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The Lord Answered Him Not

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Series: God's Living Legends II

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Once upon a time, many, many, years ago, there lived a man after God's own heart. His name was David. He was God's king-to-be, the man God personally had selected to replace an unfaithful man named Saul.

The problem, you may recall, was that Saul had been given opportunity after opportunity to be God's man. But there was something in the heart of Saul, something that always clamored to put his own best interests above those of God's and time after time there surfaced a weakness of character that made him unfit to be king. Again and again, God gave him opportunity to repent and humble himself, and again and again, he lied, connived, deceived, and used his office to serve himself rather than his God and his people.

The last time we looked at the life of this incredibly self-centered man, he had pursued David in a jealous rage, and for the more than twentieth time, sought to take David's life (as though that would preserve his office and give him a reprieve). At last, David found his opportunity for revenge. In a cave at Engedi, David found himself faced with a chance to kill the king who had so unjustly persecuted him for so long, and take the crown that was rightfully his. But instead, David surrendered to the sovereignty of his God. He humbled himself before the wicked king, honored the office he held, and refused to lay his hand on God's anointed.

Saul was moved for the moment. But, of course, Saul had been moved before. Whenever the occasion called for a show of emotions to save him, Saul could repent with the best of them. The only problem was that true repentance demonstrates itself in a change of behavior. Apparently Saul never experienced that.

As we left off the last time, we looked at the Living Legends of Saul and David. David had acknowledged that vengeance was God's; He would repay. And David bowed himself before the wicked king in a show of respect. In I Samuel 24 we read of Saul's response:

Now it came about when David had finished speaking these

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words to Saul, that Saul said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" Then Saul lifted up his voice and wept.

And he said to David, "You are more righteous than I; for you have dealt well with me, while I have dealt wickedly with you."
(1 Samuel 24:16,17 NASB)

Sounds sincere enough, doesn't it? Not really. Saul had not had a change of heart. Saul was gripped with fear. He knew David would one day be King. He knew God was protecting David, but something within him continued to grasp at straws and believe that if he could destroy this young man God had selected to replace him, God would have no option but to extend his own reign.

So Saul's "repentance" consisted of begging David not to cut off his descendants and then riding off back to his palatial estate, leaving David and his men in the wilderness to fend for themselves.

I don't know about you, but I probably would have gone somewhere and pouted. I believe I would have said, "Lord, I did it YOUR way. I had my chance, and I honored your Word. Is this what I get in return? Saul's still king, living in the lap of luxury, and I'm still here rotting in the desert with an army of 600 rebels and rejects. Is there no justice, Lord?" That's what I would have said. But praise God, David was made out of better stuff.

We will follow this amazing story through its next phase and scan some five chapters of Scripture as God's wide angle lens gives us a panoramic picture of some incredible events in Israel's history, then zooms in for a close-up of the character of these two Living Legends. We will see them both in the throes of certain defeat, and we will see the difference, the amazing difference, in how they handled the crisis.

I- ONE MORE TIME

We will only sweep across the peaks of chapters 25, 26, and 27, so we can see the patterns and the personalities that clamor for our attention. They all speak, in one form or another, of those amazing cycles of life that recur again and again. They demonstrate how, apart from the transformation of God, man simply reproduces his own mistakes. When God takes control of a life, that can change. But for Saul, God had been relegated to the role of an emergency brake, something to grab hold of when nothing else works.

Chapter 25 tells an unusual story about David and Nabal, and Nabal's wife, Abigail. In simple form, the story goes like this:

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Samuel, the prophet, had died. Israel was in mourning. David, meanwhile, was still a vagabond, a fugitive, running from the spears of the madman who still wore Israel's crown. At the time, he and his men were living in the desert of Maon. Also living in the area was an extremely successful rancher named Nabal, with his beautiful and intelligent wife, whose name was Abigail.

While David had been in the desert, he had been courteous to Nabal's shepherds, and he had helped protect their flock. Now it was shearing time, and as Nabal was shearing his flock, David sent ten men as ambassadors to ask of Nabal a small contribution in return for their kindness to his men and his flock. Nabal, however, was not known for his generosity, and his response to David's men lacked both tact and substance. In essence, he said, "Why should I share my hard-earned cash with the likes of you." So David's men returned to the desert with their not-so-gracious report, and David, fighter that he was, considered Nabal's response as a call to annihilate the cocky cattleman and all his men with him.

Meanwhile, word gets back to Abigail, who hops upon her mighty steed and gallops into the desert without so much as telling her surly mate. As she comes upon David and his entourage, she dismounts, bows before David, acknowledges his role as God's anointed, and begs for mercy. David praises God for having been brought to his senses, calls a halt to his battle plans, accepts her offerings, and turns back.

Dear Abby, meanwhile, returns to her grubby hubby who is celebrating and is now dead drunk. She waits until morning, when he starts to sober up; then she tells the whole story. He has a stroke, lies there for ten days, and dies.

Davy, meanwhile, gets a phone call from his United Press correspondent in the city informing him that no longer was Nabal able to hassle him, because the surly fella had bid bye bye to this world. David thought about it for a while, (apparently a very short while) and decided the best thing to do was to propose to Abby, now that she was without hubby, and so he did...and she accepted. Shortly before that, however, it seems David had met another lady that he fancied, and her name was Ahinoam. So he had just up and married her, too. You say, well I thought this guy already had a wife...true. He was married to Saul's daughter, but verse 44 indicates that Saul had forced her to marry another guy, even though she was legitimately David's absentee bride.

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Now it seems to me that a soap commercial would be in line about now, along with some organ music and a mellow voice that reminds us to tune in again tomorrow for another edition of “As the World Churns”. This mess will untangle itself a little as we go along, but the main thing to watch is the character of these two men. Some things have obviously already surfaced. Saul was not a man of his word. Neither was he a man of integrity. His children were just pawns like everyone else to use as he saw fit. David, meanwhile, though a man after God’s own heart, seemed to have a bit of a problem where women were concerned. And this somewhat roving eye of his would come about as close as anything in his life to being his downfall. But for now, here he was with either two or three wives, depending on how you count Michal, one of them just fresh from her husband’s funeral.

So much for chapter 25. Chapter 26 gives us another replay of a drama much like the one we saw unfold at Engedi. This time, the location was different, but the players were the same, and the results the same as well. This story goes this way:

King Saul was still bent on having David’s head to add to his trophy case, and he gets word that the heir apparent to his throne was apparently hiding on a hill not far away from Ziph. So Saul gets to Ziph in a jif, armed with 3,000 of Israel’s finest. Saul camps near where he construes David and his men to be hiding. David circles back at night and finds Saul asleep, surrounded by a circle of his men, all of whom are sawing it off as well. Abishai, David’s cohort on the journey, urges Dave to use one of the king’s own spears, place it between his ears, and end this whole silly thing.

David, however, does a rerun of his earlier stance when revenge seemed appropriate, and he once more refuses to take this life of God’s anointed. Instead, he and his aide steal the king’s spear and his jug of water, no less, and head for the hills, literally.

About half way up the mountain, Dave stops and calls to Abner, the king’s body guard who had also been in slumber land all this time, and he taunts Abner, asking him why he fell asleep, and where the water jug and the king’s spear might be. By now even Saul is awake, and he recognizes David’s voice and replies, “Is that your voice, David, my son?” David once again answers yes, asks Saul why he’s so bent on amputating David’s head from his shoulders, and why he doesn’t ease up and leave him alone.

In verse 21, Saul sings his old refrain and cries, “I have sinned.”

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(Same song, fiftieth verse.) David returns the spear, Saul tells David he's really a good kid, and they each go their way, supposedly to live happily ever after.

Now David was no dummy. He knew that Saul's heart was black as night and hard as stone. He knew he was lying, and that it was only a matter of minutes until the chase would be resumed; and he knew once again that Saul would be the chas-or and he would be the chas-ee. But David also knew he served a sovereign God. He knew it was not his job to execute vengeance by executing the king. It was God's problem, and it would be done God's way and in God's timing. So once again, he honored Saul's office, spared his life, and went back to the life of a fugitive, for verse one of the next chapter reads:

But David thought to himself, "One of these days I will be destroyed by the hand of Saul. The best thing I can do is escape to the land of the Philistines. Then Saul will give up searching for me anywhere in Israel, and I will slip out of his hand."

When Saul was told that David had fled to Gath, he no longer searched for him. (I Samuel 27:1,4 NIV)

It doesn't say "when Saul repented, he stopped searching." It says when David finally disappeared into never-never-land; Saul decided all was clear on the western front. Now I believe David was where he didn't belong. I believe he had fled to enemy soil in desperation, even though God had continually delivered him and given him the grace to be forbearing when the opportunity for revenge was his. David ran the wrong way. But God knew his heart; and God has his ways. Meanwhile, David settled down with two of his wives among the heathen and was content there a year and four months.

II- THE LORD ANSWERED HIM NOT

Now to chapter 28. It begins this way:

Now it happened in those days that the Philistines gathered their armies together for war, to fight with Israel. And Achish said to David, "You assuredly know that you will go out with me to battle, you and your men." (I Samuel 28:1 NKJV)

If you get the picture, it appears at this stage that the Philistine hordes were about to descend upon Israel with king-to-be David and his band of men fighting right alongside the enemy as they attacked their own people.

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That's what it looked like on channel 2 of the Philistine News Network. A camera beamed on Israel, however, tells a different story. Verse 3 is the beginning of it:

Now Samuel had died, and all Israel had lamented for him and buried him in Ramah, in his own city. And Saul had put the mediums and the spiritists out of the land.

Then the Philistines gathered together, and came and encamped at Shunem. So Saul gathered all Israel together, and they encamped at Gilboa.

When Saul saw the army of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly.

And when Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim or by the prophets.

(I Samuel 28:3-6 NKJV)

This was God's anointed king. But he was out of the will of God, and he knew it. And like all of us, even out of the will of God, there's only one place we turn when the heat it on...we start to pray. We may not have prayed for a long time, but when the hoofbeats of the enemy troops begin to form the backdrop for the scenario of our lives, suddenly God becomes our friend again.

Saul was unmindful of pleasing God on a day-to-day basis. He was willing to pursue and destroy the man God had chosen to rule his people. The only time Saul thought of God was when Saul was in trouble. Then suddenly, he remembered who Jehovah was. He naturally assumed that no matter how disobedient or rebellious he had been, given the right set of circumstances and a real case of need, God would be right there by his side once again. So when Saul looked up and saw the size and scope of what the enemy had in store for him, he hit the panic button. He was afraid (the Scriptures record) and his heart greatly trembled.

But that amazing verse that follows says it all:

And when Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord did not answer him...

(I Samuel 28:6a NKJV)

The heavens were silent. Saul prayed, and no one was home on the other end of the line. It never dawned on Saul to repent and make things right with God. Saul was too self-centered to think like that. Times were hard, and apparently God had become hard of hearing. Saul needed some answers, so Saul turned to other sources for his solutions.

Saul had three ways to find answers from God. But he received

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no visions, no word from the prophets; and the Urim and Thummin, another of God's tools for revealing His will, gave no answers at all. God apparently had laryngitis, or a memory lapse, or he had fallen asleep, Saul surmised. At any rate, Saul thought, "I've got to have some answers. And if God doesn't have them, I'll just call on the enemy and see what to do."

Now we read in verse 3 that Saul had put away all the mediums and witches. He had taken down their fortune telling signs and run them out into the suburbs...when, we do not know. But for some reason or other, Saul had put them all out of business. This proves one thing. He knew it was wrong. But when the heat was on, Saul went looking for a witch to do what God didn't seem able to do or willing to do. Again, there is no mention of the possibility of repentance.

Some interesting facts emerge now as this passage progresses. The first is that even though Saul had removed all of the witches from the land, his cohorts seemed to know just where he could find one. You can drive Satan underground, but he will always manage to dispense his brand of venom somewhere.

Secondly, look at how Saul went.

So Saul disguised himself and put on other clothes, and he went, and two men with him; and they came to the woman by night.
(I Samuel 28:8a NKJV)

Satan is the author of darkness. Wherever he pours out his cup of bitterness, darkness surrounds. No small wonder so many of the places where satanic activities are found are found to be blanketed in darkness. Saul took off his robes of royalty and went in the garments of a nobody. That's what you and I, God's Royal Priests, must do if we seek after satanic advice.

Thirdly, Saul had to promise to protect the witch from the very decrees he had made.

And Saul swore to her by the Lord, saying, "As the Lord lives, no punishment shall come upon you for this thing."
(I Samuel 28:10 NKJV)

How sad. Here was God's man promising Satan's representative asylum for defying God's word so he could get what he wanted.

Fourthly, look what it was Saul wanted her to do.

Then the woman said, "Whom shall I bring up for you?" And he said, "Bring up Samuel for me (I Samuel 28:11 NKJV)

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Do you see what he is asking? He was asking a satanic spirit to conjure up the dead spirit of God's anointed prophet so he could ask him what to do next. Saul wouldn't even take Samuel's advice when he was alive!! Now the verse begins:

When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice. And the woman spoke to Saul, saying, "Why have you deceived me? For you are Saul!

And the king said to her, "Do not be afraid. What did you see?"
And the woman said to Saul, "I saw a spirit ascending out of the earth."
(I Samuel 28:12,13 NKJV)

That should have told Saul something. But it didn't. We continue,

So he said to her, "What is his form?" And she said, "An old man is coming up, and he is covered with a mantle." And Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he stooped with his face to the ground and bowed down.
(I Samuel 28:14 NKJV)

Saul, of course, perceived wrong. What she had done was to call up a demonic spirit that pretended to be the spirit of Samuel. We know it wasn't Samuel for many reasons:

1- God had refused to answer Saul by legitimate means. Because of unconfessed sin in his life, the avenue of communication between God and his king had been closed for repairs. God was not going to give a demon credit for revealing truth He was unwilling to share directly with Saul.

2- It is clearly stated that Saul sought someone with a familiar spirit; a demonic spirit. Saul was not seeking God's word, Saul was seeking the enemy's counsel.

3- Satan did not have access to Samuel's spirit. All he could do then, and all he can do now, is imitate.

4- The Bible is plain that often those who think they are communicating with the dead are communicating with satanic impostors (Deuteronomy 18:11; I Chronicles 10:13-14; Isaiah 8:19).

5- The word of God again and again condemns trafficking with demons and trying to communicate with dead spirits. God never operates in contradiction to His Word. Never.

6- It was no problem for the demon to know what he told Saul. And as we shall see, it was only part of the truth.

7- Jesus taught clearly in Luke 16 and other places that it was impossible for the dead to come back and communicate with those

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on earth. There is a great gulf fixed between that neither man nor spirit can cross.

So it wasn't Samuel that Saul heard from. It was Satan. The interesting thing is that Saul tried to deceive the witch into believing he was someone else, and the witch wasn't fooled. The witch, meanwhile, tried to fool Saul into believing she had called up the spirit of Samuel, and Saul fell for it hook, line and sinker. The conflict that cries out from within him, will, if he is not careful, allow him to believe a lie.

In verse 15, this unreasonable facsimile of Samuel grunted and groaned and complained to Saul that he was really annoyed to be bothered like this, and just what did he want anyway? And Saul answered, "Well, Samuel, it's like this: I'm in trouble, I'm surrounded by Philistines, and when I dialed God's number, I got a recording that said nobody was home. What should I do?"

The witch goes on with her charade, and tells Saul what Saul should have known without her, namely that his number was up. He had defied God one time too many, and David was going to take over his rightful place as God's anointed. The reason, this pseudo-Samuel explained, was because he hadn't obeyed where the Amalekites were concerned.

Well, Saul fell on the floor in a semi-stupor,

And there was no strength in him, for he had eaten no food all
day or all night. (I Samuel 28:20b)

Saul had forgotten to stop for a Big Mac on the way to Endor, and so he passed out. But I doubt if that was all there was to it. Jesus, in the will of the Father, went forty days without eating and was able to stand before the enemy's lies. Saul was so far out of God's will his strength was virtually non-existent. So he missed a meal, and down he went. One more thing may have affected his strength, too. He had just been told by this passed-on prophet that his days on earth numbered less than one. That might cause a fella in his shape to faint, too.

The rest of the chapter tells how this willing witch became a waitress and ministered to Saul before he headed back for his Waterloo.

Now this passage is laden with principles.

Principle 1- Great shows of emotion that are not followed by true repentance do not impress God. Saul had an act he put on

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every time he was caught red-handed in disobedience to God. He paraded down to the front of the church and wept and cried, "I have sinned." You could almost make a tape recording of it, and replay it at predetermined intervals. The problem was that *his behavior never changed*. I believe God is much more impressed with a quiet confession of sin followed by an honest change of life than he is with a side show that is followed by the same song and dance... more disobedience.

Principle 2- Our God is in the second-chance business. If you don't believe in the mercy of God, just read and re-read the life of Saul. Or read and re-read your own. God is a God who loves to forgive. He loves to renew. He loves to rebuild a life even a life shattered by direct disobedience. Again and again, he gave Saul another chance. Again and again, Saul feigned repentance, and then resumed his life of self-centeredness and deceit.

Principle 3- Be careful when you are out of fellowship with God that you do not, in an effort to spite God, begin to hold hands with the devil. So often, when we are reaping the results of our own mistakes, we blame God; and in our anger, we will run back to the pit from which we've been delivered. We are indeed creatures with short memories.

Principle 4- Stay away from all forms of the occult. God clearly states in Deuteronomy 18:

When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there.

Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft,

or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead.

Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD, and because of these detestable practices the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you. You must be blameless before the Lord your God.

The nations you will dispossess listen to those who practice sorcery or divination. But as for you, the LORD your God has not permitted you to do so. (Deuteronomy 18:9-14 NIV)

Now I don't know how Scripture could be any plainer than that. It means very simply that God despises all forms of witchcraft, astrology, fortune telling, and contact with spirit beings, other than

the Holy Spirit.

In other words, if you have an Ouiji board or tarot cards, I'd throw them out as fast as you can if I were you. They don't belong in your house, for it's God's house. They are a means of trafficking with Satan, and God detests that. I wouldn't read Jeanne Dixon or your horoscope in the daily paper, either. To do so it to give credence to a satanic lie that says there is a substitute for the word of God when it comes to knowing the future.

Principle 5- Satan is a master at telling just enough of the truth to make you believe him. He did that with Jesus in the wilderness and with Eve in the garden. He did it here with Saul. He said you're going to die, Saul. You know why? Because you didn't follow through with the Amalekites. But that wasn't the whole story. Look at I Chronicles 10:13 as it plainly states:

So Saul died for his unfaithfulness which he had committed against the Lord, because he did not keep the word of the Lord, and also because he consulted a medium for guidance.
(NKJV)

How strange! The witch didn't mention that. It must have slipped her mind. Be on the lookout. He is a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. He parades as an angel of light. That's what he did in this passage, and he tells just enough of the truth to deceive you into believing a lie.

Principle 6- Panic prayers thrown in the face of God by one who has been in rebellion to the Word of God usually net nothing. I Thessalonians 5 tells us how to keep that from happening:

Rejoice always,

Pray without ceasing.

in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Do not quench the spirit. (I Thessalonians 5:16-19 NKJV)

PWOC—that's the cure! It means Pray With Out Ceasing. It means you stay in fellowship with God and in communion with God. When the enemy assails you with his fiery darts, you have a place of refuge. If you turn over two chapters, to I Samuel 30, you'll see what I mean. Here, David, like Saul a few moments ago, is in big trouble. He, too, looks around and sees himself surrounded by what appears to be insurmountable odds. You probably remember the story. It goes like this:

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Now it happened, when David and his men came to Ziklag, on the third day, that the Amalekites had invaded the South and Ziklag, attacked Ziklag and burned it with fire,

and had taken captive the women and those who were there, from small to great; they did not kill anyone, but carried them away and went their way.

So David and his men came to the city, and behold, it was burned with fire; and their wives, and their sons, and their daughters, were taken captive.

Then David and the people who were with him lifted up their voices and wept, until they had no more power to weep.

Now David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and his daughters. But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God.

(1 Samuel 30:1-4,6 NKJV)

III- DAVID ENCOURAGED HIMSELF IN THE LORD

Now I'd say David had a problem here worth being concerned about. His wives, and the wives and children of all his men had been taken captive. Not only did he grieve over that, but he had a mutiny on his hands. His own troops were blaming him for the problem. And as you recall, this wasn't the Downtown Do-Gooders Sunday School Class he was head of, this was a band of tough rejects from society. Ah, but look at the difference in David and Saul. The verse concludes:

But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God.

Saul sees the enemy and panics. David sees the enemy and he crawls up into the arms of his God and weeps and waits. Now I believe the key issue in this message ought to be in the process of becoming obvious.

Here were two men: One was a fugitive, a runaway living in enemy territory, captaining a host of the world's castoffs and running for his life, the spears of God's anointed whizzing by in every direction. He had no place to call his home. No people to call his people. No wealth. No prestige. No acceptance. But he did have something. He had a heart that God was in love with. He had a heart that beat for the same things God's heart beats for.

The other man was a man among men. He was famous. He was rich. He was powerful. He was the religious leader of the age. He was a political kingpin. He was the commander in chief of an army.

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He was everything every man ever wanted to be. The only problem was, he had a heart that was filled with deceit, hypocrisy, and vengeance. On the outside, he was Mr. Spiritual. On the inside, his life had so rotted away that when a time came that he really needed God, he didn't even know how to find Him. He was a success, but he was a fool. Though he wore the mantle of spiritual authority, his heart defied the lordship of his God.

And God was not impressed with his position. "God sets up one and puts down another." God was not impressed, because "the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart."

That's how God is looking at us today. He is not impressed with how we look, or what we say, nor even with what we do. His precious x-ray eyes are looking past the facade and into the recesses of who we really are: what we think about, what we desire when all restraints are removed, what we would choose to do were there no consequences.

He knows the enemy must be poised at the edge of the valley waiting to come crashing down into our little world, just to prove to God that we're no Davids. He knows the enemy may have already stolen into the circumstances of our lives and taken captive the things that matter to us the most. He also knows that when the onslaught comes, the Mickey Mouse religious charade we may have been playing must come to an end. The phony smiles and the memorized clichés will be worthless then.

Hopefully, we'll be like David—so in tune with God's heart and so in fellowship with God's Spirit that the minute the call to battle comes, we will instinctively crawl up into our God and rest. And like a floodgate of glory, God will open up heaven and hear our prayers and we will become more than conquerors.

Unfortunately, however, some of us are Sauls. God has given us chance after chance to be honest with Him and with ourselves, and we have, like Saul, refused to do so.

God cried out to Saul and Saul would not answer.

Is it any wonder that when Saul finally called out to God, "the Lord answered him not"? Do you know what God is saying to us?

He's saying, "Stop playing games. I don't need any more make-believe believers. I don't need any more religious hypocrites who pretend to be godly and accept the accolades of the Christian world,

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all the while possessing unteachable, unchangeable hearts. I just don't need any more Sauls. This world is in conflict. The church is in conflict. And your worlds are in conflict. There are some heavy battles ahead, and in those kinds of battles—only a David will do!”

Only a David will do, indeed.

ONLY A DAVID WILL DO

Only a David will do
When the heat of the conflict's intense
Only a heart that is shaped like God's
Will stand against Satan's offense.

It isn't what David did, oh, no,
That wasn't it at all.
It's that he said to God, “Here, Lord,
I'm giving you my all...”

And even when he had the chance
To even man's dark score,
Instead, he crawled up into God
And trusted Him the more.

When arrows flew and battles raged
And darkness filled the sky,
He trusted God and stayed the course
Though months and months went by.

Oh, this world is reeling
And still the same is true.
God's still looking for kings-to-be
And only a David will do.

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