

== IN SEARCH OF A KING ==

Understanding 1 Samuel

Week Commencing 26th September 2022

Notes for next Sunday's sermon covering 1 Samuel 18-31, "The king is dead, long live the king".

Although we don't explore every aspect of chs 18-31, you'll gain much by reading the entire section as the book (and our series) comes to an end.

DAY 1: Read 1 Samuel 18:1-5

The context of 1 Samuel 18 is very important. The youth from Bethlehem had killed Goliath. He had done what Israel's king was supposed to do, namely, fight Israel's enemies. David not only fought, when no one else (including Saul) was prepared to fight – he had won!

The defeat of Goliath would have had a huge impact. The Philistines were the single greatest threat to Israel's existence. For forty days, the Israelite troops had been quaking in terror at the abuse bellowed by the Philistine giant. It was clear that the Israelites were about to either become Philistine slaves or be exterminated. David, the unknown boy from Bethlehem, had single-handedly eliminated the threat! What he had done in the sight of all was extraordinary. And he inevitably came to the attention of the king!

Please note that vv1-5 take us forward in time and give a preview of how David rises in prominence. From v6 onward, the narrative, returns to the day of the defeat of Goliath and proceeds to pick up some of the details.

First then, vv1-5. The relationship between David and Jonathan was to be very important in David's life. It is a wonderful example of powerful human friendship – especially when we recall that David was now the anointed King and Jonathan would have otherwise been the inheritor of Saul's throne! (As an aside, any attempt to see their relationship as having a sexual component as some modern interpreters love to do, is in no way supported by the text and reflects very modern perceptions.) Note that David and Jonathan, become 'one in spirit', that Jonathan made a covenant with David and gave him his robe, tunic, sword, bow and belt. In so doing, Jonathan symbolically transferred his own royal rights and prerogatives to David. This was nothing less than an act of abdication. It wasn't official or known publicly, but it meant that David would take precedence and Jonathan would rejoice.

The other relationship of immense interest, is that between Saul and David. Interspersed between the reference to Jonathan and David in vv 1, 3 and 4, and making a striking contrast with them, are references to Saul and David in vv 2 and 5. Saul's taking and keeping of David is not explained but is in keeping with 1 Sam 14:52b. (The episode described in 1 Sam 16:14-23 probably happened at this time.) David proved himself as a good soldier, so Saul promoted him and made him as useful as possible. He was successful wherever Saul sent him for many years to come and *this pleased all the people, and Saul's officials as well*. And so, it set up the very serious jealousy and rivalry which unfolds in the ensuing chapters.

DAY 2: Read 1 Samuel 18:6-16

It's time to go back to the day Goliath was killed and to see what happened in more detail in order to understand how things developed between Saul and David. The day David returned from the fight in the Valley of Elah, word spread quickly and there was excitement throughout the whole land. But it was an excitement that would have terrible effects on one man. Read again, vv6-7. This is not an uncommon form of Hebrew poetry and doesn't necessarily imply honouring David above Saul. Subtlety of interpretation however, was not Saul's experience and v8 reveals his bitterness. Was he recalling the pronouncements of Samuel at 13:13, 14; 15:22, 23, 26, 28 and seeing the kingdom slipping away? V9 *And from that time on Saul kept a jealous eye on David*.

The very next day a 'harmful' or 'evil' spirit came forcefully on Saul v14. There is a stark contrast now between Saul and David. One, we know had the Spirit of the Lord; the other had this evil spirit. One had 'in his hand' his lyre, with which he could 'refresh' Saul (16:23); the other had 'in his hand' his spear, with which he intended to do to David what David had done to Goliath! Whatever initial 'love' Saul had for David (16:21), was all gone now. In Saul we see the opposite of the love for David we have seen in Jonathan.

In vv12-16, we see contrasting relationships. The LORD was with David but had departed from Saul (v12). This represents God's rejection of Saul and his choice of David as his king. And Saul was afraid of David! Because the Lord was with David, he had success in all his undertakings (v14). Saul saw his success and it only intensified his fearful awe (v15). Saul was aware that David's success signalled something far more disturbing than that David was a gifted soldier. The people's love for David was because he was doing for them what their king had failed to do. He fought their battles for them (v16)! It is important to see that this kind of love is required of God's people for God himself and for His anointed One Jesus Christ. Do you love the Lord Jesus who has fought our great battle for us on the cross? Jesus said *if you love me, you will keep my commandments* (John 14:15). He is, you see, the King. To love him is the kind of attachment that people have for a king who fights their battles for them! Do you love him?

DAY 3: Read 1 Samuel 24

David's journey to the throne of the nation of Israel was long and difficult. Why? After all, God had rejected Saul and had chosen David. Could not have God simply arranged for David to painlessly take over the kingdom immediately? But then of course, the same could be asked of Jesus. Why could not he (as the tempter said to him) have come into his kingdom quickly and without pain? Jesus rejected the temptation, and set out on the long and difficult journey to Jerusalem and the cross. But even now, all enemies are not yet under Jesus' feet! Why? 1 Samuel 24 may help. It was a day on which David could have very easily, made his path to the throne quick and easy. If we understand why he did not, we will learn something very important about why God is bringing in his kingdom, the way he is.

For some time, Saul's pursuit of David had been intensifying. Saul was hunting David with his troops whenever he heard news of him. Ironically, Saul took 3,000 chosen men out of all Israel, to hunt down the one whom the Lord had chosen out of all Israel.

Of all the caves around, Saul chose the one David was hiding in for a toilet break! Blissfully unaware, Saul was at David's mercy. Yet David only cut off a corner of Saul's robe. It could be seen that symbolically David was laying claim to his kingdom. But David didn't see it as his right to take by force. When Saul had moved some distance from the cave, David revealed himself. David speaks up – for his life! He shows Saul the section of robe he had torn and in so doing, shows his faithfulness and kindness toward Saul in sparing his life (see v11). David had demonstrated that he would leave it to the Lord to deal with the differences between himself and Saul. He now called on Saul to do the same – v12. He challenges Saul – *against whom has the king of Israel come out? Whom are you pursuing? A dead dog? A flea?* David calls on the Lord to decide the matter and his life now depended on the effect of these words.

See Saul's response in vv17-19. The shock of David's speech was working its way through Saul's consciousness and he realises at last that David will surely be king (v20). Such acknowledgment was forced out not by a sword, but by David's righteousness and mercy.

Consider then Jesus, who would take his kingdom not by force, but with godly patience and restraint. *He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.* It is a long and difficult journey to the kingdom of heaven and to have Jesus as our King calls us also, to godly patience and restraint.

DAY 4: Read 1 Samuel 28

The Apostle Paul graphically described the utter hopelessness of all who are 'separated from Christ' as 'having no hope and without God in the world' (Eph 2:12). He was not describing a conscious *sense* of hopelessness, but a real situation of hopelessness. To be in this transient world, but to be 'without God' is indeed to have 'no hope'. In 1 Sam 28, we see the utter hopelessness of King Saul exposed. He found himself 'having no hope and without God in the world.'

Saul took to a desperate measure because he had had no word from God and the Philistines were again on the move. Even though he had once chased all the mediums from the land, he now goes looking for one. It's a measure of his moral exhaustion, his despairing faith, his failed life. He seeks out Samuel who is not impressed at being disturbed. But it was all too late. At this eleventh hour of his life, to seek guidance from God's prophet, by utterly illegitimate means, was Saul's great folly.

Samuel repeated his original message from ch 15 – that the Lord had torn the kingdom from him. And he says in v19, that Israel would be handed over to the Philistines and that Saul and his sons will be with him. That is, dead! See his reaction in v20! The woman eventually set before Samuel who had not eaten, a meal fit for a king. The trouble was, it was eaten by a man, not fit to be king.

Saul's hopeless position was the ultimate consequence of his disobedience to God. It is the hopelessness of being without God. (Notes prepared using John Woodhouse's 1 Samuel commentary. Some sentences and phrases used directly.)