

UNIT 10

BECAUSE

OF YOUR

HARDENED

HEART



“The Lord Has Rejected You as King”

by Darryl Dash

We had a new leader. I sat in the conference center as he outlined his vision. I marveled at his skill as I listened to him talk. He used humor, well-crafted phrases, and passion as he described how he would lead the organization. When he finished, everyone jumped to their feet, clapping.

A few years later, he was gone—his vision in ruins, his legacy in doubt.

I love good leaders. I’ve seen the difference that a good leader can make to a church, school, business, or family. I devour leadership books, and I’m always looking for ways to become a more effective leader myself.

At the same time, I’ve seen a pattern repeated too many times: early promise is followed by struggles, and sometimes by failure. It seems that we sometimes get the leaders we want, but the leaders we want end up letting us down.

It’s a pattern that has been repeated at least since the days of King Saul.

THE RISE OF A GREAT LEADER

If People’s Choice awards existed in ancient Israel, Saul would have won.

Of course, the people should have known better. Samuel had warned Israel against choosing a king (1 Sam. 8:10-18). Samuel knew that the people were looking to a human leader for what only God could provide. He also knew that leader would let them down. But the warning went unheeded, and they got the leader they wanted.

Initially, Saul was amazing. First Samuel 9:2 describes him as impressive and taller than anyone else. It seems Saul had charisma, which would reveal itself later; and when you find a charismatic, good-looking leader, it’s easy to buy in.

Besides that, things at first went well for Saul, for a while. He projected humility (9:21). The Holy Spirit filled him and he prophesied (10:10). It looked like he had God’s seal of approval. Almost everyone got excited about his new rule (10:24),

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with only a few wicked holdouts (10:27). He also got a quick win under his belt (11:1-11), displayed grace to his opponents (11:12-13), and even led the people to worship God (11:14-15).

After years of struggling, Israel had finally found their leader.

THE DOWNFALL

But, no leader is perfect. We tend to excuse the failures of leaders at first, as long as they continue to inspire confidence and deliver results.

The problem comes when a leader's faults overwhelm everything else. No matter how gifted or popular a leader may appear, his or her character will begin to show.

In Saul's case, he revealed a major character defect. Under pressure, Saul took matters into his own hands, rather than following Samuel's instructions (13:1-14). Samuel, the man who anointed him, confronted him. Saul had squandered his leadership.

Sadly, Saul set a pattern for future kings. Many of them ended up revealing major

character issues, leading Israel into greater disobedience. I see echoes of Saul's leadership style in the stories of great leaders who end up squandering their potential because of narcissism, unchecked pride, or other sins.

"No man had a greater opportunity than Saul," observed Henrietta Mears, "and no man ever was a greater failure."¹

LOOKING FOR A GOOD LEADER

We should never be surprised when leaders fail. Samuel's warning still stands today: Don't look to leaders for what only God can give. Every human will disappoint. Even the best leader will let us down.

It's easy to become cynical about leaders, but that's wrong too. We need good leaders. Scripture, for instance, talks about the need for leaders within the church, but the emphasis is on finding leaders with godly character (Titus 1:5-16). We tend to focus on what a leader does, yet what a leader believes and how a leader lives matter far more than we think (1 Tim. 4:16).

So find good leaders. Choose character over charisma. Pray for them. Encourage them. But don't look to them for the security only God can provide.

We're always tempted to look for security in things that will disappoint. Leaders, jobs, relationships, and money are all fine, but none of them provide the security we need. Security can only be found in God. The story of Saul reminds us that we can often get what we want in life, only to be disappointed that it doesn't deliver what we want.

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It turns out that we see a few of our own problems in Saul's story. Like the people of Israel, we look elsewhere for what only God can provide. Like Saul, we're quick to choose our own path under pressure. Unlike Saul, God is a just King, and He would be right to judge us for our sinful conduct and our twisted hearts. We deserve God's justice just as much as Saul and the people of Israel. We're all without excuse.

But Saul's story provides us with a couple of signs of hope.

First, it reminds us that God is gracious. Despite early signs of trouble in Saul, God still showed grace to Saul, filling him with His Spirit and granting him victory. Despite wanting a king against Samuel's advice, God showed grace to Israel by not writing them off and by promising to provide a better king. Praise God that He extends grace to us when we don't deserve it! Other than Jesus, we don't find any perfect people in Scripture, but we find plenty of God's grace to those who need it.

Second, that promised better king gives us great hope (1 Sam. 13:13-14). Immediately, we see that king was David. But in the long run, the better King is Jesus, who died for our sins, triumphed over death, and now reigns forever at God the Father's right hand.

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