is still God's man. So Saul is "made king before the LORD" at Gilgal, and he starts out as a beautiful picture of the power of God.

In Chapter 12, Samuel, in his final speech, demands of all Israel that they bring forth any charges they have against him. He admits that his sons are no good, but he claims that he himself has had a perfectly honorable reign. He admonishes them that they have sinned against God in rejecting God as king, and he calls down a thunder storm as proof of this. The people get frightened because of the thunder storm and repent of their choice of a king. Whereupon Samuel says, "Do not fear. God has forgiven you, but remember, you must fear and obey your God if you want a king who will fear and obey your God."

Paul wrote Romans 13:1-7 when Nero, an evil man and evil ruler, was on the throne. He persecuted the church, made torches out of Christians, threw them to the lions, murdered his own mother and lived with a young homosexual whom he castrated and made into his wife. He was insane, but Paul admonished the Christians to pray for him. He did not change and died insane. We won't know until we get into eternity how much, if any, those who obeyed God and prayed for him restrained him, but they were faithful. That is the point. If the Israelites are faithful to God, they may not change Saul, but they will be changed. That is God's purpose, and Saul will be without excuse for any failure as king.

In Chapter 12 God warns them that if only they will fear and obey him, he will not abandon them. He will be their God, and they will be his people.

In Chapter 13 we will see Saul begin his movement toward rejection as king, and unfortunately his downward slide as believer. The Philistines are a people from out of the Aegean Sea area who went to Egypt, were thrown out of Egypt, and wound up on the southeastern seacoast of the Mediterranean where they cannot be dislodged by the Israelites. They have learned iron smelting, the process of which they keep secret. When a Jew wants his plowshare, his ax or his scythe sharpened, he must seek the Philistines. The Philistines realize that as long as they keep a monopoly on iron the Israelites cannot make weapons of war. With this new monarch of the Jews posing a threat to them, the Philistines set out to eliminate him. The Jews feel really trapped.

In Chapter 10, Verse 8 we saw that Samuel promised to meet Saul in Gilgal seven days hence at which time he would offer burnt offerings and sacrifice peace offerings. But in Chapter 13 we see the Jews beginning to

desert, because the Philistines are approaching with iron swords, spears and chariots, and all they have are mattocks, scythes, and axes. Only Saul and his son Jonathan have a sword and a spear.

Chapter 13, Verse 8:

"Now he [Saul] waited seven days according to the appointed time set by Samuel, but Samuel did not come to Gilgal; and the people were scattering from him."

So Saul says,

"'Bring to me the burnt offering and the peace offerings.' And he offered the burnt offering. And it came about as soon as he finished offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him and to greet him."

What does the flesh always do when God does not appear on schedule? It takes over, "If God won't do it, I'll do it for God." We have an incurable desire, or demand, that God adhere to our time schedule. He has told Saul, "I will be with you forever. Just fear and obey me." Samuel has promised, "I will be there in seven days." Apparently Saul waits seven days, up to but not including the last minute, and the people are deserting. So, instead of fearing and obeying his God, because the people are not fearing and obeying their God, he takes things into his own hands. Worse yet he offers an offering that only the priests are allowed to offer. [Samuel was a priest, as well as a prophet, as well as a judge. He was from the tribe of Ephraim, but he was also a Levite.]

Interesting enough Saul offers a "sweet odor" offering, the "burnt offering," the holocaust, the one that was totally consumed on the altar. The non-sweet odor offerings were the sin offering and the guilt offering. The "sin" offering was the death of Christ for the penalty of sin, and the "guilt" offering was the death of Christ for the injury of sin. They were "non-sweet odor" offerings because they involved the death of God's beloved Son. But "sweet odor" offerings, the peace offering, the cereal offering and the burnt offering, pictured the perfections of Christ. The cereal offering pictured Christ's suffering through temptation yet without sin. The peace offering was sacrificed, and then eaten with your friends and the priest. It was a picture of peace with God and the peace of God. It was yours in Jesus Christ. But the key offering was the burnt offering. It pictured Christ totally consumed to do the Father's will. So, here Saul sacrifices the burnt offering in direct violation of the known will of God. He knows he is not allowed to do this, but he does it anyway, thus making a travesty of it. The flesh always, even when it tries to please God, makes a travesty out of the situation.

The very moment Saul finishes offering the burnt offering here is Samuel right on God's schedule. One minute to midnight, and he says, verse 11,

"What have you done?"

Listen closely to the flesh when it is pinned down.

Saul says first, verse 11:

"Because I saw that the people were scattering from me,"

Who is at fault? The people. Saul is in essence rationalizing thus, "If they fear and obey God, then I will fear and obey God. If they had done it, I would have done it So they are to blame."

Second rationalization:

"and that you did not come within the appointed days"

"They are at fault, and so are you, Samuel."

Third rationalization:

"and that the Philistines were assembling at Michmash,"

[Michmash was only 8 miles NE of Jerusalem; not very far] "It was the circumstances. I couldn't help myself, you see."

Fourth rationalization, verse 12:

"Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not asked the favor of the Lord."

Who is number 4 on Saul's fault list? God himself. "He apparently is not going to help me, so I had better buy him off."

Fifth rationalization:

"so I forced myself and offered the burnt offering."

"The people, Samuel, the circumstances and you, God, twisted my arm, and I just could not help myself."

This is the flesh in action. The major thing missing in the reasoning of Saul is repentance. He has remorse but not repentance. There is the key. In the life of David we will see rotten actions, but David is a repentant man. When the finger is put on him, he confesses and repents [changes his mind about what he has done] and fully acknowledges his sin. The flesh can never ever acknowledge it is wrong. It only rationalizes and blames someone or something else. The incurably self-centered flesh believes to the depths of its soul that there is something still there, no matter how badly it has behaved, that can still please God. There may be only be a little spark, but it is totally and irrevocably committed to the idea that that little spark somehow can be fanned it into a flame that will glorify God. The flesh can never repent. It has only remorse. That is all Saul has.

Thus the tragedy is that Samuel has to say to Saul, verse 13;

"You have acted 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."

If he had obeyed this one test, and it was a scary one [Philistines with a vast army and iron weapons], the Lord would "have established his kingdom over Israel forever."

Samuel continues, verse 14:

"But now your kingdom shall not endure. The Lord has sought out for Himself a man after his own heart,...because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you."

The time is not yet right for David to ascend the throne for Saul has not yet been disqualified, but God has rejected Saul's line because of his actions and the actions of the people who wanted a human king in place of God.

Chapter 14 gives us a picture of Jonathan, the son of Saul, who is a magnificent man, a man of faith. Just he and his armor-bearer sneak up and attack one of the outposts of the Philistine garrison and destroy it. His statement is, "God can save by little or by many. Let's go." The armor-bearer says, "I'm right with you." Those two alone go up the hill, take on the Philistines and slaughter them. Then God answers that act of faith and fear comes over the Philistine host. There is an earthquake. They get all confused, begin butchering each other, and scatter.

Saul hears what is going on, looks around to see who is missing from his army and discovers it is just

Jonathan and his armor-bearer. He then calls for the Ark of God in order to inquire of God. This sounds great. The only problem is that, as he looks out, he sees the Philistines fleeing and takes off after them as he says to the priest, "Withdraw your hand." He does not complete his inquiry of God. In the flesh he pursues the obvious which is to slaughter Philistines. He also makes a rash oath and says Chapter 14, verse 24;

"Cursed be the man who eats food before evening, and until I have avenged myself on my enemies."

Me, myself and I, the unholy trinity of the flesh. He puts God aside and flees after the enemy. With no food, all the men run out of energy. They don't kill half of the people they should have killed. By evening they are so hungry that, when they come across part of the spoil of the Philistines, they tear into the meat and eat the flesh with the blood, thus sinning against the Lord.

Meanwhile Jonathan has not heard anything about this oath of his father's since he was fighting, so when he finds some honey, he dips the end of his staff in the honeycomb and puts his hand to his mouth.

Saul wants to go on attacking the Philistines and taking spoil all night and "not leave a man of them." The priest suggests they "draw near to God." So Saul asks God, "Shall I go after the Philistines? Will you give them into the hand of Israel?" But the Lord does not answer him. Saul, therefore, figures there must be some great sin amongst the Israelites. So he says, "Let's cast lots and find out who the sinner is. Even if it is my own son I will kill him." When they cast the lots, they find out it is indeed Saul's son, Jonathan, the hero, who had brought about this great deliverance in Israel. Saul says, "You shall surely die, Jonathan." Do you see the flesh here? Saul is willing to kill his son to save face. True he did make an oath to the Lord, and even though he should not have made it, an oath to the Lord is binding. So, since Jonathan did break it, the lot fell on him. God was rebuking Saul to his face because he had not inquired of God and had instead made an impetuous oath. Fortunately the people would not let Saul kill Jonathan.

To sum up, let me say again that the flesh will do anything to maintain its ego. It has only one standard, i.e., self. Whether I like it or not and whether I will admit it or not, my flesh comes before my Lord, before my wife, before my children, before anything in my life. It loves Me, first, last and always, and it will never change. If I do not believe that, look at Saul who would have killed his beloved son, his innocent son, heir to his throne, to maintain "face" in front of his people, and Saul knew he was wrong. The flesh is dirty, filthy, wicked, and we must not allow it to live at anytime in our lives.

The last part of Chapter 14 gives a description of the tremendous things Saul does in freeing Israel.

Up to now Saul has only forfeited the right of his line to rule Israel. In Chapter 15 we will see the climax of his life and the loss of his kingship.

Prayer:

Father, we thank you so much for your Word and the way it illuminates our lives and makes us see ourselves as we really are apart from You. We really have nothing to offer you at all, and in my flesh there dwells no good thing, not even one. It shows that I am incurably, irrevocably, hopelessly self-centered. I love me so much in the flesh, Father, that nothing, not even your Son's death for me will ever change the self-love, and if that flesh is not put to death and rendered inoperative and kept in its place, I will allow that filthy "old man" out of the pit to possess me to the detriment of my God, my wife, my children, everything I hold dear. God help us to realize how deceitful, how desperately wicked, the flesh really is and, therefore, be willing to deal with it ruthlessly as Samuel does in Chapter 15. Thank you, Father, in Jesus' Name. Amen.

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