

The Two Sauls

There are two notable men named Saul in the Bible: King Saul in the Old Testament, and Saul of Tarsus in the New Testament. These two men shared important similarities. Both were Benjamites who were destined for greatness. Yet these two Sauls had very opposite beginnings & endings to their lives. Because of this, their lives can serve both as a strong warning to us, and as a great encouragement!

The Old Testament Saul began as a humble farmer's son. When the Israelites demanded a king, God gave them this humble man who was the tallest, most handsome man in the nation. Saul had a good beginning as king, and through the Lord's anointing he and his son both won significant victories in battle. Yet Saul began to disobey the commandments of God, and the prophet Samuel had to rebuke him with the reminder, "When you were little in your own eyes...did not the Lord anoint you king over Israel?" (1 Sam.15:17). Yet Saul became disobedient and proud, until God rejected him and sent an evil spirit upon him. At this point King Saul could no longer get the victory for even his own life, but needed anointed servants like David to help keep him going. Yet as the Lord raised up David to new victories and anointing, Saul became jealous and tried to repeatedly kill him.

King Saul became very corrupt and he began to persecute anyone who he feared supported David. He killed the priests and even tried to kill his own son! The people thought at times that Saul might still have the anointing, such as when they said "Is Saul among the prophets?" in First Samuel 19:24. However, during these times the Lord did not anoint Saul because He approved of his life—the Lord anointed Saul because God approved of *David's* life! Yet Saul's backsliding became more and more obvious until he finally went to a witch for guidance and then the next day committed suicide. How the mighty had fallen! A humble, young, anointed man was greatly used by God until he became an independent, proud, and jealous dictator over God's people.

The New Testament Saul also had qualities that marked him for greatness. In Galatians 1:15 he declared that he was set apart for God from his mother's womb. He was born of pure Jewish blood as one of God's chosen people. He was descended from the faithful tribe of Benjamin. His parents named him Saul at his birth in the expectation that he would follow in the steps of the greatest Benjamite of all, King Saul.

Saul as a young man was chosen for leadership and given great authority by the leaders of his nation. In Acts 8:1-3 and 9:1-2 we can read how they first gave him great authority in Jerusalem and then made him an international ambassador. While God had undoubtedly formed Saul to become a great leader, in his blind pride and self-righteousness young Saul was doing everything wrong. Instead of becoming the man of God that he aspired to be, Saul had actually become the greatest persecutor of God's people! He was following in the steps of King Saul who in pride had killed the priests of God and had tried to stop the new move of God personified in David.

God in His sovereign grace apprehended Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus. There Saul saw the light of God, and also had his own blindness revealed. God continued to reshape Saul's character for many years. Saul still desired to do something great for God with his life, but he first needed to learn the proper way to aspire to greatness. As our Lord Jesus had taught, if you want to become great you must become the servant of all. If we humble ourselves then the Lord will lift us up. It is the meek, not the mighty, who shall inherit the earth.

Saul learned his lessons and allowed God to reform his character. Saul, whose name meant “destroyer,” was renamed Paul, which means “little.” Instead of remaining a great destroyer of the people of God Paul humbled himself to become a humble servant of God’s people.

The Old Testament Saul had started as a humble farm boy, little in his own sight. The New Testament Saul had an opposite start to life when he began as a proud young man rising to greatness. However, Saul of Tarsus also had an opposite end to his life from King Saul. As King Saul matured he became proud and then rebellious to God. Yet in an opposite manner, Saul of Tarsus did not remain proud but humbled himself to become Paul, the “little” one who called himself “less than the least,” (Eph. 3:8). The Apostle Paul’s life qualified him for a glorious position in the eternal kingdom of God while King Saul’s life ended in shame and judgment.

Has God given you giftings and a calling to leadership, as He gave to the two Sauls? If so, then your responses to God’s blessings can lead you to either great glory or shame. Are you becoming more humble as a leader? Or are you becoming more proud, rebellious toward God, and jealous of others? Even if God at times anoints you, as He anointed backslidden King Saul, that is no guarantee that God’s approval is on your life. It is the attitudes and obedience that we cultivate in our heart that make all the difference concerning the fruit of our leadership and our eternal reward. So may the story of King Saul teach us all the fear of the Lord, while the story of Saul of Tarsus encourages us to run after God!