

"DAVID AND SAUL"

1 Samuel 18:1-16

Last week we studied the story of David and Goliath. It's ironic that for 40 days Goliath trash-talked the army of Israel and blasphemed the name of Yahweh, the God of Israel. Nobody from the Israeli army challenged the Philistine champion. This included David's two older brothers and even King Saul, who were paralyzed by fear and devoid of faith.

David in all likelihood was a teenager. His experience as a shepherd was a fundamental aspect of his life. In fact, it shaped his convictions, his courage, and his commitment to the Lord. One would only need to study the psalms he authored to see the evidence that shepherding his dad's sheep was a powerful training ground for the next king of Israel. You know *"the rest of the story."*

Young David boldly walked into the Valley of Elah. He was taunted by Goliath who considered him to be an unworthy opponent for such a champion as himself. Armed with the finest weapons and protected by what appeared to be impregnable armor, the battle had all the markings of a massacre. Not so fast my friend!

Motivated by his love and reverence for the Lord and empowered by his faith in God's power, David charged the uncircumcised Philistine. All it took was one well-placed stone flung from his sling to kill Goliath. David kept Goliath's sword and carried the Philistine's head as a trophy of his victory. This is not just a throw-in, gory detail. Here is a picturesque glimpse of what God promised that His Messiah would do to the serpent, the devil . . .

Genesis 3:14–15... The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, Cursed are you more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you will go, And dust you will eat All the days of your life; **15** And I will put enmity Between you and the woman,

And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head,
And you shall bruise him on the heel."

The crucified, resurrected, and exalted Christ has conquered Satan, sin, and death. In Him, we can walk in victory over these infernal foes.

The defeat of Goliath was another huge turning point in Israel's history. Saul had failed miserably as king. However, the narratives that highlight David's leadership and love for the Lord show the wisdom of God's sovereign choice of David to succeed Saul. With this background firmly established, let's focus tonight on the contrast between David and Saul's character and competency. Alan Redpath stated. . .

Quite clearly, at this point in the story, the Holy Spirit brings to our attention David and Saul, setting them side by side for our careful, thoughtful meditation. Both of them were chosen for leadership and both of them were anointed by the Spirit. But with those two statements comparison ceases and contrast begins, for everything else in the life of Saul and David is in striking opposition. We see the sun begin to rise upon one life and to set upon the other. For one, there is steady growth in grace and in the knowledge of God; for the other there is tragic decline and disobedience to God: darkness, frustration, sin. Yet Saul began so well, and he might have been all that David was. The two men are placed side by side for our examination, for our warning, and for our encouragement. The same loving God, the same heavenly resources are at the disposal of both, but we see one of them steadily rising and the other steadily sinking. "The Making of a Man of God," p. 31

The contrast between David and Saul structures the entire narrative of 1–2 Samuel as a theological statement about what constitutes spiritual vitality and faithful kingship.

1 Samuel 18:1–4... Now it came about when he had finished speaking to Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan

loved him as himself. **2** Saul took him that day and did not let him return to his father's house. **3** Then Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. **4** Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his armor, including his sword and his bow and his belt.

The sovereign God knew that David would need a good friend to lean on as he walked through the valley that was in his direct path. Jonathan, Saul's son and the apparent successor to his throne, would be that friend to David. We can learn what it means to be a true friend by examining their relationship. Chuck Swindoll, lays out some key attributes of friendship in his book, *David: A Man of Passion and Destiny*.

First, a true friend is willing to sacrifice (18:4). Later on Jonathan would say this to David . . .

1 Samuel 20:4... Then Jonathan said to David, "Whatever you say, I will do for you."

A true friend doesn't keep score!

Second, a true friend will stand up for you. Jonathan was not afraid to speak well of David to his jealous and paranoid father!

1 Samuel 19:4... Then Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father and said to him, "Do not let the king sin against his servant David, since he has not sinned against you, and since his deeds *have been* very beneficial to you.

Third, a true friend is a constant source of encouragement.

1 Samuel 23:15–16... Now David became aware that Saul had come out to seek his life while David was in the wilderness of Ziph at Horesh. **16** And Jonathan, Saul's son, arose and went to David at Horesh, and encouraged him in God.

When you have an enemy like Saul, you need a friend like Jonathan to encourage you, to stand up for you, and to even make sacrifices for you. Now, let's look at the dynamics that existed between David and Saul so we can highlight some things that would cause them to head in different spiritual directions.

1. SAUL'S SPIRITUAL REGRESSION

1 Samuel 18:5-8... So David went out wherever Saul sent him, *and prospered*; and Saul set him over the men of war. And it was pleasing in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of Saul's servants. **6** It happened as they were coming, when David returned from killing the Philistine, that the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with joy and with musical instruments. **7** The women sang as they played, and said, "Saul has slain his thousands, And David his ten thousands." **8** Then Saul became very angry, for this saying displeased him; and he said, "They have ascribed to David ten thousands, but to me they have ascribed thousands. Now what more can he have but the kingdom?"

The backslider is usually the last person to recognize the spiritual decline that is so evident to others in his/her life. In Saul's case, the first thing that showed up in his life was an insane jealousy directed toward David. The song the women sang was a bitter pill for Saul to swallow. Keep in mind that Samuel had already told him that God had rejected him for the ongoing role of being the king of Israel . . .

1 Samuel 15:22–23,28... Samuel said, "Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, *And* to heed than the fat of rams. **23** "For rebellion is as the sin of divination, And insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He has also rejected you from *being* king." **28** So Samuel said to him, "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to your neighbor, who is better than you.

Saul's first step into spiritual regression was obviously *disobedience*. I remind you that Saul's partial obedience in the matter of Agag and the Amalekites was not acceptable to God. Disobedience turned into jealousy. Notice verse 9 . . .

1 Samuel 18:9... Saul looked at David with suspicion from that day on.

Jealousy then ripened into a murderous intent . . .

1 Samuel 18:10–11... Now it came about on the next day that an evil spirit from God came mightily upon Saul, and he raved in the midst of the house, while David was playing *the harp* with his hand, as usual; and a spear was in Saul's hand. 11 Saul hurled the spear for he thought, "I will pin David to the wall." But David escaped from his presence twice.

It's evident that darkness was settling in Saul's soul. Later Saul and his army would hunt for David so the malicious king could take young David's life. Here's a verse that explains the spiritual demise of King Saul . . .

1 Samuel 18:12... Now Saul was afraid of David, for the LORD was with him but had departed from Saul.

What a shocking statement this is—"*the Lord had departed from Saul.*" There was a time when the Holy Spirit would empower Saul to serve the Lord. Not anymore. Because of Saul's ungodly behavior and His blatant disobedience, the Spirit of God was withdrawn from him. Allow this phrase to penetrate your heart. Can anything be more dreadful than to have God's hand of favor on your life and then to have it withdrawn. Here's the reason Saul was numbed by fear in his tent while Goliath was blaspheming God and taunting the army of Israel—"*The Lord had departed from him.*" On the other hand, here is the reason David had the courage to take on the Philistine champion—"*For the Lord was with him.*"

1 Samuel 16:13–14... Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. And Samuel arose and went to Ramah. 14

Now the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD terrorized him.

1 Samuel 28:15... Then Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?" And Saul answered, "I am greatly distressed; for the Philistines are waging war against me, and God has departed from me and no longer answers me, either through prophets or by dreams; therefore I have called you, that you may make known to me what I should do."

Isn't it amazing that Saul was afraid of David and he dreaded him (18:12,15)? Why? I think it was because David was saturated with the presence of God and everything he touched seemed to turn to spiritual gold! Saul must have been reminded of what he once had and how he had squandered his spiritual blessings on the altar of disobedience.

Not only had God departed from him. It left a spiritual void in his life and an evil spirit took advantage of that opening. He had no appetite for the things of God—the Word, Prayer, Worship, Obedience, etc. Now he turned to the powers of darkness for guidance and direction. What a pitiful sight this is!

I want you to see the contrast between Saul and David. We've examined Saul's spiritual regression. Now let's spend a few minutes identifying the reasons for . . .

2. DAVID'S SPIRITUAL PROGRESSION

1 Samuel 18:5... **So David went out wherever Saul sent him, and prospered; and Saul set him over the men of war. And it was pleasing in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of Saul's servants.**

1 Samuel 18:14... **David was prospering in all his ways for the LORD was with him.**

1 Samuel 18:15... **When Saul saw that he was prospering greatly, he dreaded him.**

"Prospered"— relates to acting wisely or prudently, using good common sense. The end result emphasizes being successful. So, why did David prosper? I think it's pretty obvious—THE LORD WAS WITH HIM AND HE WOULDN'T TRADE IT FOR ANYTHING THE WORLD COULD OFFER. He had a heart for God!

Psalm 51:10–13... Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. **11** Do not cast me away from Your presence And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. **12** Restore to me the joy of Your salvation And sustain me with a willing spirit. **13** *Then* I will teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners will be converted to You.

David walked in fellowship with God. He knew what it was to abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

- **He acted with wisdom.**
- **He obeyed the Lord.**
- **He worshiped the Lord.**
- **He had pure motives.**
- **He sought to please the Lord.**
- **He had a teachable spirit.**
- **He was quick to confess and forsake his sins.**
- **He sought God's direction in critical moments.**

CONCLUSION

Okay, I think the contrast between David and Saul is crystal clear. I want you to consider some questions . . .

- **Are you regressing or progressing in your spiritual life?**
- **Are you obeying the Lord Jesus or disobeying Him?**
- **Do you sense the Holy Spirit's presence in your life?**

Character and Motivation

Saul emerged as a physically imposing figure but proved spiritually weak, quickly demonstrating his unsuitability for rule¹. He functioned as a self-absorbed, unpredictable despot more invested in his public image than in heeding prophetic counsel². By contrast, David possessed inner strength rooted in a heart aligned with God's values, embodying the principle that "the LORD looks on the heart"¹. David demonstrated passion for defending God's honor and genuine concern for his soldiers' welfare, often risking his own safety².

Relationship to Divine Authority

The fundamental divide centers on obedience. Saul faced rejection because of persistent disobedience and refusal to repent genuinely, while David found favor by seeking to reign consistently with the covenant and pursuing God's forgiveness through true repentance³. Despite serious failings, David maintained loyalty to Yahweh through a life characterized by significant covenant faithfulness³. Saul consistently rejected Yahweh's authority as sovereign, following his own instincts without regard for divine approval, whereas David remained committed exclusively to God's authority and sought nothing less than His approval².

Practical Outcomes

While Saul proved unable or unwilling to subdue Israel's greatest enemies, David achieved spectacular victories against both the Philistines and Amalekites from the moment of his anointing². Saul violated covenants made with others, while David honored his covenant commitments, positioning him as a covenant keeper in contrast to Saul's covenant breaking³.

When learning of Saul's death, David mourned deeply for both Saul and Jonathan, displaying genuine respect despite their conflict ([2 Sam 1](#)), further illustrating his character's moral depth.

1. 1

J. Daniel Hays, "[1-2 Samuel](#)," in *What the Old Testament Authors Really Cared about: A Survey of Jesus' Bible*, ed. Jason S. DeRouchie (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2013), [207–208](#).

2. 2

Bill T. Arnold, [1 & 2 Samuel](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), [392](#).

3. 3

J. Robert Vannoy, [Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: 1-2 Samuel](#) (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2009), [398–399](#), [410](#).