

• A good beginning followed by unbelief and deterioration

**Further decline**

1. He was only partially obedient

2. He ignored warnings

3. He hardens his heart towards God's voice

• God rejects Saul from being king – an irreversible decision – an oath of God's wrath

• The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind...

Saul began well. When we first met him he was a spiritual young man, but he began to deteriorate when he fell into unbelief. For a long time he could have sought God's restoration. The fact that God was speaking to him through Samuel<sup>1</sup>, and that God was still calling him to fulfil his kingship<sup>2</sup> was a signal that there was still the possibility of restoration.

Now comes a further stage in the fall of Saul, one in which he ruined his life.

1. **He was only partially obedient.** Saul was obedient in attacking the Amalekites<sup>1</sup> but disobedient in keeping Agag alive<sup>2</sup>, and in keeping the best of the flocks<sup>3</sup>. His disobedience was partly a matter of pride. He wanted to display Agag. The victory of Jonathan<sup>4</sup> had showed Saul in a bad light. Now he would be able to display a prisoner who would demonstrate Saul's prowess in war rather than Jonathan's. It was also a matter of profit. The animals were valuable.

2. **He ignored warnings.** God tells Samuel the way he feels about Saul<sup>1</sup>, and Samuel prays all night for Saul. This is an indication that even at this stage there is still the possibility that Saul might be restored. Then Samuel goes to Saul with one last word from the Lord. If he responds to a word from God Saul can still be restored. But Saul is elsewhere building a monument for himself<sup>2</sup>! Saul is totally blind to what he has done. As always he greets Samuel with pious language<sup>3</sup> and is blind to his partial obedience<sup>3</sup>. Saul had been told to exterminate everything but while the bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the cattle can be heard not far away<sup>4</sup>, Saul is claiming obedience to God's command. Again<sup>5</sup>, he puts the blame on others but admits no fault in himself<sup>6</sup>.

3. **He hardens his heart towards God's voice.** Samuel puts to him something to consider which is explicitly a revelation from the Lord<sup>1</sup>. But Saul is still full of excuses<sup>2</sup>. This is his last chance. If he does not obey this last word from God he is finished. But he refuses to accept God's analysis.

So God's judgement falls. God wants obedience more than anything<sup>1</sup>; he hates rebelliousness<sup>2</sup>. Now Saul is rejected from being king. This is an 'oath of God's wrath' comparable to Numbers 14:20-23, the point after which God will not 'change his mind'. God changed his mind about Saul being king<sup>3</sup> but will not change his mind about this particular judgement. Saul confesses his sinfulness and asks forgiveness<sup>4</sup> but it is too late for him to get his ministry back. Verse 26 again says that God has rejected Saul from being king. Saul might plead for a change in God's decision<sup>5</sup>, but God will not change his mind<sup>6</sup>.

The difference between 1 Samuel 15:10-11, 35 and 15:29 is striking. Can God change his mind? He changed his mind about Saul being king but will not change his mind about this judgement. It is an oath that makes the difference. As Psalm 110:4 says of another matter, 'The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind...'

1 15:1  
2 15:2-3

1 15:4-7  
2 15:8  
3 15:9  
4 1 Samuel 14

1 15:10-11  
  
2 15:12  
3 15:13  
  
4 15:14  
5 as in 13:11  
6 15:15

1 15:16-19  
2 15:20-21

1 15:22  
2 15:23  
  
3 15:10-11  
4 15:24-25  
5 15:27-28  
6 15:29

• *Rejection from being king*

• *Samuel's last deed to attend to what Saul neglected – and then he leaves*

**Saul loses his ministry but not necessarily his eternal destiny**

• *Saul is like the Israelites who before God's oath could go to Canaan*

• *We must keep our hearts tender for a ministry and an eternal reward can be lost*

However, it is notable that it does not say 'the LORD has rejected you;' it says 'the LORD has rejected you **from being king.**'

Like Esau who could find no place to get his inheritance because the death-bed oath of Jacob had been given<sup>□1</sup>, so Saul will now not be able to get God to change his mind. Samuel no longer will be his adviser in the kingship. Samuel shows kindness to him in not disgracing him before the people<sup>□2</sup>, but will never speak to Saul again<sup>□3</sup> during Samuel's life. Samuel's last deed before Saul is to attend to the very thing Saul neglected; Agag is executed<sup>□4</sup>. Then Samuel leaves; God had changed his mind about Saul's kingship but will not change his mind about Saul's abandonment<sup>□5</sup>.

All of this is a classic example of what we find in Hebrews 6:4-6. Saul could not be renewed to repentance. He had hardened his heart<sup>□1</sup> and neglected his great salvation<sup>□2</sup>. It does not necessarily mean that God rejected Saul eternally. 1 Samuel 26:21-25 seems to speak of a deeper repentance than before, and 1 Samuel 28:19 suggests that Saul would be with Samuel after his death and would share the same destiny as his godly son Jonathan. Statements about Saul's rejection always relate to his ministry not to the man himself ('rejected.. . **from being king,**' <sup>□3</sup>; ('the LORD has torn **the kingdom out of your hand,**' <sup>□4</sup>). Because such a rejection involves an oath after which God will not change his mind<sup>□5</sup>, Saul cannot get back to where he was before this word was given. He is like the Israelites who before God's oath could go to Canaan<sup>□6</sup>, but after God's oath<sup>□7</sup> could not be renewed back to the position where they were before and could not thereafter get to Canaan despite their attempts<sup>□8</sup>. If afterward he wished to exercise the kingship with God's anointing, he would find no place for a change of heart in God though he might seek it with tears<sup>□9</sup>. None of this has anything to do with salvation. Israel though rejected **from Canaan** by God's oath was nevertheless forgiven<sup>□10</sup>. So was Saul. But his ministry was lost for ever, and with it his eternal reward. We may believe he was saved through fire<sup>□11</sup> and could have been used in other ways but as God's anointed king he was finished.

May we know God has not taken such an oath against us. If we can hear his voice, if we are not dull of hearing<sup>□1</sup>, all is well. We can be renewed unto repentance. But we must keep our hearts tender, for a ministry can be lost. And so can an eternal reward.

□1 Genesis 27  
 □2 15:30  
 □3 15:31  
 □4 15:31-33  
 □5 15:34-35

□1 see Hebrews 3:7  
 □2 see Hebrews 2:3  
 □3 15:15  
 □4 28:17  
 □5 15:29  
 □6 Numbers 14:8-9  
 □7 Numbers 14:20-24  
 □8 Numbers 44:40-45  
 □9 see Hebrews 12:17  
 □10 Numbers 14:20  
 □11 1 Corinthians 3:15

□1 Hebrews 3:7; 5:14



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