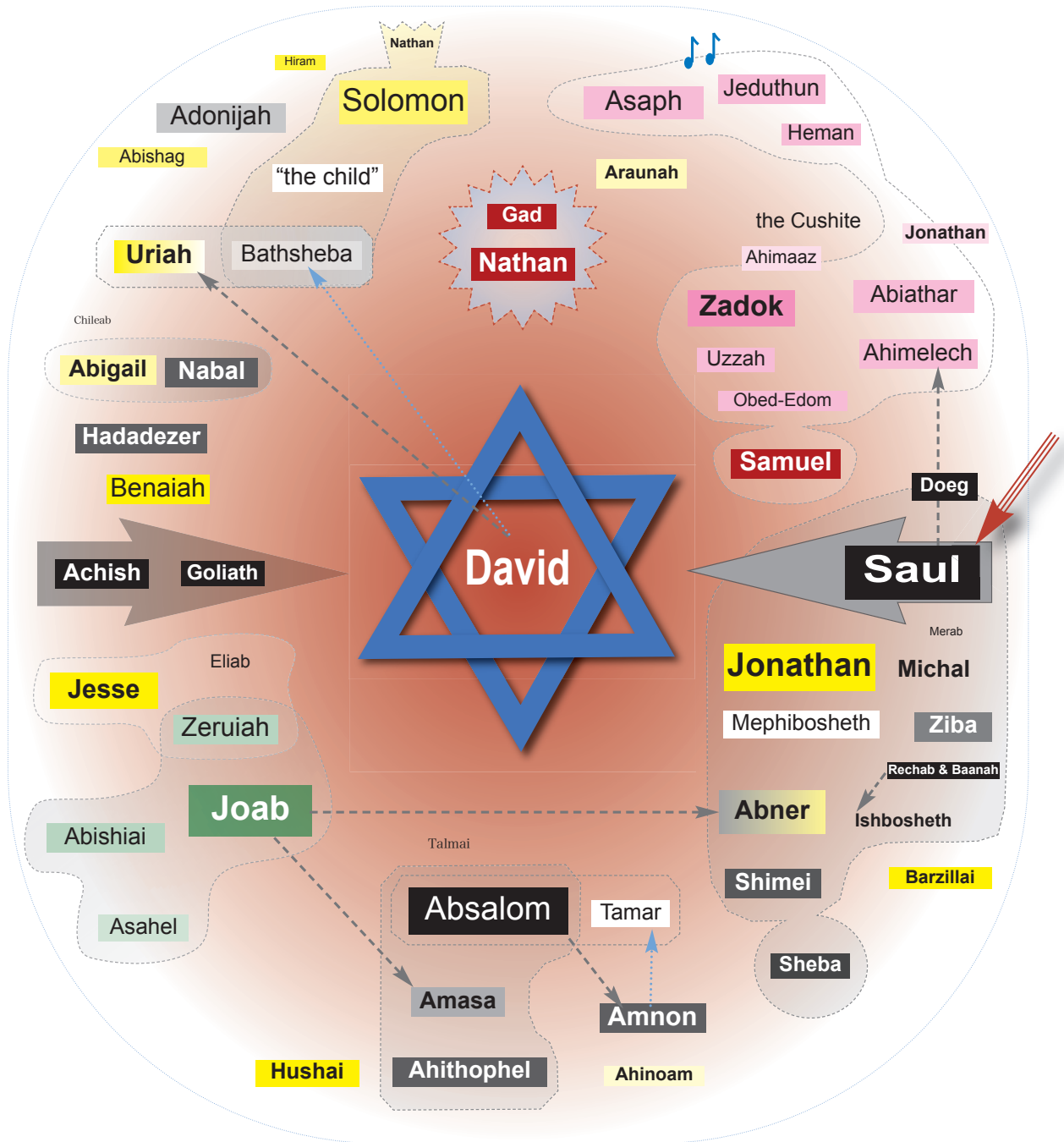


surrounded



people in the life of David

about Saul

1. According to Paul in Acts 13:21 Saul was the king of Israel for forty years. During much of that time (in First Samuel chs. 18 through 26) he was trying to kill David who he selfishly viewed as his enemy and rival.

2. It's easy to be critical of Saul, as we saw in the last study on his killing of the priests in First Samuel ch. 22. In ch. 24, however, he wasn't all bad. The things that he said about himself and David in 24:16-21 after being spared, for instance, were true. The same hint of goodness is seen in what David said about him after he died. (See 2 Samuel ch. one.) So reconciling the better side of Saul with the many evil things that he did is one of the most difficult aspects of this study.

3. Saul's words show that telling the truth is not necessarily a sign of good moral character. Was he forced to say what he did or was his unexpected honesty about himself and David the result of shock and surprise? Was he selfish as usual in asking David to swear an oath of promise to him?

4. Perhaps the best way to view the situation in ch. 24 is as David taking firm command of the moral high ground by sparing Saul's life in front of all the people. Because of this the king was shown to be morally weak and thus was unable to continue his murderous pursuit. So it was not so much that Saul changed his mind about David as it was that God's special help and direction had changed the situation, itself. Saul later tried to find and kill David again in ch. 26.

descriptive terms

The list below will help you describe Saul as seen in First Samuel ch. 24. Some terms fit him well, while others do not; so mark them as correct, incorrect or partly correct. Then use the list to help fill out the worksheet on the opposite page.

a good king

better than the king of Gath

the Lord's anointed (24:6, 10)

king for life

fearful of David (24:20-21)

rightly fearful of David

listening to bad advisors (24:9)

respected by David's men (24:4-7)

David's enemy (24:4, 19)

trying to kill David

able to kill David

protected by David (24:7)

cursed by David (24:12-15)

to be judged by the Lord

unlike David

emotional (24:16)

morally weak

unstable

self-centered

double-minded

shocked, surprised

thankful (24:17-19)

repentant (24:22)

unrighteous (24:17)

wicked (24:13)

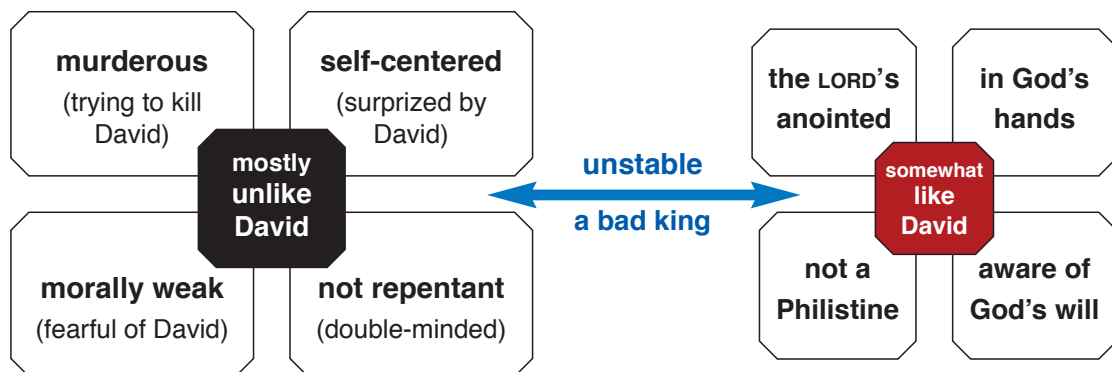
unsaved

Saul

King Saul was a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. (James 1:8) He was somewhat like David as the Lord's anointed and in his general awareness of God's will, but at the same time he was more obviously David's opposite in his fighting against God and lack of true repentance. The summary diagram below illustrates this unstable bipolar nature, which makes it difficult to describe the first king of Israel simply.

Saul started out well in ch. 11, but was quickly rejected for not obeying the Lord in chs. 13 and 15. From ch. 18 onward he was seeking to kill David. So First Samuel mostly shows that Saul was self-centered and murderous, unlike David who (as seen in chs. 24 and 26) was not seeking to kill him. Therefore the negative "unlike David" pole is shown larger than the other.

King Saul was...



Christians often argue about whether Saul was saved or not. Those involved in this debate choose one of the two poles of Saul's life and reject the other, stressing part of the evidence and minimizing that which is to the contrary. This is obviously not a good approach. Saul may have been unsaved, but we don't know for sure since that is not the focus in First Samuel. The main point, which takes into account all the evidence, is that Saul was unstable and a bad king. David, though likewise imperfect, was much more stable and a far better moral leader.

David repented and changed his ways whenever he was confronted with his sin. (See 2 Sam. 12:13, for example.) Saul, however, repeated the same sins despite being confronted about them, as seen in First Samuel chs. 13 and 15 and chs. 24 and 26. In 24:16-22 Saul seems to repent of trying to kill David, but he attempted to do so again soon after in ch. 26. Why was this? The easy answer is that his repentance wasn't genuine. A more helpful answer may be that Saul was trying to do contradictory things at the same time, be a real king and selfishly protect himself.