

SOTERIOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

PART 22

KEY TERMS: PERSEVERANCE, PART 2

Do we have biblical examples provided to show us that believers can fall into egregious sin? Do we have biblical examples of believers who fall away from the faith and never return? Do we have biblical examples of people who fall into sin and who are subsequently restored? In fact, we do. In these categories, however, many people would deny that some these examples represent true believers.

The first king of Israel, Saul [שאול], is an example of a believer who did not persevere. Before I get into discussing Saul, I want you to know many people do not think Saul was a believer in God. Opinion is divided on this issue. J. Vernon McGee and Eugene Merrill (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary*) do not think so. Thomas Constable, however, does affirm Saul's status as a believer. "Since God chose and equipped Saul to rule His people, it seems most likely that he was a genuine believer in Yahweh, though Saul gave evidence of not having a strong commitment to Him" [Thomas L. Constable, "1 Samuel" in *Thomas Constable's Notes on the Bible*]. "The expression be turned into another man may mean spiritual regeneration or a marked advance in spiritual growth...There is debate as to whether this refers to a work of God's Spirit which prepared Saul for kingship or to the act of spiritual regeneration. It may seem that Saul's subsequent attitudes and behavior do not reflect a genuine spiritual life. Yet Saul seems to have struggled with sin and desired to worship God" [Earl Radmacher, Ronald B. Allen, H. Wayne House, *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Commentary*, p. 359]. Unger wrote, "Then he would be turned into another man, divinely endowed with character and courage for kingship, and a true successor of the judges who were all impelled by God's Spirit....God gave Saul another heart, transforming him into a great leader and warrior. The Spirit of God came upon him mightily, indicating a sudden and full possession by the Spirit of Elohim....When Samuel said, tomorrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me, it meant that at the time of their death Saul and his sons would go to be where Samuel was, that is, to the paradise section of Hades, where all the spirits of the righteous dead went in Old Testament times" [Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament*, pp. 376-377, 406]. Dr. Anthony Badger believes the new heart given to Saul is the mark of a believer [Anthony B. Badger, *Confronting Calvinism: A Free Grace Refutation and Biblical Resolution of Radical Reformed Soteriology*, pp. 283-284]. The other factor to consider in this issue is that the Old Testament almost never specifically identified who was a believer and who wasn't. "The Old Testament will be searched in vain for record of Jews passing from an unsaved to a saved state, or for any declaration about the terms upon which such a change would be secured" [Lewis

Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, p. 6:73-74]. I don't think Chafer is totally correct in that assertion. The only Old Testament people I could think of off the top of my head that were specifically said to be believers was Abraham in Genesis 15:6, but Abraham wasn't a Jew but a Gentile, and Hezekiah who "trusted in the Lord" (2 Kings 18:5) which I understand to be a synonym for belief. Other kings were said to have done right before God and the assumption is they were believers. For the most part, Chafer is correct and we have to examine the totality of the Scriptures in any pericope in order to attempt to determine the status of any particular person and in the case of people like Saul and Balaam that is still a bit difficult. In the case of other people, the issue is clearer. That's why so many people are divided over the issue of whether or not some of those Old Testament men were believers.

1 Samuel 10:6, 9-10 ⁶"Then the Spirit of the LORD will come upon you mightily, and you shall prophesy with them and be changed [הִפָּךְ] into another [אֲחֵר] man.... ⁹Then it happened when he turned his back to leave Samuel, God changed [אֲחֵר] his heart; and all those signs came about on that day. ¹⁰When they came to the hill there, behold, a group of prophets met him; and the Spirit of God came upon him mightily, so that he prophesied among them.

It seems unlikely that unbelievers do not have the Spirit of the Lord come upon them and at the same time experience a change into another man or have a heart that God changes. An unbeliever can be directed to do and/or say whatever our sovereign God desires him to do or say but that does not necessarily require an endowment of the Spirit (for example, see Caiaphas and his prophecy that was from the Lord stating it was expedient for one man to die for the nation Israel [John 11:47-53]. Caiaphas was clearly an unbeliever.) We also know that the Magi Balaam [בְּלָעַם] was Spirit directed to prophetically declare God revealed truth but opinion is divided concerning whether or not he was a believer. Constable writes, "Nevertheless Balaam knew Yahweh, submitted to Him, and received revelations from Him (22:8, 13, 18–20, 38; 23:5, 12, 16; 24:1, 13). There are many indications in the narrative that Balaam genuinely feared Yahweh. He seems to have been sincerely sympathetic with the Israelites, and he praised them (23:10)" [Thomas L. Constable, *Thomas Constable's Notes on the Bible*]. "Balaam as a prophet offers the strange spectacle of a prophet-diviner—a mixture of paganistic ritual with a true, though blurred, knowledge of the true God" [Merrill F. Unger, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, s. v. "Balaam"]. Remember, Rahab was counted a believer and all she knew was that God delivered the Israelites out of Egypt and passed them through the Red Sea and was coming to conquer Canaan and give the land to His people, the Israelites. At that point, Hebrews 11:31 records the fact that she was a believer; James 2 confirms that as well. We do have to keep in mind that belief is predicated on the revelation of God at the time and not as we understand it today. Balaam's interaction with God certainly at least suggests a believing

relationship. That does not remove the fact that Balaam counseled Balak on a method to damage Israel, that he was killed later in battle by the Israelites, and that the New Testament condemns his behavior (2 Peter 2:15; Jude 11, Rev. 2:14). If he was a believer, he certainly made some grievous sinful errors but is that a disqualification for being a believer? No. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, rev. gives a clearly conflicted account of Balaam's life. "The oracles of Balaam (Nu. 23:7–10, 18–24; 24:3–9, 15–24) are significant alike for their content and for the accompanying account of the experience of the prophet himself. The first two oracles are directly attributed to the activity of Yahweh, who "put a word in [Balaam's] mouth" (23:3, 16). Yet it would appear from 24:1 that on both occasions he had recourse to divination. It is noteworthy that the two final oracles are introduced with precisely the same words (24:3, 15) and imply a measure of progress in Balaam's spiritual experience. He speaks of himself as "the man whose eye is opened" (cf. BDB, p. 1060 [šōtan]), as if he has come to see the worthlessness of heathen divination and has come to recognize that he must henceforth forego all effort to turn Yahweh from His purpose to bless Israel. The manner of his inspiration also undergoes a change. The apparently somewhat mechanical communication of Yahweh's word in the delivery of the first two oracles is replaced by the direct operation of the Spirit of God upon him (Nu. 24:2b)." The entry ends with this comment about his character: "Though an element of mystery surrounds Balaam in the OT narratives, the Scriptures leave us in no doubt as to what conclusions to draw with regard to his character. He is represented as the archetype of the false teachers of the Christian Church who pervert the truth of the gospel in the interests of personal gain (2 Pet. 2:15) and under the guise of Christian liberty advocate compromise with the world (Rev. 2:14)" [J. C. J. Waite, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, rev., s. v. "Balaam"]. "Even if Balaam began well as a genuine servant of the Lord, he did not end well" [Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Promise-Plan of God: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, p. 88]. Even a Reformed theologian such as Dr. Kaiser has to admit that Balaam is described in the beginning as a genuine servant. We have to remember the Magi who came after Balaam centuries later and who relied on the prophecy of Balaam and on the testimony of Daniel believed they needed to acknowledge and worship the Jewish King at His birth. The major point I'm trying to make here is that believers can commit egregious personal sins, they can be disobedient and rebellious, and they can even apostatize from the faith, totally fail to persevere, and still have eternal life. That is a biblical truth that is contrary to the Reformed doctrine as they define perseverance and that is what I'm refuting. Perseverance does not mean what they say it means which is that it is the proof that one is elect and born again. According to their doctrine, if there is no perseverance, there is no faith. That is false and that is what I'm refuting.

We do have to remember that in the Old Testament the Spirit was not a permanent indwelling presence in believers. "The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament was not universal.

He came upon a very few selected individuals; He came upon them to give them special privileges—to empower their hands with skill, or to open up their tongues to speak—or to give them ability to lead or guide the nation Israel, but it was a sovereign act of God” [J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Divine Comforter: The Person and Word of the Holy Spirit*, p. 60].

David is the only person identified in the Old Testament of whom it was said he had a lifelong indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit came upon people for power in completing specific God given tasks and when finished the Spirit departed from them. This is not an indication they lost their salvation; it is an indication the specific purposes of God were ended with that person at that time. It may also be an indication the believer was in rebellion against God and the Spirit was removed as a disciplinary measure. Remember that David implored God not to take His Spirit from him after his sin against God involving Uriah and Bathsheba was discovered which is an indication that the Spirit could have been removed from him.

1 Samuel 16:13 ¹³Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. ...

Psalms 51:11 ¹¹Do not cast me away from Your presence And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.

Many commentators do not believe 1 Samuel 10:6, 9-10 indicate that Saul was a believer but I disagree with that. Another, אַחֵר, means other, another, different; it pertains to one of the same kind or class of object but distinct within that class. “It can take on a figurative meaning indicating that a person has become another person (1 Sam. 10:9, literally, with another heart)” [Warren Baker and Eugene Carpenter, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament*, s. v. “אַחֵר”]. Both “another” in verse 6 and “changed” in verse 9 use this word. But “changed” in verse 6 in connection with changing into another man is, הִפְתִּיךְ, means change or turn into; it is to change the essential form or nature of something. The Hebrew words used here seem to refer to Samuel's change into another person with another heart and his essential nature was changed so that he became another man. We can also infer from 1 Samuel 13:13 that Saul was a believer. First, Samuel says the Lord was Saul's God. Samuel also told Saul that if he had kept the commandment of the Lord, God would have established his kingdom over Israel forever. It is inconceivable to me that God would have placed an unbeliever over His son, the nation Israel, whom He rescued from Egypt. Admittedly, that is an inference and not an exegetically supported conclusion even though I think the theological reasoning is sound; therefore, we shouldn't build doctrine on that line of reasoning. The final inference that Saul was a believer is 1 Samuel 28:19 wherein Samuel, who was summoned from the abode of the dead, informed Saul that he and

his sons would be with him, Samuel, the next day. Samuel was certainly a believer, there is no question about that, and the only way Saul would be with him is because he was a believer as well; an unbeliever could not have gone to Abraham's Bosom in Paradise. This is also an inference concerning Saul, but it is exegetically valid according to the analogy of Scripture because we know believers and unbelievers were separated in a place called Hades and the believers were in Abraham's bosom while unbelievers were in a place of torment (Luke 16:19-31). It is possible, however, that Samuel was only saying that Saul would join him in death rather than in his specific location in Abraham's bosom. Radmacher's Bible commentary says, "The words with me simply refer to the grave. This text is not intended to provide a final answer concerning Saul's spiritual status" [Earl Radmacher, Ronald B. Allen, H. Wayne House, *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary*, p. 381]. Most commentators interpret this verse to be a general reference to death. Some of them think the apparition was demonic but the text seems to suggest its authenticity. Therefore, I wouldn't conclude this verse is definitive either, but I would tend to agree with Unger that "with me" is specifically referring to Samuel's specific location. We can debate this issue, but the fact is the text is not definitive and no real answer is forthcoming.

1 Samuel 13:13 ¹³Samuel said to Saul, "You have acted foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you, for now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever.

1 Samuel 28:19 ¹⁹"Moreover the LORD will also give over Israel along with you into the hands of the Philistines, therefore tomorrow you and your sons will be with me....

The point I'm making here is that, concerning the totality of the Scriptures about him, I think Saul was a believer. "Saul was attentive to Samuel's predictions and readily responded to the influence of the Spirit of God on his heart and the workings of the Spirit among the joyful band of prophets. Here is the first instance in Scripture in which the Spirit of God and a heart change are linked together" [G. H. Livingston, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, s. v. "Saul"]. "A tragic figure, Saul's heart was initially changed; he had even prophesied" [Daniel C. Browning, Jr., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, s. v. "Saul"]. "Saul was a loyal worshiper of God....Saul was a loyal worshiper of God on one hand, but disobedient to God on the other; chosen by God, yet rejected by Him" [*The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, s. v. "Saul, King of Israel"].

In terms of perseverance, how did Saul fare? He failed. His failure began when he disobeyed the Lord, usurped the function of the priest, and offered a sacrifice resulting in the loss of this throne because God removed it from him (1 Sam. 13:8-14). Saul disobeyed the commands of God when he spared some of the animals of the Amalekites and their king, Agag (1 Sam. 15). Ultimately, God imposed divine discipline

on Saul and caused him to be tormented by an evil spirit (1 Sam 16:14, 18:10). At that point, the Spirit left Saul (1 Sam. 16:14) which we know to be possible in the Old Testament dispensation. The fact the Spirit left him cannot be used to say he was either not saved or that he lost his salvation. Saul grew to hate David and tried to murder him a number of times over a period of years. Finally, Saul used a medium to conjure Samuel from the dead (1 Sam. 28). The next day he was badly wounded in battle and took his own life (1 Sam. 31). This is certainly the picture of a man who failed to persevere and once he got off track he never got his life back on track. If he was a believer, he remained a believer but the temporal discipline he suffered due to his unfaithfulness was unpleasant to say the least and it ultimately cost him and his sons their lives. His life was a picture of divine discipline and failure. Yet, in the final analysis, I am convinced that Saul, despite his failure to persevere, will be in the Messianic Kingdom as an Old Testament believer. If you disagree that Saul was a believer, then insert anyone into this set of facts who you know to be a believer and you still have to understand that a believer can do these types of rebellious, sinful activities and still remain a saved person.

1 Samuel 16:14 ¹⁴Now the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul...

1 Samuel 18:12 ¹²Now Saul was afraid of David, for the LORD was with him but had departed from Saul.

Asa [אַסָּא] is an example of a good king who did not persevere and finished poorly [1 Kings 15; 2 Chronicles 14-16]. Asa started out as a king "who did good and right in the sight of the Lord his God" (2 Chron. 14:2). Later in his reign, he failed to trust in the Lord to protect the nation and he relied on the king of Aram [אַרָּם] instead. God sent a prophet to rebuke the king and Asa imprisoned the man of God. Asa then began to oppress some of the people. Asa is an example of a man who did not persevere but he was a believer and he will be in the Millennial Kingdom.

The next example of perseverance I want to briefly examine is the life of King David [דָּוִד]. Samuel proclaimed him to be a man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14). Scripture consistently presents the picture of David as a man of God who was loyal to the end of his life. Yet, we know that David was not consistently faithful to all the commands of God. He multiplied wives for himself contrary to the provisions of the Law (Dt. 17:17). He committed adultery with Bathsheba [בַּת־יֶשֶׁבַע] and had her husband, Uriah [אֹרִיָּה], murdered in order to cover up the infidelity and to suppress the scandal (2 Sam. 11:1-12:23). David was going to kill Nabal [נָבָל] and his men for the impolite snub Nabal gave them but he was persuaded by Abigail's [אַבְיָגַיִל] acknowledgement of him not to do so (1 Sam. 25:2-38). David offended God by taking a census and a plague on his people resulted (2 Sam. 24:1-17). David commanded Solomon to murder Joab [יֹאָבָב] and Shimei

[שָׁמַעֲוִי] once Solomon assumed the throne (1 Kings 2:5-6, 8-9) which was an order Solomon carried out (1 Kings 2:28-46). In the aggregate, those actions are certainly not godly. However, David remained the standard for faithful kings; the descendants of David who ascended to the throne were all measured against his reign. They were either kings who did right or did not do right in the sight of the Lord as their father David had done.

David was clearly a believer; there is no controversy about that. He did commit extremely serious sins including adultery and murder but those incidents do not prove he was never a believer and they did not result in the loss of his salvation. The doctrine that claims any certain but undefined level of personal sin somehow "proves" a person is unsaved is clearly unbiblical. David is an example of a believer who persevered throughout his life. He had problems and failures along the way but all in all his life was counted as the life of a man after God's own heart.

Did David get a free pass for his transgressions? No. He suffered some serious temporal discipline in his lifetime. The prophet Nathan [נָתָן] rebuked David for his sin and declared to David the disciplinary measures he would endure for his sin.

2 Samuel 12:7–12 ⁷Nathan then said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'It is I who anointed you king over Israel and it is I who delivered you from the hand of Saul. ⁸I also gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your care, and I gave you the house of Israel and Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added to you many more things like these! ⁹Why have you despised the word of the LORD by doing evil in His sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the sons of Ammon. ¹⁰Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.' ¹¹"Thus says the LORD, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you from your own household; I will even take your wives before your eyes and give them to your companion, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. ¹²Indeed you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and under the sun.' "

Did these things come to pass? They certainly did. First, the child born to David and Bathsheba died (2 Sam. 12:15-23). Amnon [אַמְנוֹן], David's firstborn son and the son who would have had legal rights to inheriting the throne, raped David's daughter, Tamar [תָּמָר] (2 Sam. 13-23). Absalom [אַבְשָׁלוֹם], Tamar's brother, murdered Amnon for the violation of his sister (2 Sam. 13:24-39). Absalom fomented a plot to overthrow his father and take his throne by force (2 Sam. 15-18). David had to flee for his life from Jerusalem and during his absence Absalom went in to his father's concubines in full view of the city on the roof of the palace as a display of his position over David and of his claim to

the throne of Israel occupied by his father. David's advisor Ahithophel [אַחִיתֹפֶל] joined Absalom's rebellion. David was cursed to his face by Shimei [שִׁמְעִי] who was a relative of Saul's. Absalom was slain in the battle for the kingdom and David was heartbroken over his death. It took a rebuke at the hands of Joab [יֹאָב] to bring David to his senses (2 Sam. 19:1-7). Another of David's sons, Adonijah [אַדֹנִיָּה], conspired to usurp the throne as David lay dying (1 Kings 1:11-37). That was rough finish to David's life.

The final Old Testament example concerning perseverance I want to examine is Solomon [שְׁלֹמֹה]. I don't know anyone who claims that Solomon was an unbeliever. Solomon started out in an exemplary manner; he was blessed by God beyond all imagination. He humbled himself before God and placed the welfare of his people above his own desires and God rewarded him for that attitude (1 Kings 3:6-15). However, just as his father David had done before him, he violated the command prohibiting the multiplication of wives but in addition to that he also violated the commands prohibiting war horses and the hoarding of wealth (Dt. 17:16-17). We know that when his son Rehoboam [רְחֹבָם] succeeded him the people had been suffering under an economically punitive level of labor and that implies a high level of taxation as well (1 Kings 12:1-15). There is no record that Solomon wrote a copy of the Law for his personal study as the Law required (Dt. 17:18-20). Solomon's large number of wives was partly the consequence of political liaisons with other monarchs but God was supposed to be the source of his safety and security (1 Kings 11:1-3), and it seems Solomon also had a lust problem; concubines had nothing to do with diplomatic relations and national security. By the time of Solomon, concubines were apparently obtained for the personal pleasure of the monarch. Diplomatic relations with those nations and marriages with their daughters was strictly prohibited. Finally, those women turned Solomon's heart to embrace their idolatrous religions (1 Kings 11:4-8). Solomon even built altars on high places for Chemosh [כְּמוֹשׁ] and Molech [מֹלֶךְ] (1 Kings 11:7) who were gods to whom babies were sacrificed. Whether he actually participated in those rites or just his wives or just his people is unknown, but it is certain that he facilitated the practice during his reign. Upon assuming the throne, Solomon had Adonijah [אַדֹנִיָּה], his brother, put to death (1 Kings 2:19-25) as well as Joab [יֹאָב] (1 Kings 2:28-35) and Shimei [שִׁמְעִי] (1 Kings 2:36-46).

Did Solomon suffer temporal discipline for his unfaithfulness? I believe he did. God raised up adversaries to Solomon (1 Kings 11:14, 23, 26). One of the things God promised him was long life if he kept God's statutes and commandments as his father David had done. Solomon reigned forty years and I'm guessing he wasn't yet sixty years of age when he died. I suspect his somewhat early death was due to his descent into pagan idolatry and his other violations of the Lord's commands. Longevity at that time wasn't what it is today and perhaps in terms of the life span at the time he lived a long life, but it would have been a small matter for God to have prolonged his life into advanced

old age, if Solomon had remained faithful. I'm suggesting that his death was temporal, divine discipline for his disobedience and his idolatry.

1 Kings 3:14 ¹⁴"If you walk in My ways, keeping My statutes and commandments, as your father David walked, then I will prolong your days."

1 Kings 11:42–43 ⁴²Thus the time that Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel was forty years. ⁴³And Solomon slept with his fathers and was buried in the city of his father David, and his son Rehoboam reigned in his place.

Ultimately, God told Solomon he would retain only a small part of Israel as the heritage he would pass down to his sons.

1 Kings 11:9–13 ⁹Now the LORD was angry with Solomon because his heart was turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, ¹⁰and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not observe what the LORD had commanded. ¹¹So the LORD said to Solomon, "Because you have done this, and you have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you, and will give it to your servant. ¹²"Nevertheless I will not do it in your days for the sake of your father David, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son. ¹³"However, I will not tear away all the kingdom, but I will give one tribe to your son for the sake of My servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen."

In terms of perseverance, Solomon started well and ended in apparent apostasy. I don't see how one could fall further than sacrificing babies to pagan gods. But even after all that, he is still counted among the Old Testament saints.