

Message #32

I Samuel 14:47-52

There is an old saying: “If you succeed without suffering, it is because someone else suffered before you. If you suffer without succeeding, it is because someone will succeed after you.”

Saul had walked into a dream job and he was succeeding and for him there was not much suffering. He was not looking to become king, but God had made him king and He had blessed him and was blessing him.

When we come to this text of Scripture, we come to some of the oddest verses in the narrative that connects to Saul. This is the only passage that stresses that Saul was successful in a very unique setting. **One commentator observed that verse 47 is the only verse that actually deals with any military success of Saul.** It is odd.

The actual purpose of this part of I Samuel is probably not to give a list of all of the successful military exploits of Saul. We think it is an entirely different reason.

The context of where this passage sits is odd. It is located between the foolish proclamation that Saul gave that no one could eat (14:24) and his blatant rebellion against God by taking something God told him not to take (15:3, 9).

Sandwiched between these two events are these verses that deal with the military success of Saul and his family. Now the big question is why? Why does God take the time to show us that Saul had been successful in a context that shows he is rebellious?

The reason is this. **God is showing us that He was blessing Saul so we may see that his rebellion was not due to a lack in what God was doing with him and for him. Saul’s rebellion and stupidity were due to his own character and his own choices.**

If we were to pass out paper here and ask you to write down a list of wonderful blessings you have experienced in your life, we would probably compile quite an impressive list. Each person could cite blessings they have experienced from the hand of God. So we would conclude from this that any time we rebel, it is not due to the fact that we have not experienced God’s blessings. It is due to our own sinful rebel character. That is what this context shows for Saul.

It did not matter what God did for Saul, he would not obey God. What we see here is this:

GOD WILL BLESS HIS PEOPLE, BUT SOME OF HIS PEOPLE HAVE A CHARACTER THAT WILL NEVER OBEY HIM NO MATTER HOW MUCH HE HAS BLESSED THEM, SO IN THE END GOD WILL REMOVE HIS BLESSINGS.

That is what this text is all about.

Now let's put this in some historical time perspective:

- 1) We know from Acts 13:21 that Saul reigned over Israel for 40 years.
- 2) We know from II Samuel 5:4-6 that David began to reign in Hebron when he was 30-years-old. What this means is that Saul had reigned for 10 years when David was born.
- 3) We know that David was initially anointed king almost immediately after the second rejection of Saul (I Samuel 15/I Samuel 16:13). The actual age of David is not given but we many assume since he is watching sheep alone he must be at least 15-years-old.

What all of this means is this—**Saul enjoyed many wonderful blessings of God for 25 years.** He enjoyed God's blessings 10 years before David was born and 15 years after David was born. **God got fed up with him in the final 15 years of life of his 40 year reign.**

God had blessed Saul for 25 years. This man had every opportunity to succeed militarily, politically and spiritually. He was not under great stress or strain. God had given him blessing upon blessing, God had given him many victories and he blew it and threw it all away.

His problem was his character. His character was not one of faithful obedience to God and whenever God put Saul to any test to prove his character, Saul failed. Saul was a constant failure and it was not the fault of God. He was a guy who would throw away his faithfulness at the drop of a hat.

This is important. **A believer can be one who has experienced many great blessings of God and still be a spiritual dud. One could have received many blessings for 25 years and never have a right relationship with God. That is the story of King Saul.** He appeared to be a great winner but he was a loser.

God was blessing Saul and here there are four Divine Blessings:

DIVINE BLESSING #1 – God permitted Saul to fight and defeat enemies and expand his Territory. **14:47**

Once Jonathan had inspired the whole nation Israel and inspired Saul himself, Saul took charge of the Kingdom and fought in various directions and won.

Moab was to the east; Edom was to the south; Zobah was to the north and the Philistines were to the west. God allowed him to have victory in all of these directions and all of these areas. He was a commendable and successful leader.

No matter what the terrain or the enemy, Saul was having victory. In the tough mountains of the Edomites or the plains of the kings of Zobah or the coastal regions of the Philistines, he was succeeding. God let him inflict punishment and he was winning battle after battle.

Most leaders would dream of this. Most would long to have God give one victory after another.

When David takes over, he will look more like an initial loser than winner. The Psalms are filled with David's prayers for deliverance. Here Saul was experiencing one deliverance after another. God blessed him for 25 years and you would think his primary ambition would be to honor God. But with Saul that was not the case.

It is possible to have a few victories in life actually given to us by God and still not be a real dedicated servant of God. One commentator observed you could have a string of victories at church and still not have a life that pleases God. Saul had a heart problem and he never got it resolved.

A pastor friend of mine said he had a guy in his church who had given up alcohol and tobacco and still never went anywhere for God. That is Saul.

You may be a believer and you may be able to point to moments of victory. In fact, you may have enjoyed prosperity for 25 years and still be a spiritual dud and loser. That is the story of Saul.

DIVINE BLESSING #2 – God permitted Saul to earn a good reputation as a valiant leader.
14:48

God let Saul earn a good name for himself as a valiant military leader. He attacked and he defeated any nation who threatened Israel. God gave him victory over the most intimidating and toughest of enemies.

Josephus said he reigned "happily." The Amalekites were bitter foes of the Israelites and they were some of the toughest fighters in the world. They were a desert group of enemies that were located in desert regions south of Israel.

Amalek was a grandson of Esau (Gen. 36:12, 15-16). Esau was a rugged mountaineer and he was an experienced hunter. The Amalekites were at home in the wilderness (Gen. 14:6-7). But 436 years before this, God put a curse on the Amalekites and promised they would be wiped out (Deut. 25:17-19). God was using Saul as part of a fulfillment of His plan.

What this shows us is that Saul was beating the biggest and the toughest military forces in the world. His army was going into remote wilderness areas and they were winning. God was blessing Saul in the warfare.

But being successful in your job is not the same as being successful with God. One could succeed greatly at the job and be a spiritual disaster.

Just because one experiences success in his world does not mean he is successful with God. A person could have a business that causes him to travel north, south, east and west. He could seem to land every deal and conquer every obstacle and still be, as J. Vernon McGee said, "Satan's man" like Saul (*I Samuel*, Vol. 2, p. 150).

Think for a moment about another Saul, who was later named Paul. When he started out he didn't appear to be successful anywhere. Every place he went, he seemed to lose. He gets beat up; he gets jailed and he gets chased out of cities. Yet, he was right with God. He never saw the successes of the O.T. Saul, but in eternity it will be Paul who reigns supreme and not Saul.

DIVINE BLESSING #3 – God permitted Saul to have a blessed family. **14:49-51**

Saul had it all seemingly. He had power. He had privilege. He had prosperity and he had posterity.

Saul had three sons: **14:49a**

- 1) Jonathan
- 2) Ishvi
- 3) Malchi-shua.

Saul had two daughters: **14:49b**

- 1) Merab - she married Adriel and had five sons (II Sam. 21:8)
- 2) Michal - she married David and had no children (I Sam. 18:20-28; II Sam. 6:23)

These two girls will play an important role in future narratives.

Saul had a wife and her name was Ahinoam. Probably Saul's wife Ahinoam was the mother of the five children mentioned (**14:50**). It is interesting that Abinadab, who was also a son of Saul, is not mentioned here (I Sam. 31:2). It is possible that the reason is he was Saul's son by a different mother.

We also learn from **verse 50-51** that he had a relative heading up his military whose name was Abner. In the middle east, it is still a custom to appoint certain family members to key governmental positions.

Abner was the son of Ner who was also the father of Kish (I Chron. 8:33; 9:39). Kish and Abner were brothers. So Abner was Saul's uncle and he was heading up Saul's military.

We may assume since Saul was the most handsome man in Israel that his children were good-looking children. All of these children were a blessing of God, but it does not mean that all with children are right with God.

Saul and his family are impressive. He is a successful king; he is surrounded by family and friends. He is on top of the world. The problem is he is a spiritual phony.

We must not ever equate numerical and material success with spiritual success. Laodicea was a big impressive church, but spiritually speaking, she was dead. She was just like Saul.

DIVINE BLESSING #4 – God permitted Saul to increase his military with the best soldiers.

14:52

Throughout Saul's reign the most intense enemy were the Philistines. In fact, it will be the Philistines that will actually end Saul's life (I Sam. 31).

When Saul saw any great warrior or leader, he recruited him to join him and his military. This is what God said would happen because Israel wanted a king. He said a king will take your sons (I Sam. 8:11). He was drafting and drawing the biggest, the brightest, the courageous and the best people to be on his military team.

Let's face it; he looks like a winner, but he is a loser.

None of these victories had a major spiritual effect on Saul. If he would have walked close with God, he could have seen God give total victory over the Philistines.

One of the things that is very clear from studying Saul, is that the exact same circumstances that prove Saul's unfaithfulness prove others faithfulness. This was true with Saul and Jonathan, and this will be true with Saul and David.