

## MISSING GOD'S HONOR ROLL

"And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthah; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets." Hebrews 11:32.

Gideon! Barak! Samson! Jephthah! Samuel! David! There's a name that is missing! Where was Saul when God called the roll of the heroes of the faith? His name is not there. You will look for it in vain. The absence of Saul's name in this verse speaks louder than pages of criticism and volumes of censure.

If you should go to West Point and walk into the old cadet chapel, you would observe on the east wall the black marble shields with the names of the major generals of the Revolutionary War. On each shield there are four lines, first the rank of the general, under that his name, under that the date of his birth, and under that the date of his death. There were twenty-nine major generals in the Revolutionary War, and there are twenty-nine shields. You will see the shield of Greene, of Gates, of Steuben, of Lafayette, and of all the others. In the far corner, almost hidden by the gallery rail, and at the back, you will find the shield of Arnold. On that tablet you will read this inscription -- Major General, \_\_\_\_\_, Born 1740, and \_\_\_\_\_.

There are many significant and striking things at the Academy. There are cannon that were captured, tattered battle flags, and magnificent monuments. But nothing is any more significant than the missing name of Benedict Arnold. Upon the roll of honor on the walls of the old West Point chapel a name is missing -- the name of Benedict Arnold. Upon the roll of honor of God's heroes of the faith a name is conspicuously absent, and that is the name of Saul.

You will recall that unworthy motive prompted the Israelites to insist on having a king. That motive was expressed in the words of their elders to Samuel: "Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations." This request was very displeasing to Samuel, and he hesitated to grant it; in fact, he advised against it, and warned them of its consequences. Unwilling to heed Samuel's advice, they replied, "Nay; but we will have a king over us; that we also may be like all the nations." Like the other nations, they were especially interested in procuring a king who would be an outstanding military leader.

Saul was ultimately chosen to be the king. In many respects he is the supremely tragic figure of the Old Testament. His life is an effective illustration of the progressiveness of sin. If we are at all sensitive as to the supreme values and vital issues of human life, the story of his life is bound to challenge us.

### I. Saul's Early Manhood Was Promising.

Saul was the son of Kish, a well-to-do farmer who was a member of the tribe of Benjamin. Saul had the advantages of rural environment and upbringing. He not only enjoyed the highest privileges of training which his day afforded, but his father wisely provided useful employment for him.

When we first meet Saul there are many things about him to admire. Never did a young fellow show fairer promise or kinglier possibilities; and never did such a young man find more illustrious opportunities greeting him at the outset of his career.

#### 1. Saul was exceptionally attractive.

He was in the springtime of life with his best years yet before him.

"How beautiful is youth, how bright it gleams,  
With its allusions, aspirations, dreams,  
Book of beginnings, story without end,  
Each maid a heroine, each man a friend."

Saul had a splendid physique. The Bible says he was "a choice young man, and a goodly: and there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he: from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people" (I Samuel 9:2). Saul was very handsome, tall in stature, graceful in build, princely in bearing, and kingly in appearance. Due to the fact that he was the most handsomely proportioned young man in the land, he commanded the admiration and respect of a nation that was fond of pomp and grandeur.

## 2. Saul was genuinely humble.

Most great men are humble. Saul was in the prime of his early manhood when his father told him to take a servant and go in search of his animals which had wandered from their pasture and were lost. He cheerfully obeyed the command of his father. He did not consider himself too big to work faithfully at such a lowly task. Without asking a question or raising a single objection, he simply did as his father told him.

When Samuel told Saul that he was to be the king of Israel, he replied with becoming modesty: "Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? wherefore then speakest thou so to me?" (I Samuel 9:21).

When the people assembled at Mizpeh for the public election of their king, they cast lots and Saul was chosen. While the voting proceeded, Saul fled in the opinion that he was not qualified for the position. After his election they dragged him from the midst of the baggage, where he had modestly concealed himself, and acclaimed him king. Following the words of counsel from Samuel, king though he was, Saul returned home and resumed his work on his father's farm.

## 3. Saul was unusually courageous.

When the ruthless Ammonites made their outrageous demands, Saul displayed unusual courage by rallying the nation to arms with his stirring call, by ordering an offensive, and by marching to the relief of the besieged inhabitants. The Ammonites were routed, and Saul, the good soldier and superb general, was the hero of the hour.

## II. Saul's Middle Life Was Perilous.

### 1. Saul trifled with temptation.

During the early years of his reign, Saul distinguished himself in various ways, both at home and abroad. He organized an army for the defense of Israel. Samuel charged him to wait seven days for his arrival. Because Samuel tarried and the people were scattering, Saul intruded the office of high priest and offered the burnt offering.

### 2. Saul disobeyed the commands of God.

God ordered the complete destruction of the Amalekites -- the men, women, children, flocks, and herds. Saul executed the order with dispatch and efficiency, except he took the king, Agag, captive, and retained the best of the flocks of livestock as booty. In other words, Saul obeyed God only in so far as it suited his whims to do so. Through all of these centuries that has been man's trouble. Man has thought that he has known better than God, therefore, he has been unwilling to obey God's commands. But, it never pays to disregard God's commands.

When Samuel accused Saul of violating the divine command, Saul adopted the miserable subterfuge of putting the blame upon those over whom he exercised authority. After his disobedience, lying, and deceit were exposed, Saul reasoned that if his action were wrong the motive was excellent, as they meant to sacrifice the best unto the Lord. However, his plea of a good intention was frivolous and false. Samuel said, "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice."

### 3. Saul became insanely jealous.

Through his prowess in war David gained the applause of the people. Saul heard them singing: "Saul has slain his thousands and David has slain his tens of thousands," and he became insanely jealous. Both secretly and openly he sought David's life, and his cruelty to David hastened his own fall.

### III. Saul's Last Days Were Pitiful.

Samuel made it clear to Saul that failure was inevitable on account of his becoming conceited, disregarding God's commandments, ignoring the prophet of God who was his best friend, and leaving God out of his life. The time came when Saul had to have help, but he did not know where to find it. He did not want to appeal to God because he knew that he had never repented of his sin. What could he do? In sheer desperation he turned to an old witch who had hidden herself in a cave, when Saul had banished her in his better days. Early in his reign he refused to tolerate such characters in his country. And now he has decided to consult one of that obnoxious number. Ah, how men change with sinful years! What once they did not think themselves capable of doing they come to do. That which they scorned others for doing they at length themselves do.

On the next day, in the great battle on the slopes of Mount Gilboa, Israel was defeated and Saul's army fled, but Saul fought on with his old-time courage and heroism, until he was desperately wounded by the Philistine archers. When his three sons had fallen at his side, then Saul, seeing that he had lost his sons and his kingdom, and thinking that he did not have anything to live for, begged his armourbearer to take his sword and thrust it through him. When he refused to do so, Saul, in his desperation, took his sword, fixed the hilt firmly in the ground, and then fell with his full weight upon the upturned point and committed suicide. There could scarcely have been a sadder end to a very promising career.

Saul's life may be summarized accurately in these words: early promise, gradual deterioration, and ruinous fall. He made the greatest mistake that one can possibly make --he left God out of his life, and as a result he missed God's honor roll. In summarizing his own life, Saul said, "I have played the fool." What a different life Saul's would have been if he had only repented of his sin and lived in accordance with the will of God! Anybody who lives without God certainly plays the part of the fool, but that is so unnecessary. Every person should repent of his sin and receive Christ as his Saviour.