

David's Rise, Saul's Demise, I

In this session we are going to move beyond Saul and get into the rest of the book of 1 Samuel. We want to move rather quickly. I like to compare a course like this to archaeology where sometimes you do an aerial survey of the terrain, other times you land the plane and get out and do a surface survey, walking around on some things, and then occasionally you dig a trench. We have been in a very deep trench with Saul, and now we are going to move on and do a little more aerial work, looking at the rest of 1 Samuel. We will pause occasionally to glance at a significant feature or to highlight something. Mainly what I want to do is get into a thematic survey. I will first say a few words of introduction, but then we will get into a thematic survey that I will explain at the time.

I said I was getting away from Saul, but I have to begin by saying something about Saul. Though he is no longer king after 1 Samuel 15, in God's eyes, according to God's judgment, he remains on the throne for a considerable time, indeed probably a number of years. He is, however, no longer the center of attention. From 1 Samuel 16 onward, David is the center of attention. David has not been absent in the preceding chapters though he has not been named. But he has been described as the man after God's own heart, the man who pleases Him, or as "the neighbor who is better than you, Saul," as we read in 1 Samuel 15. The only place that Saul will reappear as the main character is in 1 Samuel 28, but this just contributes to the picture of Saul's unfitness to be king. Thus it also contributes to the fact that it is right and good that David now become king.

It is typical to refer to this section beginning somewhere roughly in 1 Samuel 16, although those who like to divide the text are having trouble deciding where to divide it. They do not know where to begin this half of the book about the history of David's rise. Some start it at the beginning of 1 Samuel 15 so that you have a nice introduction of how Saul was rejected and then you get into the story of David. Others start at 1 Samuel 16:1; others start at 1 Samuel 16:14. I would suggest that probably we should take the book as a piece and not really worry about dividing it off. Whatever it may have been in its existence at one point, it is now well integrated and tells one story.

The theme of this portion of the book of Samuel and, in a sense, of the whole book, is an apologetic for the rightness of David's rule. You can see that in an early context it would have served to justify the fact that though David was not the first king, he was the rightful king. It was necessary to have such an apologetic, such a document that would have defended David's right to rule. It was necessary even in the time of David because there continued to be those who supported Saul. I need only remind you of Shimei, for instance, whom we encounter in 2 Samuel 16. He was the man who went out and threw dust at David when he was fleeing from his son, Absalom. Shimei called David a man of blood. He was clearly a supporter of Saul. There would still have been many Saulites around even though David was on the rise and ultimately on the throne. It was important to defend to the people and to those who would read these documents why David is on the throne instead of Saul or Saul's son, Jonathan. This story accomplishes that. The fact that it has an apologetic aim does not mean that it is not factual or historical. In fact, if it were not factual or historical or did not have the right perspective on events, then it would be propaganda in a negative sense. Propaganda itself is a neutral term. To propagate a particular view can be right, but we tend to think of it as a negative thing. If it were disinformation, then it would be simple propaganda. But it is true information, and thus it explains why David is now on the throne. Throughout this section it is made clear that David is not responsible for the death of Saul. He is not responsible for the death of Abner or of Saul's one surviving son, Ish-Bosheth, in 2 Samuel 3 and 4. All of those various episodes demonstrate that David was innocent in his rise to power. There are certain commentators who read between the lines differently. I actually think they read into the spaces between the lines. Their own

opinion is that David was a guerrilla warrior who would have done anything in his power to kill Saul and be rid of him. In fact, the text tells us just the opposite. It was Saul who was out to get David, not David who was out to get Saul.

What I want to do in this thematic survey is to think beyond just the issue of content and focus more on the issue of message. What is the point? What is the application of some of these? In order to do that I would like to give titles, chapter by chapter. These are not for you to take and use as your titles, but they are thematic titles that describe in short fashion what I see to be at least one of the major points of application that we can discover in these chapters. Then I will go and talk a little bit about each one.

First of all, as we get into 1 Samuel 16, the title I have given to chapters 16, 17, and 18 is an overarching title. I am going to give some more specific titles, but I call this section "David's Rise Delights all but Saul." Everyone is delighted with David or becomes delighted with David except Saul. In 1 Samuel 16 to 18, we see that what really counts to God is not height, but heart. It is a way of recalling the difference between an impressive outside and an impressive inner light that God views as far more important. In 1 Samuel 16, the anointing of David, there are several questions that automatically arise.

One of the questions stems from when God tells Samuel to go and anoint the man whom He has chosen. In 1 Samuel 16:2 Samuel asks, "How can I go?" The Lord says, "Take a heifer with you and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.'" Just to remind you, the issue is not that God is telling Samuel to lie. We can defend it and say it was true, he did come to sacrifice. But that is not solely why he came. It is not even the main reason he came. It is, in a sense, disinformation. But remember I mentioned before that we have to allow for a certain irony even in this text. In the preceding chapter Saul had been defending his disobedience by basically saying, "I know you told me to destroy all of the Amalekites and all of their livestock. And I know we saved the best of their livestock because people wanted to save them. But really it was only to sacrifice." My impression is they are cooking up the best excuse they can on the spur of the moment. They really spared the Amalekites because they liked them and they wanted to benefit somehow from this great victory. So they spared the best of the livestock, but they tried to excuse it. Saul tried to excuse it and said that it was only to sacrifice. It was for the Lord. When God tells Samuel to say he is going to sacrifice, maybe God is giving Saul back a little bit of his own kind of rhetoric. Maybe there is some irony there. It is not a certainty, but maybe there is.

The other thing that can be said in terms of that particular ethical issue is that it is not expected between enemies that truth is spoken, at least not in situations of warfare. It would not be right for an enemy to expect that you would be fully forthcoming with the truth any more than you would be fully forthcoming with what your next move is going to be in a chess match. Your opponent has no right to expect you to reveal your next move. It can be argued that now there is a breach between God and the rejected, unbelieving king. There is no reason that Saul should expect that he will hear the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth now that he is rejected.

Another question that comes up is in 1 Samuel 16:13-14 where David is anointed by Samuel. In verse 13 it says, "So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him [David] in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came upon David in power." This is unusual; the Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson sporadically in power, but He comes upon David from that day forth. This is the first mention of this kind of permanent endowment with the Spirit. The flip side we get in verse 14, which says, "The Spirit of the LORD had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD tormented him." That again raises a host of questions and causes furrowed brows in many quarters. I think there are two ways to look at it. One is that the word "evil" does not necessarily mean wicked or morally reprehensible or morally evil. It can mean simply troubling, calamitous or injurious. God sometimes

visits upon disobedient people, but the world, in general, experiences evil circumstances and calamitous events. God can be the agent of bringing calamity upon an unrepentant people, maybe to bring them to their senses. That is one way to look at it, to lessen the notion of an evil spirit, which we associate with a demon. It could simply be an injurious or calamitous spirit. It could have to do with his mental unraveling, with his growing insanity. Without trying to be a psychologist and psychoanalyze this situation, he seems to become increasingly insane.

Another way to look at it is to say God is sovereign and He is sovereign even over the agents of darkness. He is not the author of evil, but certainly there is nothing that can take place that is outside His control or that He cannot forbid. Thus, as in the book of Job, for instance, He allowed the accuser to go and strike Job's property and then Job's body. You could say that God sent the accuser. In a manner of speaking, yes. In simpler terms, He allowed that to happen.

Maybe a third way to look at it is to realize that when God withdraws His spirit, then, of course, what is left? It is only a calamitous spirit, an injurious spirit. When we are left to our own devices we unravel. God is the Father of all good things—the Father of Lights, as James calls Him.

In 1 Samuel 16 we have the anointing of David. We have also the induction of David into Saul's service. I mentioned earlier this letter of reference that we have in 1 Samuel 16:18. I do not think we need to interpret that in such a way that we run into problems with the fact that David is still young in the succeeding episodes and yet is described here as a brave man and a warrior. Even as a young man he has already killed a lion and a bear. That should qualify you in a letter of reference as a warrior, given the poetic license that we often exercise with letters of reference. The servant is saying, "I can see this guy as a great warrior. He will be wonderful. He has got what it takes. He has already done it. He is young, but do not worry too much about it." Some people say that everything is dischronologized here, but this is a letter of reference. They are recommending him.

I would entitle 1 Samuel 17 simply, "The Key to Confidence." We have in this chapter David's demonstration and his confession. Especially in 1 Samuel 17:45, we have David responding to the taunts and the challenges of Goliath, a Philistine. He says, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied." "Armaments notwithstanding, you are going to go down. I have my little sling, but the stone is God-directed and nothing you bring against me is going to affect me." Make no mistake; the key to confidence is not the power of positive thinking. David is a little guy. He believes in God. God has placed him there. He is confident God will defeat Goliath even though he looks overpowering. The key to confidence is placing one's trust where it belongs—not in ourselves, but in God.

I would title 1 Samuel 18 "Holding out When You Should be Giving in" That is, giving in to God. Saul is rejected, but he is not willing to accept that. Contrast the rejection of Eli, how he responded to his rejection in 1 Samuel 3:18 by simply saying, "He is the LORD; let him do what is good in his eyes." Such a phrase does not pass the lips of Saul, in fact, quite the contrary. In 1 Samuel 18:8, after Saul hears the people saying, "'Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands,' Saul was very angry; this refrain galled him. 'They have credited David with tens of thousands,' he thought, 'but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?'" Saul had been rejected; it was made perfectly clear when the robe was torn in 1 Samuel 15:27. Samuel said, "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to one of your neighbors—to one better than you." Who might that be? It is David!

Jonathan is a wonderful man of valor. He proved it in 1 Samuel 14, but he is utterly absent in chapter 17. How do you explain that? Did he have a crisis of faith? I think Jonathan realized that his father's house was rejected, and his hour would not come. It was not his time to step forward. Jonathan had the faith to face Goliath, but he is nowhere to be found. He is right here in 1 Samuel 18. It is not like he is gone on vacation. I think he rightfully withdrew and said, "This is not our hour. It is not my time to take the lead. Let us see who that neighbor is to whom the kingdom is given." Jonathan recognizes that it is David. In fact, one thing that has really perplexed people in 1 Samuel 17:55 is when David comes back from defeating Goliath. As David is going out, Saul watches David and he says to Abner, "Abner, whose son is that young man?" Abner replied, "As surely as you live, O king, I do not know." The king said, "Find out whose son this young man is." Why was Saul so agitated? Why was he so curious to find out? He had already talked to David, but as he sees him going out there, I think Saul is beginning to understand. He may have thought, "That is the guy. There is the neighbor who is better than I. I am terrified of Goliath. This guy is going out to face him with faith in God, which I do not have. Who is this guy?" He asked about who his father's house was because Saul had promised that the man who would defeat Goliath would be free in Israel; that means tax free. Can you imagine that? Tax free for your whole family? He would also become Saul's son-in-law. So for various reasons Saul suddenly becomes concerned, wondering who this guy is.

In 1 Samuel 18 we see Saul continuing to hold out when he should be giving in. This will be a recurring feature of Saul's experience. Look ahead to 1 Samuel 20:30-31. Saul realizes that Jonathan has recognized David as the one who is to succeed Saul. That has even been symbolized by Jonathan giving David his insignia, his weaponry, that which marked him out as crown prince. Jonathan has given that over to David. They have made a covenant with one another. Saul realizes this and he is furious. It says in verse 30, "Saul's anger flared up at Jonathan and he said to him, 'You, son of a perverse and rebellious woman! Don't I know that you have sided with the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of the mother who bore you? As long as the son of Jesse lives on this earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established. Send and bring him to me, for he must die!'" Saul knows that David is the one to be king, but he will not stand for it. His response is far from, "He is the LORD; let him do what is good in his eyes." He is holding out when he should be giving in. We may find ourselves in positions where we have disqualified ourselves from a leadership role. The last thing we should do is compound sin upon sin by insisting on hanging on and sticking in when we should be submitting ourselves to God, getting out, and allowing the next person who God raises up to get in.

I have entitled 1 Samuel 19 "Saul Seeks David's Life." In these chapters, that is exactly what we find. In chapter 19 there is a very interesting recurrence of this saying that we heard in chapter 10. The bystanders asked, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" In chapter 19, which I would entitle, "Acting in Character," Saul is now bent on killing David. That is his intent. He knows that David is with Samuel, and Saul sends emissaries to go take David in order to kill him. But when the emissaries arrive, they keep falling in with a worship service that is in progress, and they prophesy with the prophets. Saul gets frustrated and so he heads out to do the deed himself. While he is on his way, notice 1 Samuel 19:23 says, "So Saul went to Naioth in Ramah. But the Spirit of God came even upon him, and he walked along prophesying until he came to Naioth." It was not mob psychology; he was not there yet. The Spirit of God comes upon him and works again; He changes him into a different person. The person who is the real Saul was out to kill David. God changes him into a different person. "He stripped off his robes and also prophesied in Samuel's presence. He lay that way all that day and night. This is why the people say, 'Is he even Saul among the prophets?'" It is with great irony because the people do not believe it. God overpowers Saul against his will and causes him to act out of character. But appearances can be deceiving.

I would call 1 Samuel 20 “The High Cost of Holding Out Against God, Part 2.” We had that in 1 Samuel 18. Saul is still doing it in chapter 20. This begins to result in further alienation of Saul from those who would support him. Jonathan, in particular, recognizes that David is being done an injustice by his father. First Samuel 20:34 says, “Jonathan got up from the table in fierce anger; on that second day of the month he did not eat, because he was grieved at his father’s shameful treatment of David.” There is something about persisting in sin that begins to alienate us even from those who love us and would support us. Saul, in his own unwillingness to submit to God’s judgment and disqualification in his life, is beginning to alienate himself from a beautiful son. His son does not wish him ill, but when it comes down to it, if Saul is going to go that way, Jonathan has to side with David. That is a high cost. We see a progressive alienation until the point that even Saul’s men have a hard time going along with what Saul asks them to do.

The account of David at Nob is in 1 Samuel 21. He goes to Ahimelech, and Ahimelech asks him what he is up to. He says that he is on a mission from Saul and deceives Ahimelech. I have entitled this “Half Truths that Hurt Others.” I think one of the things we learn from this chapter is that even King David was a human being whose every action was not right. We will see later that David will admit as much, that he was wrong to do what he does here. He deceives Ahimelech, perhaps in an effort to not have him be an accomplice in David’s escape. Perhaps it was to shield Ahimelech from later danger, but the effect is actually the reverse. Maybe if he had been straightforward with Ahimelech then Ahimelech could have said, “Now I need to choose sides. Who am I with?” If he helped David, he had better do it and leave because he will be in big trouble.

Immediately 1 Samuel 22 follows up. I have entitled this one “The Depravity of Man Without God.” Here Saul is in action. He comes to the priests at Nob, over whom Ahimelech was the High Priest, and he slaughters them. Notice the phrase in 1 Samuel 22:19: “He also put to the sword Nob, the town of the priests, with its men and women, its children and infants, and its cattle, donkeys and sheep.” Have you heard a phrase like that before? Earlier in the Saul account he was told to do that to the Amalekites. At the end of 1 Samuel 15:3 it says, “Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.” This is verbatim repetition except for the mention of camels. The Amalekites had camels and the priests of Nob did not, so in the interest of truthfulness, the camels are not mentioned. But apart from that the lists are identical. What we see is the depravity of a man without God. He did not kill those who were the enemies of God, whom he was sent to kill, and ends up killing the priests of God. It is a dangerous thing to step outside the will of God; no telling what we might find ourselves doing. We cannot imagine what we are capable of outside His will.

It says in 1 Samuel 22:17b that Saul’s officials appear even more righteous than he. “But the king’s officials were not willing to raise a hand to strike the priests of the LORD.” Saul was. His own officials would not do it. He had to choose Doeg, the farmer of Edomite, to begin the process, and he was willing.

At the end of 1 Samuel 22 there is one sole surviving priest of Nob. These were the descendants of Eli, so this was also the fulfillment of the rejection of the house of Eli. This was coming to them for their sin. In verse 22 when Abiathar gets to David, it says, “Then David said to Abiathar: ‘That day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, I knew he would be sure to tell Saul. I am responsible for the death of your father’s whole family. Stay with me; do not be afraid; the man who is seeking your life is seeking mine also. You will be safe with me.’” There David admits that he is responsible for the death of Abiathar’s family. There is a great complexity of events: Eli’s sin, the rejection of the house of Eli, God’s pronouncement of the judgment of the house of Eli, Saul’s sin, and Saul’s wickedness in doing what was

within the will of God. Similarly those who crucified Christ were wicked for doing so, and yet God was accomplishing His will through that sacrificial death.

Moving on, 1 Samuel 23 deals with David's continued flight from Saul. In a general sense, you might entitle chapters 23, 24, 25, and 26 as a group: "Adversity—Leave it in God's Hands."

First of all, chapter 23 gets us started by describing what friendship is all about. I could call 1 Samuel 23 "True Friendship" because it really highlights this. Notice in verse 15 and following that David is at Horesh. He has been betrayed by a city that he just rescued. When Saul hears where he is, David inquires of God and asks if these people will turn him over to Saul. God says that they will even though he had just rescued them. David learns a little bit about false friendship. But then in 1 Samuel 23:16 he is visited by his true friend, Jonathan. "Saul's son, Jonathan, went to David at Horesh and helped him find strength in God." That, I think is a good motto for friendship. A good friend does not deny the truth of the situation. He does not deny the realities. If you are suffering with a very severe illness, perhaps an illness that is terminal, your true friend does not keep telling you it is not terminal. Your true friend acknowledges the real situation, but the true friend helps you find strength in God. That is what Jonathan did for him. We do not know exactly how he did that. He said, "Do not be afraid. My father Saul will not lay a hand on you," which was true because God was protecting David. He continued, "You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you." That is not true because Jonathan was dead by the time David became king. If what he is saying that he would take second place, then that was true. He was already doing that. A true friend helps the other find strength in God.

Chapters 24, 25, and 26 have the overarching title, "David Protects Saul's Life and Avoids Blood Guilt Twice." In chapters 24 and 26, David does just that. He protects Saul's life when he had golden opportunities to take it. In the cave he was close enough to him to carve off part of his robe. Afterward his conscience smote him because of the symbolic significance of robes. It was like he was carving off part of the kingdom. I think that is why his conscience smote him. In real terms, he did not grasp the kingdom. He regretted even a symbolic act of aggression like that. He used it to show Saul, saying, "I could have killed you, but I did not." In chapter 26 David also had an opportunity to kill Saul when he was slumbering in the camp. He was even encouraged to do so by his men. But he took Saul's spear and water jug and took it up to a far hill. He said, "Who are you coming out against, a partridge?" The Hebrew word is a "caller." David was calling to him from the hill. He said, "Are you coming out after a caller? Here I am calling, look what I have got." He chastises Abner for not protecting Saul, but he did not take Saul's life.

Many ask about 1 Samuel 25 why the story about Nabal is there. Again, I think I have alluded to this. Chapter 25 is there because Nabal is vulnerable. Nabal is not the Lord's anointed. David has been avoiding taking up arms against Saul or killing him because Saul is still the Lord's anointed, though he is rejected. He still is set apart by God, and David is not going to touch him. Nabal, however, is a different story.

In chapter 25, David learns the very important lesson that God will deal with his adversaries. David is waylaid by the wise Abigail and prevented from taking matters into his own hands. He is forestalled, and he praises God that He sent this wise woman to stop him from doing what the other wives would have done. He was ready to deal with Nabal and all his male offspring so that not one of them would have been living the next day. Instead, the next day Abigail goes back to tell her husband what almost happened and finds him celebrating in a banquet, like the banquet of a king. There are many ways in which Nabal, whose name means "fool," seems to be a surrogate Saul. He sort of represents Saul in this chapter. She goes back to tell him what nearly happened, but he was too inebriated. She thought, "I

might as well wait until the morning when he is sober.” The text tells us the wine had gone out of Nabal; the word Nabal also sounds like wine skin. It was going out of the old wine skin and he was sober. Abigail told him what almost happened, and the sober facts caused his system to seize up. We do not know medically what happened, but ten days later he died. In 1 Samuel 25:37 it says, “His heart failed him and he became like a stone.” He probably had a heart attack, his heart became like a stone, and later he died. As a result, David learned that God will defend him. God will deal with his enemies.

In life we are all going to be confronted from time to time with those who are against us for whatever reason. We are going to be confronted with adversaries. The best defense is not a good offense. The best defense is not, “Do unto them before they do unto you.” It is often best not to even defend yourself, but to allow God to defend you. I am not saying you should never speak the truth in love, but I am saying do not become personally defensive. It is far better to turn the other cheek and thus entrust your well-being to One who is far better able to manage your affairs and to deal with your adversaries than you are. That is what David learned and that is what we can learn from it.