

# Samuel, Saul, David and Goliath

A while ago, Ashley's Bible book group decided to read the Old Testament first book of Samuel. It relates to a fascinating period in Israel's history, including the transition from being led by the Lord God, through prophets and judges, into the era of being governed by human kings.

It's a rollercoaster of a story, starting with Hannah and her son and prophet, Samuel - also the priests, Eli and his two sons Hophni and Phinehas (described as a pair of scoundrels!). There were battles, mostly with the nearby Philistines, but some other tribes, too. In the first one, the enemy captured their prize - Israel's Arc of the Covenant - but they suffered so much harm, through it, that they returned it, forthwith, accompanied by gifts. Many other things also happened, but as Samuel grew older, his two sons, Joel and Abijah, were about to succeed him. They, however, didn't follow in their father's ways, abusing their authority, so that the Israelites demanded a king (so they'd be like the surrounding nations). This was a rejection of the Lord God, who was their true king. (Surely, the Lord has never ceased to be the true king, which has been tragically overlooked by so much of human civilisation.) The story continues, through the first and second books of Samuel: it's a great read!

One of the stories of 1 Samuel, which is probably most familiar, is the story of David and Goliath. It's an exciting story, in which good triumphs over evil. I could have told something of the story, from memory, but I couldn't have told you much of its context: what happened in the runup to it? How does it fit in to the bigger picture? It might help others, as well as me, to take a look around that story.

Israel's first king was Saul: here's what is said of him in [1 Samuel 9:1-2](#):

<sup>1</sup>Now there was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish the son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Becorath, the son of Aphiah, the son of a Benjamite, a mighty man of valor. <sup>2</sup>He had a son whose name was Saul, a choice and handsome man, and there was not a more handsome person than he among the sons of Israel; from his shoulders and up he was taller than any of the people.

The Lord told Samuel to anoint Saul king. Was he the Lord's choice? Maybe, but I think that the above-mentioned qualities are more likely the people's choice, than the Lord's. He was a good looking - very important with a lot of people. He was a big fella - humanly, he had strength, power, "grunt". I wonder if the Lord chose Saul at least partly to make a point.

Saul started well - the Lord worked through him. When the Ammonites threatened Jabesh Gilead, Saul rallied the Israelites and defeated the enemy ([1 Samuel 11](#)). He became ever more popular with the people, during that episode and, after the battle, they confirmed him as king and held a big knees-up.

Perhaps Samuel could see himself getting older and got a view of his rocking chair, as [1 Samuel 12](#) presents him giving a sort of farewell retirement speech, during which he includes the following, which seems to reinforce the thought that Saul was the people's choice for a king:

"...<sup>12</sup> When you saw that Nahash the king of the sons of Ammon came against you, you said to me, 'No, but a king shall reign over us,' although the LORD your God was your king. <sup>13</sup>Now therefore, here is the king whom you have chosen, whom you have asked for, and behold, the LORD has set a king over you..."

Looking at the chapters that follow, as elderly as he was, Samuel's involvement was far from over. From this time onwards, Saul seems to have struggled with obedience to the Lord and his reign declined. It appears clear, from the text, that he offended the Lord greatly. Samuel rebuked him and, despite routing the Philistines and Amalekites, in [1 Samuel 15](#), the Lord conveyed, through the prophet, that Saul was rejected as king. In the following chapter, Samuel was sent to Jesse, in Bethlehem, to anoint a new king, though Saul continued as the people's choice.

As much as Samuel was a prophet of the Lord and chosen by the Lord, he was still human. Here's [1 Samuel 16:6-7](#): Samuel saw Eliab, Jesse's oldest son:

<sup>6</sup> When they entered, he looked at Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD's anointed is before Him." <sup>7</sup> But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

If Samuel had lost his concentration on the Lord, perhaps he'd have anointed Eliab as the next king, with potential disaster to follow... It's so encouraging to read that Samuel kept close to the Lord and acted on His guidance. Again, it shows that the Lord's values are not necessarily the same as ours. [1 Samuel 16:8-13](#) continues:

<sup>8</sup> Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, "The LORD has not chosen this one either." <sup>9</sup> Next Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "The LORD has not chosen this one either." <sup>10</sup> Thus Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. But Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen these." <sup>11</sup> And Samuel said to Jesse, "Are these all the children?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, and behold, he is tending the sheep." Then Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here."

<sup>12</sup> So he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, with beautiful eyes and a handsome appearance. And the LORD said, "Arise, anoint him; for this is he." <sup>13</sup> Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. And Samuel arose and went to Ramah.

So, the Lord chose David, the one Jesse and perhaps Samuel as well, least expected. He was probably the one that I would have least expected, too, had I been there at the time...

Rejected by the Lord, Saul started to be tormented by an evil spirit and someone was selected to play soothing music, to calm him. Who should it turn out to be, but David?

So, after these happenings the story gets to the battlefield, with the Israelites and Philistines glaring at each other and Goliath spitting his threats and mockery. In that context, I would reckon that Saul and David probably conducted themselves in completely different ways. I could see Saul, perhaps in his tent, putting his army between Goliath and himself. I think Saul and the Israelites focussed on human physical strength and power: that's something of what the army would have represented. In that way, the best they could hope for was stalemate. However, David put himself between Goliath and the Israelites: He knew something of the Lord's strength, as can be seen from his summing up, in [1 Samuel 16:31-37](#):

<sup>31</sup> When the words which David spoke were heard, they told them to Saul, and he sent for him. <sup>32</sup> David said to Saul, "Let no man's heart fail on account of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." <sup>33</sup> Then Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are *but* a youth while he has been a warrior from his youth." <sup>34</sup> But David said to Saul, "Your servant was tending his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and took a lamb from the flock, <sup>35</sup> I went out after him and attacked him, and rescued it from his mouth; and when he rose up against me, I seized *him* by his beard and struck him and killed him. <sup>36</sup> Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, since he has taunted the armies of the living God." <sup>37</sup> And David said, "The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." And Saul said to David, "Go, and may the LORD be with you."

Thus it was that Israel's little whelp with a big faith went out reliant on a sling, a few stones... and the living God of Israel... to meet not just "this uncircumcised Philistine" (said to be around three inches short of ten feet tall), but also his shield bearer, who was in front of him. Goliath's last recorded words are in [1 Samuel 17:43-44](#):

"Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. <sup>44</sup> The Philistine also said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the sky and the beasts of the field."

David's reply follows, in [1 Samuel 17:45-47](#):

"You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted. <sup>46</sup> This day the LORD will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you. And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, <sup>47</sup> and that all this assembly may know that the LORD does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the LORD's and He will give you into our hands."

Which one turned out to be right? Why David, of course!

The first book of Samuel tells of many other things. Saul made several attempts to kill David, whilst David several times, resisted the temptation to kill Saul, even when it would have been easy. Chapter 25 tells us of Samuel's death and in chapter 27 David decided that the safest place to be, with respect to Saul, was with the Philistines. Thus, he and his men defected to the enemy camp. Chapter 30 sees David defeat and destroy the Amalekites and recover all the people, animals and goods, which that enemy had previously taken as plunder. The book closes with chapter 31 and the Philistines defeating the Israelite army - leaving Saul and his three strongest sons (including David's beloved friend, Jonathan) dead on the battlefield.

You might think that David would be relieved at Saul's death, but the second book of Samuel opens with David grieving the loss of Saul and especially Jonathan. From there, David's reign strengthened and became established. It went well for some years. However, just as Saul's reign was troubled by his sin of disobedience to the Lord, so David's reign eventually declined, also, as a result of his sin: he committed adultery with a married woman, Bathsheba and then had her rightful husband conveniently killed on the battlefield. In another incident, recorded in the very last chapter of the book, he sinned against the Lord and brought a plague upon the Israelite people.

It has been said that the difference in the responses of Saul and David, following their sins against the Lord, is that Saul offered excuses, whereas David offered heart-felt repentance from a broken and contrite soul and spirit. You can read something of David's expression of repentance in Psalm 51. Perhaps this gives an indication as to why David was always recognised as Israel's greatest king.

I think I've been going on long enough, for now.

God bless,

Steve W.