

Rise & Fall of King Saul, IV

Father, we thank You first and foremost for Your grace in our lives, that undeserved favor that we enjoy. We thank You that we can relax in our position in You and recognize that we do not strive to attain it; we could never have done that. And we do not strive to retain it or even to maintain it, and yet we, out of gratitude, want to obey what You tell us to do. We pray that Your Holy Spirit would empower us to be obedient servants and as we obey to recognize that even then we do nothing more than our duty. And we do not accrue merit through our obedience. Lord I pray that you would also teach us from Your Word. We thank You for it, we thank You that it challenges our minds and that it challenges our hearts. We pray that we would seek to serve You with all our hearts and our minds and our strength. Father, I ask now that You would guide our session; help me in my explanation of things to be clear. We pray that You would help the students in their alertness and attentiveness to pick up on what You would want them to. So we commit this time to You in thanksgiving that You are here in our midst. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Let us do those kings of Israel and Judah. We are doing the 10th, 9th, 8th, 7th, and 6th century. So it is 3, 5, 5, 5, 2 for the kings of Judah. Beginning with Rehoboam, the son of Solomon; these were the kings of Judah. Rehoboam, Abijah, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Jehoram, Ahaziah, Athaliah, Joash, Amaziah, Azariah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manasseh, Amon, Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. (Here is a device to help you remember: if I babble on, then I would be a liar.)

Now we will do the kings of Israel, beginning with Jeroboam, and it is 3, 9, and 8. There were 9 in the 9th and 8 in the 8th century. Jeroboam, Nadab, Baasha, Elah, Zimri, Tibni, Omri, Ahab, Ahaziah, Joram, Jehu, Jehoahaz, Joash, Jeroboam, Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, Hoshea. (And here is a device to help you remember: then came -ah- Syria and took them all away-ah.)

We are talking about King Saul. Right now it will be rehearsed for you in a slightly different form as the final chapter in this book, *The Art of Biblical History*. This is "The Reign and Rejection of King Saul: A Case for Literary and Theological Coherence" in this section of Saul. We are going on in later sessions to press on through the rest of 1 Samuel. We will not handle everything in equal depth, as you will see, when we move on.

We started talking about Solomon. We talked about him in some length the last time. We want to do a few more things now. I want to begin by a little bit of review and recast things a little bit. Saul is a puzzling character. He is a troubling character in the Bible. The story of Saul itself is somewhat troubling. Last time we talked about a couple of areas in which Saul or the story about him is troubling. The story itself is troubling because to many people it does not seem to hang together as a story. Some sight the apparently differing attitudes toward the monarchy. There appear to be some promonarchical and some antimonarchical sentiments expressed in these chapters.

What did we say to that particular problem? Do we have different sources because we have different sentiments expressed? We want to look at the question more carefully and distinguish between God's attitude toward kingship and God's attitude toward the people's insistence that they must have a king. God had intended all along that Israel would have a king. Israel said they must have a king now, and they must have a king like all the nations. These are two quite different issues.

In summary, I think the question you need to ask is who is expressing what sentiment about whom? You will find that there are many different things said about kingship, about the people's demand for a king,

and about Saul's fitness to be king. It is wrong to say that anything that relates to kingship is a monarchical sentiment, and they should all be monolithic. You should have a harmonious attitude toward kingship roughly and generally conceived. You have to ask more specific questions.

The first reason Saul is puzzling is because many people point to the difficulty of the appearance in the story of Saul. They say Saul came to power in several different ways. In one place he is anointed, and you would think that should propel him to his position of prominence. In another place he is selected by lot. In a third place he goes out and defeats Nahash, the king of the Ammonites, who was besieging Jabesh Gilead. He rescued Jabesh Gilead and came to public attention that way. Scholars often say that any one of these accounts would be adequate to explain how Saul became king. Since we have too many, we do not know which one to trust or whether we should trust any of them. There is a good bit of skepticism as to whether we can ever know how Saul became king.

In regards to this particular issue, the answer to how Saul became king is an accession process. It is the three-staged process by which an individual in Israel and in the surrounding nations would have come to a position of public leadership or public power. The first step is designation; in Saul's case it was designation by anointing. Second is some demonstration that this is the designee, this is the one whom God has chosen to lead. This new leader should go out and prove it somehow. The effect of that would be to come into the public eye. The people would notice him and say, "God must be working through that person. Look what he went and did." The third stage would be confirmation.

What did we discover in the story of Saul? We discovered that the initial designation was anointing. I suggested that should have been followed by Saul doing what his hand found to do. We discovered in the context that the heavy implication is that Saul should have attacked the Philistine garrison. That would have demonstrated that God had chosen him to lead. It would have brought him into the public eye, and it would have provoked the enemy. It would not have won the war. It would have simply started the war. Thus Saul, having done what his hand found to do, was to go down to Gilgal and wait for Samuel to come. In fact, as we read the account, that is what we are expecting, but he does not do it.

We may be troubled, asking why the narrator did not come out with an explicit criticism of Saul. Why did he not condemn him for not doing what his hand found to do? Early in this course we talked about a narrative technique, which is very typical of Hebrew narrative—biblical narrative. It is also typical of other narratives, and that is what we call "gapping." Gapping is the intentional withholding of information in order to raise questions in the readers' minds, to arouse interest, to create suspense. What is going to come of this? Should not Saul have done something? Indeed, many commentators have suggested that Saul should have done something and he did not. So, rather than see that as part of the story that we are to be reading, some have suggested an alternative. They say that in a hypothetical earlier source in another form than what we find in the Bible, the initial story of Saul's designation through anointing must have been followed immediately by this heroic deed. That has now been displaced and placed later, and Saul has been supplanted by Jonathan. They say it is Jonathan who actually strikes the garrison in 1 Samuel 13. I think that is more fanciful than anything else—and unnecessary. I think the point of the text is that Saul falters in the starting block. He is hesitant to get on with the task at hand. He does not do what lies at hand. Thus, the accession process, which was to be designation, demonstration, and confirmation, falls apart because there was no demonstration. Then immediately after that, we had a re-designation. We had the lot casting which begins almost like a judgment speech. It has the same tone as a judgment speech. Just at that point where the sentence is to be announced, Samuel said, "Now gather yourselves by your clans and we will cast lots. We will find out who it is that is to lead." Of course the lot fell on Saul. It first fell on his clan, then on his family, then on him. But Saul was hiding behind the baggage. They had to drag him out. He was now designated

a second time. In 1 Samuel 10:27 we are told that “some troublemakers said, ‘How can this fellow save us?’” They were not used to this. They were used to designation followed by some demonstration. They had not seen anything from Saul at all except his hiding behind the baggage. How could this guy save them? They were troublemakers. I pointed out the last time that they should not have questioned God’s choice. But remember, God’s choice was made in response to the people’s sinful demand, so God was giving the people what they demanded. It does not mean that just because Saul was God’s choice he was necessarily suited for the task or destined to be a good king. So Saul had been designated now a second time.

He then has opportunity to go and rescue the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead, which he does in chapter 11. That serves as a demonstration that, yes indeed, he can save the people. He can lead. The people are happy; Saul is happy. At the end of chapter 11 Samuel says now we can go to Gilgal and renew the kingdom, which is what they do. It says that Saul and all the people held a great celebration. We do not hear that Samuel was celebrating. Rather, we hear in chapter 12 that Samuel is still warning the people and warning the king that it is still not a done deal. There has been the designation, a second designation. There has been a demonstration that demonstrates that Saul can lead. But there is not yet the confirmation necessary. In Samuel’s mind, there is still a test to be stood.

What was that test? That is crucially important. What was the test that Saul needed to pass in order to demonstrate that he was suitable to be an Israelite king, not a king like all the nations? He needed to wait the seven days. He needed to wait in a given circumstance. He needed to wait for Samuel to come. It was not just that Samuel should offer the sacrifices and consecrate a battle, but rather God wanted to see if Saul was concerned to wait for the arrival of the prophet. The prophet spoke for God. If Saul demonstrated that at all costs he would wait to hear from God, then he would demonstrate his submission to the will of God. Thus Israel could have a human king and yet remain a theocracy. Israel could remain God’s inheritance where God ruled.

When we come to 1 Samuel 13, we begin to see the pattern realized that was established at the time of Saul’s initial anointing in chapter 10. In 1 Samuel 10:7, we had the instruction to do “what your hand finds to do.” This would have been the demonstration that Saul was designated, and it would have been a provocation of the Philistines. It would not be any defeat of the Philistines. It would just be throwing down the gauntlet to them, so it would have been the provocation. This was to be followed by a rendezvous between Saul and Samuel. It was vitally important that Saul hear further from God, from the prophet, who was God’s spokesman what Saul was to do next. He was not autonomous. He was not a king like all the nations. He was still beholden to God. There was to be, following the provocation, a convocation.

What you have in 1 Samuel 10:7 was Saul’s first charge. And as we have been talking, he did not follow through. He did not do what lay at hand. He did not do what his hand found to do. Thus the situation stalled at that point, making it necessary to have a second designation and a substitute demonstration. But the real demonstration, the attacking of the Philistine garrison, is yet unfulfilled when we come to 1 Samuel 13.

In Chapter 13 we have the parallel to 1 Samuel 10:7 by the hand of Jonathan in 1 Samuel 13:3. This is the relationship here: 1 Samuel 10:7 is fulfilled in 1 Samuel 13:3. You can find isolated commentaries that recognize that and make that point. What is not done is to put together 1 Samuel 13:3 with what follows in Chapter 13. This two-stage process is attested in both chapters. As soon as Saul hears that Jonathan has struck the outpost of the Philistines, Saul goes down to Gilgal to wait for Samuel. He calls the people out. That does not mean that he took his troops out of the hill country and went down to

Gilgal, but rather he called out the rest of the people who had been dismissed to their homes. He had a certain number of troops; he had 2,000 with him and 1,000 with Jonathan. Now they needed all the troops; they started a war. Saul called the people to come out, but it is clear that he goes to Gilgal primarily to wait for Samuel.

First Samuel 13:3 is followed by 1 Samuel 13:4b. Then commentaries always point out 1 Samuel 13:7b-15a to show that those are the verses that relate to what Saul was doing in Gilgal. We see the same pattern. This has to do with 1 Samuel 10:8. The verse that is most explicit is 1 Samuel 13:8, which refers to the time set by Samuel. It is unmistakable that 1 Samuel 10:8 and this section are related. It is also unmistakable that 1 Samuel 10:7 and 1 Samuel 13:3 are unrelated. But what has been typically overlooked is that we have the same pattern in both accounts. The burden of proof would be on those who would say that the pattern is not genuine in either the one or the other. The typical critical scholarly approach has been to say that 1 Samuel 10:8 is an intrusion. It has been interpolated into the text. Likewise this section in 1 Samuel 13 has been interpolated into the text. The reason this section is regarded as an interpolation—that it has been inserted secondarily into the text—is that it is assumed that chapters 13 and 14 are quite favorable toward Saul. It is only this episode down in Gilgal that portrays Saul negatively. What is interesting is that more recent studies have begun to say that 1 Samuel 13 and 14 in their entirety are rather negatively colored toward Saul. This intrusive, inserted episode has caused a further editing of the material, which has now made it all unfavorable toward Saul. The problem with that is that you need to ask how we decided it was intrusive in the first place. It was decided because the rest of 1 Samuel 13 and 14 are supposed to be positive toward Saul. Now you say they are also negative toward Saul and are assuming that that is redactional, that it was added. They were changed to make them negative. But now we do not have any reason to assume that this was inserted in the first place. It no longer makes sense. We should read the Bible as it stands and not assume that this is an inserted episode. It belongs where it is in the text. That has to do with how to read the texts as a unified sensible story.

The other reason why Saul is so puzzling, enigmatic, and troubling to people is theological. The basic problem on a theological level is that Saul was first chosen by God, elected, and anointed in response to the people's request. We have to keep remembering that Saul was chosen in response to the people's demand in 1 Samuel 8. God chooses Saul in 1 Samuel 9 and 10. But Saul is very soon rejected in 1 Samuel 13 and 15 for what most commentators assume to be rather inconsequential, trivial offenses. We are trying to build the case that they were not trivial offenses, but that is what most commentators still believe. Why was he rejected? Samuel was late in 1 Samuel 13, and he went ahead with the sacrifices. Commentators say they would have done the same thing. It was not any big deal. Samuel must have just been out to get him. We read about the petulant, peevish prophet. One scholar described Saul in 1 Samuel 13 as "properly and guilelessly deferential." In other words, Saul was quite forthcoming to Samuel. He was polite to Samuel, but Samuel, on the other hand, was harsh, unresponsive, and accusatory. Samuel responds this way despite the fact that Saul offers what appeared to be compelling and valid reasons for proceeding with the sacrifice before the arrival of the tardy prophet. Samuel was late. The text itself says that Samuel was late.

The question is whether or not this kind of scholarly claim that Saul's infractions were trivial suggests a deficient understanding of sin. No sin is trivial before God. Every sin is sufficient to send us to hell. Those are not the words of the questioner here, but that is the basic idea. It is a question of trying to say, "What was the big deal?" It is often said, "Look at David: adulterer, murderer." It is hard to top those sins, and he did not get rejected. Saul ran out of patience—ran out of nerve—and panicked because Samuel was late. He went ahead with the sacrifices and he gets hammered. What is going on? That is the idea: the apparent imbalance between the treatment of David and the treatment of Saul.

One scholar points out that in 1 Samuel 13:13, to Samuel's charge when he accuses Saul, he says, "You have not kept the commandment the LORD your God gave you." "Commandment" could be translated "charge." That is what Samuel is saying: "You did not keep the Lord's charge." This commentator says that this is a remarkable statement because Samuel cites no commandment that has been broken, nor can we construe one. Here is where my argument would rest. I would say, given the reading we have done of the preceding story, we can very definitely say what that commandment or charge was. It was the charge given to Saul at the time of his anointing that was exceedingly important. It was given precisely to test whether he would be submissive to the will of God and wait for the Word of God. Only then would he be a suitable king in Israel. If, out of weakness, wickedness, or another reason, he would not wait for the Word of God, then he is not a suitable king. It is a very important test that is being stood. For those who do not see that, then they accuse Samuel the prophet of being peevish and playing a daring, brutal game with Saul's faith, career, and eventually his sanity. They say Samuel is toying with Saul. The result is then that people say things like "the narrator invites us to wonder as Saul must have wondered about Samuel, who appears here to be unprincipled, and about Jehovah, about God." The story of Saul causes people deep theological angst. It causes them to wonder about the character of God because they do not understand why God would have rejected Saul for this apparently trivial offense.

These kinds of ponderings are reflected in many contemporary writings. Another scholar, who has written an entire book on King Saul, says that "the story of Saul shows us that God does have a dark side. David knows only one side of his God. Saul knows the other." David knows the light side and Saul knows the dark side. Now, before we begin to engage in this terminology, joining the dark side and thus sweeping away biblical teaching about the character of God, a few things come through with crystal clarity. God is holy, God is righteous, and God is sovereign. All of those things are so clearly taught that to begin to say there is a dark side to God is quite astonishing. We need to back off from that more quickly than some have done. We need to focus on the command, the charge. As we see what it is, we begin to recognize that when Samuel says in 1 Samuel 13:13, "You have acted foolishly," he may be saying it with considerable grief in his tone of voice. We can imagine him saying, "Saul, you have acted foolishly. Did not you see how important this was that you wait?" It may have been simple spiritual blindness on Saul's part that caused him not to see the full ramifications of his going ahead in Samuel's absence. It may have been obstinacy, but I think in this first instance in 1 Samuel 13 Saul himself was legitimately taken aback. He wondered what was going on. He claims in 1 Samuel 13:11-12, "When I say that the men were scattering, and that you did not come at the set time [...] I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering." But Samuel still says ignorance is no excuse. In the books of Samuel, lack of knowledge of the ways and plans of God is never an excuse for misbehavior. In fact, it is an indicator of the distance of someone from God and His will and ways. Often in Samuel a lack of knowledge is a refusal to know. We will see this later in the life of Saul. He knew fairly early, and Jonathan confessed that his father knew that David was to be king. Yet Saul persisted in his unwillingness to recognize that or at least to bow to that, and he continued to strive against it and try to kill David.

I want us to move to the next section of this session, which is entitled "A Reading of Saul's Rejection in the Light of His Rise." It is going to give us an opportunity to highlight a few more elements of the text that I think drive home the thesis.

Was there ever a confirmation? The people were happy. So in a sense, he did ascend the throne. It was sufficiently confirmed that he became king, but whether he was a suitable king was still waiting the test. According to the original plan, I believe Saul should have done what his hand found to do. That would have given him opportunity to go to Gilgal and wait for Samuel to arrive. If he had waited, Samuel would have come and said, "Good, Saul, you waited. You proved that you are not autonomous. You are

not going to strike out on your own. You are not going to act independently of the will of God. Whatever happens, you are going to wait to hear God speak because God is king. God is the Great King. You are the human king.” The Israelite human king was not the Great King. God was the Great King. The human king was just the vice-regent on earth. And that would have proved that Saul was suitable and that would have meant that his confirmation was complete. He would have been confirmed in God’s eyes, as well as in the people’s eyes. He was partially confirmed. He got on the throne, but he was very quickly then disqualified from establishing a kingdom. In 1 Samuel 13 Samuel says, “[God] would have established your kingdom [...] But now your kingdom will not endure.” Saul’s kingdom is not going to last, and certainly he is not going to found a dynasty.

The question is this: is the confirmation based on the people accepting and liking him? There is a human aspect to the confirmation, but far more important is the divine aspect. Does God approve of this king? That was what yet was to be tested, and that is where Saul failed. His kingdom was not established. It was not confirmed by God. From the very outset, Saul is already on the way out. But God is patient. We will see Saul in 1 Samuel 15 get another chance. Samuel will say, “Listen to me this time, Saul. Pay close attention this time.”

We want to talk about the true nature of Saul’s sins. This is an area where people get really confused because you can talk about Saul’s offenses on several different levels. It is like being able to talk about an illness in several different ways. You could say that you have a rash on your face. But the rash is a symptom of the problem. There is a more deep-seeded problem; you got poison ivy or something else. We have to distinguish the problem, but this is often not done in the commentaries. They say Saul at one point went ahead with the sacrifices and got hammered for that. In 1 Samuel 15 he did not carry through with the band. Saul was to defeat the Amalekites and destroy their populous and everything they had. He was not to take booty, but just destroy them. They were under the curse that God had placed upon them from their resistance to the people of Israel when they came out of Egypt.

People say that at one time he went ahead with the sacrifices; he did not wait for Samuel. Another time he did not follow through with the band. But what really caused him to be rejected? Those are the specific offenses, which would include sacrificing, going ahead in Samuel’s absence. It was Samuel’s absence that was the most crucial element there. Another offense was that Saul spared Agag. Later in 1 Samuel 28 Saul again is the main character. He visits the witch of Endor, the medium. The book of Chronicles will say one of Saul’s offenses was that he went and consulted a witch. That was forbidden in the Pentateuch.

The question many ask is which offense was it? I think that is the wrong way to ask the question. I think what we need to ask is what is the disease of which these are but the symptoms? What is the more general offense that both 1 Samuel 13 and 15 mention explicitly?

First Samuel 13 says, “You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you.” What does 1 Samuel 15 say? “To obey is better than sacrifice.” Saul, why did you not obey? Chapter 15 begins with Samuel saying, “Listen now to the message from the LORD.” I mentioned earlier that it sounds so overdone. But Samuel is really saying, “Read my lips. You have had trouble getting it before, Saul, so listen very carefully. Listen so that you may obey.” The general offense in both of these chapters is disobedience to God as His Word is proclaimed through His prophet. He is disobedient in both chapters. That is the general offense. But then the question arises, are we not all disobedient? Was not David disobedient? Is not every human being disobedient other than Christ? We all sin and fall short of the glory of God. We are all disobedient. So why does Saul catch it? Why was he disqualified from being king in Israel just because he was disobedient? David was disobedient, and he was not disqualified.

There is an even more fundamental offense in Saul's case. His illness was his disobedience, but what was his fundamental illness? What was the fundamental problem? I would say pride is one of the symptoms, or a general offense. I think there is something that is simpler; maybe it is too simple to even ask it.

I do not think he was a godly man. I do not think he had a real relationship with the Lord. When he was seen prophesying, people were astounded to see him behaving in that way. It is not that Saul somehow lost his salvation, as though he once was walking with God and then he made a few blunders and God rejected him and removed him from the kingdom. Rather, I do not think Saul was a true Yahwist. I do not think he was a true believer. He was a nominal Yahwist. He would go through the motions in so far as that was convenient and the pressures of a situation did not threaten him enough to give up. We see that around us all the time with people who will do the religious thing for a while until it becomes too pressurized or too inconvenient. Then they stop and do not even try to go through the motions. The New Testament says that when that happens, those who depart from us were never with us. They may have seemed to be with us, but they were never truly with us.

In Saul's rejection we need to remember two things. He was rejected from being king. That does not mean that he was rejected from any possibility of repenting and coming to God and being accepted by God. It is not anything like that, although I do not think there is any evidence that he did that. He was disqualified from his office. I think the fundamental reason that he could never work out as a king in Israel was that he was an unbeliever. I would simply say Saul was religiously an unbeliever. If we were to speak in anachronistic terms we would say he was not a Christian. Christ did not come at this point as this is Old Testament history, but he was a nonbeliever. He would be like a pastor who does not really know the Lord. That pastor is never going to offer acceptable service to a God whom he has no relationship with.

These are astonishing phrases in 1 Samuel 10:6 that sound like Saul's conversion experience. They sound like "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." You will be changed into a different person; you will be a new creature with a changed heart. That terminology that I am using is New Testament terminology. It is possible that it could be used that way. There was no precedent for using the terminology at this time period in exactly that way. We have to ask ourselves, "Are there other ways to understand this particular terminology?" When he says, "You will be changed into a different person," in order to do what? It is in order to join in with the prophets, the worshippers of God who are coming down from the high place. Saul, you will be different, you will be changed into a different person so that the third sign can be fulfilled. God will give you a different heart. Heart in Hebrew means really the center of your being, your mind, your cognitive faculties, as well as the seed of your emotions. In fact, your kidneys were the seed of your emotions in the Hebrew way of thinking, the center of all that you think, feel, and do. He is saying, "Saul, God will change your heart."

The question is, "Why was it necessary that Saul's heart be changed for him to join in with the prophets and fulfill the third sign?" To this point he is ill suited. There is nothing about Saul's station as an unbeliever that would cause him to be the kind of person that would join in with the prophets. We do not have this recorded, but we can imagine that he would stand back skeptical, cynical, disapproving, or simply unaffected. As an unbeliever he is not the kind of person who would naturally join in with them. Thus it is necessary that God work on him and change him into a different person—give him a different heart—so that the third sign can be fulfilled. The question that arises is this: was this a permanent change? Was it a conversion experience or was it a temporary transformation of Saul to enable the third sign to take place? Was it only to put Saul in a position of joining in with these individuals? Is there evidence that there was a permanent change? I would say not. I would say the first lack of evidence is

that he did not do what his hand found to do. The third sign took place and he said that when all of these signs take place, do what your hand finds to do. Saul did not. I think this was an external action of God upon Saul, or at least a temporary action of Saul, that adjusted the way he thought to make it possible for him to participate in the third sign.

“Why was Saul chosen in the first place?” Look at Hosea 13. This is not necessarily referring to Saul, but it is expressing a sentiment that I think is demonstrative of what was going on. Look at Hosea 13:10 and 11; God is speaking to His people through the prophet Hosea. He says,

Where is your king, that he may save you?
 Where are your rulers in all your towns,
 of whom you said,
 “Give me a king and princes”?
 So in my anger I gave you a king,
 and in my wrath I took him away.

Why was Saul chosen in the first place? The people demanded it. God said, “Warn them, Samuel. Warn them of what this king will be like.” They heard the warning and they said, “No, we want a king. We want a king to lead us in battle and to be like all the nations. They insisted, they persisted, and God conceded.

Did Saul really have a chance? In 1 Samuel 13 God says through Samuel, if you had obeyed, if you had kept the charge, God would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. That raises some questions. Did God not have David in mind all along? What if Saul had obeyed? “What if” questions are difficult to deal with in the providence of God. He is omniscient. He is sovereign. He can say a true “what if” knowing and even decreeing that the “what if” will not be fulfilled. Some have argued that maybe Saul would have been made king over the northern kingdom. Maybe his clan, his family, his dynasty would have been established over the northern kingdom of Israel and David could have been king over Judah. I think that is a secondary theory and not a good one.

In 1 Samuel 8 when the people demand a king, God tells Samuel to listen to what they have asked for and give for them a king. In 1 Samuel 16 after Saul has been definitively rejected in 1 Samuel 15, Samuel is mourning for Saul. By the way, this statement confirms that Samuel was not a petulant, peevish prophet who was just out to get Saul. God says, “How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king.” The Hebrew text says I have seen, I have espied, I have found for me a king. There is a clear distinction between the king that was given for them because they demanded it of God and the king who was His choice.

The expression, “A man after God’s own heart,” can also be translated, “A man of God’s choosing.” There is something very fundamentally important about the fact that David was God’s choice. It was not because David merited so much more than any other person that God chose him. He was a man of God’s choice. But it is also true that David’s heart, because of God’s previous working in David’s life, was in tune with the will and purposes of God. God has found a man who pleases him. He combined the two—a man who is His choice and a man whose heart is in sync with Him and, in that case, also pleases Him.

I think it is important to look at this event and push it all the way to the fundamental offense of being an unbeliever. Later I would like us to go back and look one more time for the subtleties in the narrative that indicate that Saul was ill suited from the outset to be Israel’s king. The tendency has been to say

there was a positive faith, so everything was going great for Saul. He was so good and well meaning from the beginning and then he made a few little mistakes. As a result he got hammered, and it went sour from there. He basically went insane and fell apart. But I would suggest that once we know what the fundamental problem is, we look back and in the narrative, very subtly, in the way in which Saul is portrayed, we see that he is ill suited from the very outset. It does not hit you over the head, but suddenly the narrator is aware of where things are going and gradually we become aware.