

A Man After God's Heart

The books of Samuel -- and there are two of them -- deal with the lives of three important people in the history of Israel: Samuel the prophet, priest and judge, and the first two kings of Israel, Saul and David. All three of them failed as fathers -- their children were against them and against what they stood for. But beyond that, they didn't have a lot in common.

The time of the judges is coming to an end -- Samuel will be the last notable person to serve in that role. 1 Samuel 7:15-17 confirms this when it says,

"Samuel continued as judge over Israel all the days of His life. From year to year he went on a circuit from Bethel to Gilgal to Mizpah, judging Israel in all those places. But he always went back to Ramah, where his home was, and there he also judged Israel"

Then, at the beginning of chapter 8, we read that Samuel appointed his sons as judges of Israel: Joel and Abijah. But they were not men of principle as their father was, they would accept bribes and pervert justice for the sake of money. It was the condition of Samuel's sons that led the elders of Israel to ask for a king. They came to Samuel and said:

You are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have (8:5)

The short version of the long story is that Saul, son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin was chosen to be the first king of Israel. When we first encounter Saul, we meet a humble man who has no thought that he could be king:

But am I not a Benjamite, from the smallest tribe of Israel, and is not my clan the least of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin? Why do you say such a thing to me? (9:21)

Samuel had just told him that the desire of all Israel had turned towards him and his family.

And when the time came for the official, or public, choice of a king for the nation, when Saul's name was chosen, he couldn't be found anywhere. They had to ask the LORD where Saul was and the LORD told them that he was hiding among some baggage. And in the early days of his rule, he led Israel to a victory and showed grace in his leadership, refusing to punish those who had spoken against him being king.

But then he got the Philistines mad at him by attacking their outpost at Geba. They gathered 3000 chariots and 6000 charioteers and soldiers too numerous to count and moved against Israel. The Hebrew people hid in caves and thickets, among rocks and in pits and cisterns. Some of them were crossing the Jordan River to get away from the Philistine army and Saul began to see the number of fighting men with him getting less and less. Saul panicked. He said,

Bring me the burnt offering and the fellowship offerings. And Saul offered up the burnt offering.

What's wrong with that? In a time of crisis, Saul sought the help of Yahweh his God. But Samuel had told him to wait for a full seven days and Saul couldn't wait until the end of the day. He felt that he had to do something and so he arranged for the sacrifices to be offered, and just as he was finishing, Samuel walked up:

"What have you done?" asked Samuel.

This is not a question asking for information; it is a rebuke, a challenge. But Saul is ready with excuses:

When I saw that the men were scattering, and that you did not come at the set time, and that the Philistines were assembling at Micmash, I thought, 'Now the Philistines will come against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought Yahweh's favor.' So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering.

Have you ever done something wrong and been challenged on it? Saul did something we might have done; he got a bit defensive. "You did not come at the set time" -- well, yes he did come on the seventh day -- it's just that Saul couldn't wait until the end of the day. "The Philistines might come against me before I have sought the LORD's favor." Yes, they might, but the prophet of Yahweh had told him to wait until he arrived. Didn't he trust the word of the LORD and that if he obeyed things would work out? "I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering". It's like Saul is saying he didn't want to do it, but he felt he just had to. The 2000 men he had with him was now down to 600 and he couldn't wait. He tried to seek the favour of Yahweh through disobeying the command of the LORD, and it didn't work.

"You acted foolishly," Samuel said. "You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you; if you had, He would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. But now your kingdom will not endure; Yahweh has sought out a man after His own heart and appointed him leader of his people, because you have not kept the LORD's command."

(13:13,14)

Yahweh has sought out a man after His own heart and appointed him leader of His people. So Saul knew that he had a rival, one who would succeed him, a new king who would not be one of Saul's sons. And it wasn't long before he knew who that person was. In chapter 16, Samuel followed God's leading to Bethlehem, to the home of Jesse and there anointed David to be the next king of Israel. In chapter 17 David killed the Philistine champion, the giant Goliath. In chapter 18 Saul heard the women singing a little tune that got him quite upset: "Saul has slain his thousands and David his tens of thousands." (18:7) And from that time on Saul was jealous of David, tried to kill him on a number of occasions and even gave one of his daughters to David in marriage in hopes to use her against him in some way.

When Saul realized that Yahweh was with David and that his daughter Michal loved David, Saul became still more afraid of him, and he remained his enemy the rest of his days. (18:28,29)

From that point until the end of 1 Samuel, Saul pursues David, tries to trap him and kill him, but God protects this "man after His own heart" and keeps him hidden from the

king.

Now, what was it about David that God loved? Why did He tell Samuel that this was the man after His heart that He had chosen to be the ruler of Israel? What was unique about him, that would set him apart from Saul and from all the kings who came after him?

1. He trusted God with everything about his life. You can notice this in the few devastating failures -- they were the times when he didn't look to God for His leading, but most of the time that wasn't the case. Let me give you a few examples. In 1 Samuel 23, David and his band of 600 men are living life on the run, keeping out of Saul's way as much as possible. They hear that the Philistines are fighting against the town of Keilah. The first thing David does is ask the LORD, "Shall I go and attack these Philistines?" The LORD tells him to go up and attack because God will give him victory. When the men doubt this strategy, David asks again and is again reassured. When Saul hears that David has successfully attacked the Philistines at Keilah and is lodged there, he calls his troops together to trap David inside the town. Again, David inquires of Yahweh, "Will Saul come down? And if he does, will the people of this town hand me over to him?" "Yes, and yes." And so David and his men leave the town before Saul can get there.

Twice during the time of his hiding from Saul, he is in a position to kill his enemy and is advised to do so. Both times David refuses to take the life of his enemy, the man who is trying to kill him. Why? Because he trusted that God had anointed Saul with a purpose and he would not take into his own hands the fate of Yahweh's anointed king. In other words, he trusted God with Saul's judgment; he didn't allow himself to take God's role as judge and act out of his own hurt or anger.

In 2 Samuel, right after David has been anointed king over all Israel, the Philistines decide to attack him and their army spreads out in the Valley of Raphaim. David asks the LORD, "Shall I go and attack the Philistines? Will you hand them over to me?" "Go, for I will surely hand the Philistines over to you." (5:19) After being soundly defeated, these enemies of Israel are right back at it in v. 22: "*Once more the Philistines came up and spread out in the Valley of Raphaim.*" Again, David asked the LORD what he should do in this situation. Notice that it's the same situation that David has just faced: the same enemy, the same valley, and, wouldn't you think, he could just employ the same strategy? But no, the word of the LORD comes back to David and He directs a different strategy:

Do not go straight up, but circle around behind them and attack them in front of the balsam trees. (v. 23)

Again, David hears and obeys the word that Yahweh gives him and again he is successful in defeating his enemy. This total dependence on God is surely one of the ways in which David showed that he was a man after God's heart, and was also one of the areas where Saul failed because he seemed to depend on his own ideas too often.

But there is another area where David showed this heart that God loved and that was in his passion to see the true worship of Yahweh, not only in Israel, but far beyond its borders to include all peoples, all nations of the world, that everyone would be drawn to worship and serve Yahweh. To see how this plays out, we'll have to go way beyond 1 and 2 Samuel, to the Psalms, the prophets and the New Testament.

The end of the book of 1 Chronicles tells us about David's preparations for his death, for what would continue after him, his legacy. And it's interesting to note that a great deal of his concern was focused on worship. He appointed his son Solomon to succeed him as king, and then instructed him to build a temple, a place of worship for Yahweh. He also appointed stonemasons to prepare dressed stone, he provided iron for making nails and fittings, he provided more bronze than could be weighed and more cedar logs than could be counted. Later in the same chapter he says this to Solomon:

I have taken great pains to provide for the temple of the LORD a hundred thousand talents of gold, a million talents of silver, quantities of bronze and iron too great to be weighed and wood and stone. (22:14)

Note that the talent used by Israel in Old Testament times was 30.3 kilograms or 67 pounds. So David provided a whole lot of gold and silver for the temple and he gave the instruction that "the house to be built for Yahweh should be of great magnificence and fame and splendor in the sight of all the nations. (22:5). David had learned to be so dependent on God that he was now, at the end of his life, able to see all that God had done for him. He was able to see that Yahweh had never failed him, that the LORD was good and glorious and worthy of the adoration of the nations. And David was determined to do his part in making that happen. He made lavish preparations for the building of the temple which Solomon would see through during his reign.

But David also made many other provisions for the ongoing worship of Yahweh in Jerusalem. He counted all the Levites and organized them around the functions of the temple. He had 4000 to be gatekeepers and another 4000 to play musical instruments in worship. He had some in charge of the purification of the sacred vessels and others in charge of setting out the showbread and the various components of the offerings. Chapter 25 of 1 Chronicles is devoted to naming the singers who would lead in worship and in prophesying at the temple. Chapter 26 names the gatekeepers and those in charge of the treasures. In chapter 28 David hands over to Solomon the building plans for the temple and then tells him, "Be strong and courageous ... do not be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD God, my God, is with you." (28:20) Over and over in these closing days of David's life, we see his passion to make an extravagant offering towards the worship of the LORD, a beautiful and palatial structure for God's glory.

The next place we'll look to see signs of a man after God's heart is the book of Psalms, most of which were written by David. And what we see here is a man who believed with all his heart that Yahweh was the great God of all creation, of all peoples, and that He was worthy of the praise of the nations. This sets David apart

from the people of his time, because, as Jonah would demonstrate less than 200 years later, Israel as a whole saw God as their tribal God, the God who would do battle with the gods of other nations, but not so much as the God of the whole earth. Let's turn to some of the psalms that are specifically labelled as psalms of David.

Psalm 57, written while David was hiding in a cave as Saul pursued him through southern Judah:

*I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations
I will sing of you among the peoples ...
Be exalted, O God, above the heavens;
Let Your glory be over all the earth* (vv. 9,11)

Psalm 96, which is a shortened version of a psalm that David composed in 1 Chronicles 16:

*Sing to Yahweh a new song
Sing to Yahweh, all the earth
Sing to Yahweh, praise His name
Proclaim His salvation day after day
Declare His glory among the nations
His marvelous deeds among all peoples
For great is Yahweh and most worthy of praise
He is to be feared above all gods
For all the gods of the nations are idols
But Yahweh made the heavens
Splendor and majesty are before Him
Strength and glory are in His sanctuary
Ascribe to Yahweh, O families of nations,
Ascribe to Yahweh glory and strength
Ascribe to Yahweh the glory due His name
Bring an offering and come into His courts
Worship Yahweh in the splendor of His holiness
Tremble before Him all the earth
Say among the nations, "Yahweh reigns!"* (1-10a)

And on it goes from there, describing the LORD coming to judge the whole earth. This is a small sample, but it does represent the heart of David for God to be glorified, not just by Hebrew people, but by all peoples on earth.

Now, let's take a quick look at one of the prophets, Amos. After many chapters describing God's call for justice from His people and His threat of judgment if they refused to repent, there is a sign of hope at the end of his prophecy:

*In that day, I will restore David's fallen tent
I will repair its broken places, restore its ruins
and build it as it used to be,
So that they may possess the remnant of Edom
And all the nations that bear My name,*

Declares Yahweh, who will do these things (9:11f)

Amos is describing the restoration of David's kingdom, the renewal of what had obviously fallen on hard times under the various successors to his throne. The restoration will be accompanied by what appears to be a military victory, the possession of Edom and all the nations that are called by the name of the LORD. When we read of the fulfilment of this prophecy, however, it looks very different.

Let's go to Acts 15, the Jerusalem Council, the place where the early church had to decide if their new faith in Jesus would become a unique faith and one to encompass all peoples, or would remain a small subset within Judaism.

Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." (v.1)

This created a conflict with Paul and Barnabas and resulted in a council of church leaders that was held in Jerusalem. There, some believers, Christians, who still belonged to the party of the Pharisees, stood up and said that Gentiles who became followers of the Way must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses. (v. 5) This was followed by lengthy discussion, then Peter stood to give his testimony of how the Spirit was given to Gentiles in response to faith, not to legalism, and then Paul and Barnabas told stories of miraculous signs and wonders that God had done among the Gentiles. And then James, the brother of Jesus stood to speak. Now James was a real stickler for the law, a Pharisee's kind of guy, but on this issue he took a different tack:

Simon has described to us how God at first showed His concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for Himself. The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: "After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild and I will restore it, that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear My Name, says the Lord who does these things. (Acts 15: 14-17)

David's fallen tent, the thing from David's reign that God was most anxious to restore, was his passion for all the nations to be included among those giving glory to his great God, Yahweh, Creator and Lord of all.

So, what does it mean to be a person 'after God's heart'?

It means two really big things at least from the example of David's life:

1. It means that we learn to live in dependence on the Lord, not depending solely on our own wisdom, our street smarts, our learning. David's son, Solomon, once wrote some profound words that direct us in this:

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding
In all your ways acknowledge Him
and He will make your paths straight*

This is so hard for us -- we're so independent and so full of confidence. Somehow David learned to trust in God more than he trusted himself and it made him great.

2. It means that we are committed to always growing in worship. We will not let up on giving God praise and in looking for ways to honour Him, to exalt His reputation among people we're with. David was fully committed, not just to seeing the people of Israel worshiping God, but to see the nations of the earth worshiping Him. He showed that passion in His preparations for the Temple and in some of the psalms he wrote. This passion led to his kingdom being the one in Israel's history that God wanted to restore ... and He did so through the early church.

We can do these two things -- neither are easy, but we can devote ourselves to learning dependence, listening, obeying the voice of the Lord, and by wholehearted worship, doing what we can to see God worshiped in every part of this earth.