

# DAVID AND SAUL

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**An outline of the studies.**

1Samuel 8–11	The Giving of Kingship to Saul
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**Study 1: 1Samuel 8:1–22**

**The Background to Saul’s Kingship**

This chapter marks a remarkable change of circumstances. Samuel, the prophet–judge of Israel, had become old, and had made some arrangements for the transfer of power to his two eldest sons. However, through their greed – which expressed itself in the breaking of the Law (cf. Exod. 23:6–8, Deut. 16:18–20 – they were disqualified from taking this authority. This was recognised by the elders, but who also had their own agenda. They longed to be like the other nations, with a recognisable king. 1Sam. 7:10 indicates that the Philistines were a constant threat to Israel – perhaps this lies behind the desire for a king – but we see in 1Sam. 7:10–11 that under the Lords kingship this threat was dealt with fully. Faithfulness to the covenant of God was promised to be rewarded with national security (Deut. 28:7).

Samuel recognised the wrongness of the request, but also takes it personally as a rejection of him (and his line.) The Lord called him to hearken to the people – to give them what they requested – and not to see it as a rejection of himself, but rather as a rejection of the Lords kingship over the people. Samuel is one who, because he belongs to the Lord, shares in the suffering of the Lord (8:8). This rejection had been foreseen by Moses in Deuteronomy 17:14–20, and permission had been given there, with certain safeguards and hedges as to the way that this king was to exercise his authority. As wrong as the motives for the people to have a king were, the purpose of God was being worked out in their rebellion. Samuel makes clear in his prophetic word concerning the king that the safeguards and hedges the Lord had given with the kingship in Deuteronomy were in fact going to be ignored by the king – he would tyrannise the people – and that in the end the people would cry out in misery because of their insistence on the king.

## 1Samuel 9:1–10:16: The Anointing of Saul

Saul is introduced to the reader of 1Samuel before he is introduced to Samuel. He was an impressive young man. His father was Kish, a man of wealth – which could be better translated, a man of great power and influence. The length of the genealogy given indicates something of the importance of the family socially, and Saul himself stands out as a very handsome man and of very tall stature – head and shoulders above his contemporaries in very many ways (cf. Paul in Phil. 3:4–7). All these gifts were precisely that – gifts of God to him, to be received in grateful praise.

In verses 3 to 10 of chapter 9 we have the (seemingly) insignificant event of the search for Kish's donkeys. Saul and one of the servants were commissioned to search for the animals, and they did quite a thorough search, through Ephraim and Benjamin, but didn't find them. In all this frustrating work, the Lord's purposes for Saul are being worked out.

When Saul was ready to go back empty-handed (9:5), his servant suggested that they consult the prophet in the nearby town. Saul's response says much about his mindset about the nature of God and His relationship with men and women. He is concerned that they have nothing to offer the man (9:7). Without a thing to give, Saul does not want to receive. He has no sense of the grace of God. He operates contractually – and so believes that all that he has or will have will be bought or deserved. He was essentially a proud man.

Certainly no prophet was ever to prophesy for gain. His word was the word of the living God, the God of all grace. To expect payment for the word was to actually change the word. (The account of Elisha and Naaman is instructive at this point, especially with the account of Gehazis greed – see 2Kings 5.) When Saul's servant has some silver, Saul is happy to go and see the prophet.

Samuel had been warned of the coming of Saul in a revelation the previous day, and had organised a feast to be the occasion for Saul's

anointing as prince (v. 15). The revelation concerning Saul indicated that God's purposes were the purposes of grace to Israel (9:15–16). When Samuel saw Saul the Lord spoke directly to him, indicating that this was the one indicated in the revelation. Saul was wonderfully oblivious to all that is happening here (v. 18)! The immediate concerns of Saul were addressed – the animals were safe – and greater things were indicated, for Saul and his family. All this Samuel gives to Saul without anything being given to him. The Lord dealt with Saul completely on the basis of grace. Saul's response, Am I not a Benjaminite, from the least of the tribes of Israel? And is not my family the humblest of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? Why then have you spoken to me in this way? (9:21) shows again that he has a merit view of God's gifts. He may even be distrustful of a person who acts graciously – the question could imply, What are you after, Samuel? Yet gift upon gift is heaped upon Saul – the honoured place at the feast (9:22), the best portion of the meat being kept for him (9:23–24), and a place to spend the night (9:25). This is culminated the next day in the private act of Saul's anointing (9:26–10:1), and the prophecy that accompanied it (10:2–8). Of this anointing and prophecy, Saul is (wisely?) silent before the public coronation takes place (10:14–16).

## 1Samuel 10:17–27: The Coronation of Saul

The people were gathered at Mizpah, and Samuel introduced the coronation with a reiteration of the basically rebellious nature of the desire for the kingship. In the face of the Lord's continuing deliverance of His people from Egypt on, the call for a king was a rejection of the Lord who continues to save the people from all their calamities and distresses (10:19). The people were to approach Samuel according to their tribe and family groups. (Here the word thousands is clearly to be understood that way (i.e. as family), and it means that we must be careful in other places not to use that word to arrive at literal computations of the size of Israel's population or of the army.) The lot was used – a chancy method perhaps, but one in which the Spirit of God was at work – and through a process of

elimination Saul was selected. However he was not to be found. The Lord indicated that he was hiding amongst the baggage – this strong, imposing, powerful man is hiding in the cupboard! Certainly he was not king because of his personality or zeal or faithfulness. He was to be king because the Lord had chosen him (v. 24) and this entirely by his grace. It was the Lord's choosing of Saul that made him distinctive as king. Although there was an immediate response of faithfulness, and men of valour whose hearts had been touched by God aligned with him, there were those who despised him, giving him no honour as the new king.

### **1Samuel 11:1–15: The Lord Establishes Saul's Kingship**

The problem of the Philistines and other enemies (e.g. the Ammonites to the east) was not resolved simply by appointing a king – the king needed to act in the face of threat, else his authority would be broken. Samuel had prophesied of Saul that he would save Israel from the hand of their enemies (10:1) – and unless a king can do this, then he has no real power as king (cf. Luke 1:68–75). This principle was immediately tested by the actions of Nahash, the Ammonite king in his besieging of the little town of Jabesh-gilead. His intention was not simply to gain that territory, but to bring disgrace upon the Lord's people, Israel.

Until this point Saul had been continuing as king in his normal patterns of operation – farming – but this event was the occasion for the empowering of the Spirit of God in him. He summoned the army of Israel, and he was sure of success as they marched out to battle (11:9). After the very great victory, the worthless men who had despised him at his coronation were under threat, but Saul recognised that the victory had come by the hand of the Lord (10:13), and so acts in grace to those who stood against him. An opportunity for all to participate in the kingdom is given at Gilgal, with the peace offerings being the sacrifices of reconciliation.

### **1Samuel 12–15: The Removing of the Kingship from Saul**

#### **1Samuel 12:1–25: Samuel's Exhortation to the People Regarding the Kingship**

This chapter could well be set in the feast spoken of at 11:15 (the presence of Saul and Samuel together could well indicate this, as well as the fact that Samuel here addressed 'all Israel' [12:1].)

Samuel began his exhortation to the people by raising the matter of his own leadership [12:2–5]. He was a man who had acted with integrity, shown in his refusal to use his position as seer-judge for his own benefit. He was not a 'taker', as against the expectation of the king who the people have requested (8:11–18). For this reason, Samuel said, 'The Lord is witness against you.' That is, by the desire for a new model of leadership, the people have stood against the Lord. The nature of Samuel's leadership led the people to agree with him. 'He is witness,' they agreed.

In verses 6 to 11, Samuel set out the basis for his exhortation. He determined to plead with people (v. 7) on the basis of the Lord's faithful dealing with them through their history. This faithfulness in salvation came by free grace, and was expressed in the face of continuing sin and rebellion, especially through the time of the judges. In verse 12, Samuel brought this history to its current point – the demand of the people for a king in the face of the threat from Nahash of Ammon. This rebellious demand, the Lord gave to them – evidenced by Saul's presence there – and the Lord had delivered them in this way, even though it was a way of rebellion.

**Verses 14 and 15** set out the heart of the exhortation in the light of the history of God's covenant faithfulness. The exhortation was this – remain in covenant loyalty and obedience to God, fearing and serving Him, by hearkening to His voice and not rebelling, but rather following Him. Should they do this, they and the king would remain in the blessing of the covenant – it will be well. Should however they

depart from this covenant faithfulness, the hand of the Lord would come against them and the king.

**Verses 16 to 18** set out the sign the Lord gave to verify this exhortation as His own exhortation – a sign which indicated the wickedness of their asking for a king. The sign was thunder and rain – a sign of judgment.

The response of the people was to ask Samuel to intercede for them, and the confession of their sin [v. 19]. Samuel was able to give them the word of grace, which encouraged them to obedience and true worship. The people were the Lord's, and He would not cast them away. So Samuel indicates his desire to pray for the people – not grounded on their faithfulness to the Lord, but because of the Lord's faithfulness to them; to not pray for such people would be sin. [vv. 20–25].

### **1Samuel 13:1–23: The Sin of Saul which Disqualifies Him from Kingship**

Saul's main task as king is to fight the Philistines, and that is what we see him doing in this chapter (vv. 1–7, 15b–23). Yet fulfilling the task is not the same as being covenantally faithful, as vv. 8–15a indicate.

**Verses 1 to 7** portray the Philistines as being superior in terms of technology (chariots, horsemen) and numbers. An initial small victory [v. 3] had served only to make the Israelites odious to this large power. The Philistines responded by amassing their large army, and the people of Israel became terrified, hiding away in caves, or running away to safer land. Saul had called the army together at Gilgal, and those with him waited, trembling.

The purpose for the gathering was to commit this venture to the Lord, through the offering of sacrifices – burnt offerings for dedication to the Lord and peace offerings to express communion and fellowship with Him. Saul had no authority to offer such sacrifices – this was a

priestly task – and so he was to wait for Samuel to come. After seven days, it seemed that Samuel was late and may not be coming, and the people started scattering from Saul. They would not go into the battle without the Lord's blessing. Saul acted to prevent this by offer the sacrifices himself (v. 9). After Saul had offered the burnt offering, Samuel arrived. Saul acted as though all was OK (v. 10), but Samuel penetrated to his heart with the question, 'What have you done?' Saul demonstrated the knowledge of his guilt by immediately justifying his action (vv. 11–12). He would not truly acknowledge his sin; he blamed the people, Samuel, the Philistines, and gave his sin a noble tone, and tried to justify himself by indicating that he had to force himself to do this act. Because he would not live by grace, he could not face his own guilt and sin squarely. He could not confess his sins.

Samuel pronounced the judgment of God on Saul. By his foolishness, Saul has missed out on what the Lord was promising; the Lord had sought out 'a man after his own heart' (v. 14), and the kingdom promises and blessings were to be transferred to him. (Note that the Lord speaks of an act that He has already done; He is not simply reacting to Saul's sin, but in His sovereign purposes, He is dealing with Saul's sin.) 'A man after the Lord's own heart' is a man who knows the character and the mode of action of the Lord, and who lives in line with that character and action. He is a man who knows god to be the God of all grace, and who lives in the grace of God. Samuel did not sit down to debate this matter with Saul; he pronounced the judgment and moved on.

**Verses 15b to 23** then set out the situation of the continuing trouble with the Philistines. It is within this setting that the call of the new king is enacted and made clear.

### **1Samuel 14:1–52: Jonathan, a Son in Contrast with His Father**

Jonathan was the son of Saul, and would have been heir to the throne had Saul not been excluded by his sin. This son stood in sharp

contrast to his father, being a man of faith who lived in the knowledge and security of God's goodness. As we will see later, this made him a person who his father found impossible to understand or relate to well.

We had been introduced earlier to Jonathan in 13:2–3; he was a soldier who was able to act decisively and confidently. We see this again in vv. 1–15 of this chapter. He was out engaging the Philistines in battle, whilst his father remained in camp trying to discern the will of the Lord. Jonathan was not rash or impulsive, but had a confidence which came from knowing the God of Israel. **Verse 6** is key to understanding the basis of his action – it all came from his knowledge that ‘nothing can hinder the Lord from saving by many or by few.’ The Philistines are these uncircumcised, as against the people of Israel who had the sign of circumcision to show they belonged to the living God.

**Verse 7** shows a great difference between Saul and his son; Saul had been led by his servant to the prophet in 9:6, but here Jonathan gave the lead in knowing the will of God.

When Saul became aware of the consternation that Jonathan's action was causing in the Philistine camp, he was still unable to act decisively. He called for the ark (v. 18), expecting through that to gain an express divine commandment about the matter. Perhaps this indicated a kind of sulkiness on Saul's part – he wouldn't do anything now unless the Lord told him expressly. But even while the priest was being consulted at the ark, events overtook him and Saul had to act. Unable and unwilling as Saul had been to discern the will of God, ‘the Lord delivered Israel that day...’ (v. 23).

Following the day of battle, the Israelites were exhausted but were unable to refresh themselves because of a foolish oath by Saul. He had undertaken the army (probably before the battle) to swear that they would not eat food until evening, and Saul was avenged on his enemies. This oath indicates that Saul was still refusing to see the goodness of the Lord towards him and all of the Lord's people. He

was trying to manipulate blessing from God, rather than receive it from Him. In the midst of the battle there was a sign of the goodness of the Lord to His people – honey dripping from trees onto the ground. Saul's foolish oath meant that the people could not enjoy the Lord's goodness to them. The Lord had promised them a land of milk and honey in giving them the Promised Land (Ex. 3:8, 17; 13:15; 33:3; Lev. 20:14; Num 13:27, 14:8, Deut. 6:3; 11:9; 26:9, 15; 27:3); Saul's uncovenanted mindset locked him (and the people) out of that gift at this point.

Jonathan recognised his father's foolishness in giving the command (v. 29), but his eating of the honey (v. 27) was not an act of rebellion, but rather of ignorance of the oath. When he was found to be guilty of breaking the oath, he did not seek to worm out of the consequences of his father's foolishness, but rather willingly submitted to it: ‘I tasted a little honey with the tip of the staff that was in my hand; here I am, I will die (v. 43).’ Saul, perhaps determined to impress the Lord, insisted that Jonathan be put to death with yet another oath (v. 44), but the intercession of the people for his life ransomed Jonathan (v. 45). What Saul's foolish act did mean however was that the rout of the Philistines was not fully accomplished (v. 46)

### **1Samuel 15:1–34: Samuel's Final Confrontation with Saul**

The fact that Samuel had anointed Saul king stood (vv. 1–3), even though the Lord had given His word that the kingship would be removed from his line. Until such time, Saul was king, and he was to act as the king. At this point it meant obeying the Lord in the complete destruction of the Amalekites. This destruction was judgment on them for their opposition to Israel when the Lord was bringing them from Egypt. (The Kenites, who shared territory with the Amalekites, had on the other hand dealt kindly with the Israelites, and so they were under covenant blessing [v. 6].) Rather than completing the destruction however, Saul kept the best of the livestock, destroying only what was worthless (vv. 7–9), and not

putting Agag the Amalekite king to death. This would seem to be an attempt to win popular approval (note that he does this with all the people [v. 9].)

This action confirmed the Lord's determination to remove the kingship from Saul, for Saul was most certainly not a man after the Lord's own heart. He was self-directed, obeying the Lord only at those points where it suited him.

When Samuel finally met Saul, the king seemed pleased with himself, and may actually have thought he had kept the command. Again Samuel quickly disillusioned him. Saul again shifted the blame to the people, and again tried to give the matter a noble motive – they have been kept for sacrifice. Samuel cut this self-justification short – ‘Stop! I will tell you what the Lord has said to me this night.’

The word of the Lord to Saul at this point undercut any attempt he may have made to justify himself. He was appointed by the Lord to be king, whatever he may have thought of himself. He was given clear command by the Lord about how to exercise this rule. He had quite clearly disobeyed.

Yet Saul tried again to justify himself, claiming, against the Lord's own word to him, that he had obeyed. He refused to confess his sin. ‘If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.’ (1John 1:8–10) To this stubborn refusal, Samuel brought the word of judgment; Saul's religious acts meant nothing for there was no obedience in his heart. This finally brought a confession from Saul (vv. 24, 30), but he still had an eye out for his own position. His confession was closer to remorse than to repentance. Because he would not live by grace, he could not face his own sin, and see it properly dealt with.

## **1Samuel 16–17: David, A Man After God's Own Heart**

The flow of these chapters in which David's kingship is sealed, in promise though not in full fact of reality, follows a similar pattern to the narrative of the giving of the kingship to Saul. There is firstly the secret anointing (16:1–13, cf. 9:15–10:8), then there is a time of public recognition (16:14–23; cf. 10:17–27), and then there is military victory (17:1–58; cf. 11:1–15). Within this flow there are many similarities also between Saul and David, which fact leads us to discover something dynamic about the nature of the grace of God, as I trust we will see as we work through these chapters.

### **1Samuel 16:1–13: The Anointing of David**

The Lord had told Samuel, in His word for Saul, that the line of Saul was finished with regard to the kingship, and that the Lord had sought out a man after his own heart, appointing him to be prince over his people (13:14). This word provides the interpretive key to the events that follow.

Chapter 15 ended with the fact that, following the failure of Saul with regard to the Amalekites, Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death, but that he grieved over him. Chapter 16 opens with the time for that mourning having passed; there was a new thing breaking forth in the Lord's plan for His people, and Samuel was to be involved in what the Lord was doing. Samuel was to go and anoint one of the sons... of Jesse, the Bethlehemite (see Ruth 4:18–22). From these sons, the Lord himself had provided for Himself a king. This act of provision is the Lord's free, sovereign act of grace, unforced by any human hand. In Gen. 22, Abraham knew the grace of God by faith, and that the Lord himself would provide the lamb for the offering, and in fact named the place where he was asked to take Isaac, ‘The Lord will provide.’

Samuel's reticence about going (16:2–3) was well-grounded, but the Lord showed him away ahead in obedience. Similarly, the fear of the elders of Bethlehem was well-grounded from their perspective; Samuel was either in the employ of Saul, or else he was undoing Saul. Either meant that they were in a lose/lose situation.

The taking of the heifer for sacrifice wasn't simply a subterfuge, or cover-up for Samuel's real intentions (16:2b,5). The choosing of the new king was to take place in the context of worship (sacrifice) and fellowship (cf. Acts 13:2–3). The Lord had appointed a man after His own heart; only in worship could the heart of the Lord be known, and so only in worship could this man be made known.

Samuel had all his faculties of reason at work in this worship (16:6–10); he evaluated each of the sons of Jesse as they were brought before him. Hence, his approval of Eliab. Yet his reason, his logic was to be subjected to the Lord's own way of seeing, to the Theologic of God. The Lord's word to him, 'Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart' (16:7) brings us back to this point, that the Lord was looking for a man after His own heart, that is, a man who knew who the Lord is and how the Lord acts, and who lived in glad consonance with that reality. (The person who knows that God is the great provider, freely and out of His sovereign grace giving good gifts, that person is the one who acts freely in providing and giving – see 2Cor 9:8.) Samuel was called at this point also to be a man after the Lord's own heart, to see as the Lord sees, and so to be involved in what the Lord was providing for Israel. (NB the word for 'provide' and the word for 'see' is the same word, ra'ah.)

None of the sons that Jesse presented to Samuel were chosen by the Lord (16:10). We are not told what it is about them that makes them unsuitable – only this fact, that they were not chosen by the Lord. Samuel asked if there were any other sons, and the youngest son was

summoned from the sheepfold. David paralleled Saul in this respect, that he was looking after his father's livestock. When David was brought in, we are told that he was ruddy (not so swarthy as his companions – striking to look at), had beautiful eyes, and was handsome – again some parallels to Saul. Yet it was none of these factors that qualified David to be the king. The verdict of the Lord came to Samuel, and he arose and anointed David in the midst of his brothers. The family had not considered David important enough to come along (cf. 1Cor. 126–29); David was like Saul in many respects – none of this counted, but what mattered was the Lord's own choice. And the verdict of the Lord on this man tells us that David was a man after the Lord's own heart.

### **1Samuel 16:14–23: David Enters Saul's Court**

At his anointing, 'the Spirit of God came mightily upon David from that day forward' (16:13). 16:14 tells us that the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul. There could be only Messiah, only one anointed by the Lord. (This is most significant – when John the Baptist saw the Spirit descend on Jesus, it is important to know that he saw the Spirit remain. (John 1:32). Only Jesus can now give the Spirit, only Jesus can save, only Jesus is king.) Instead of the Spirit of God, Saul was tormented by an evil spirit from the Lord. Saul became a troubled, angry, moody, mentally unstable man following his final confrontation with Samuel, and following David's anointing. The Lord handed him over to himself, which is the way he had lived – doing his own thing, what he thought best. His illness was the Lord's judgment on his rebellion.

The Lord's provision of David as king to replace Saul is now also the Lord's provision of David as healer for Saul (16:17). Clearly, David had lived in the gift of God to him of the Holy Spirit, as evidenced by the report of the young man (16:18). Saul summoned David, and he was sent immediately. His ministry was much appreciated by Saul, and a great affection for David came to Saul (16:21). That this love was because of David's usefulness to him is a possibility we cannot

easily dismiss. Saul could not easily relate as a true friend to any person for he lived outside covenant grace. So, for example, he could never be close to his son Jonathan, suspecting and accusing him, fearing him too. Those who know God's covenant grace are those who the friends of God, and are those who are brothers/sisters who live in true friendship.

### **1Samuel 17:1–58: David Fights Goliath In Faithful Trust**

Verses 1 to 3 of this seventeenth chapter set the scene for what follows, reminding us that the Philistines still posed a great threat to Israel. Goliath was the champion, or representative, of the Philistine army. He was a powerful figure – perhaps not 9 feet tall (one commentator estimates 6 feet nine inches) – but is not called a giant (17:4); he was powerfully arrayed in armour (17:5–7); and he taunted the Israelites with his powerful voice. He reeked in self-confidence and assertiveness!!! The crux of his taunts lay in his words, 'I defy the ranks of Israel this day...' (17:10) – he despised Israel and so despised Israel's God, the living God. The response of Saul and all Israel to Goliath indicate that their faith in God wilted in the face of Goliath's bravado. Verses 12 to 15 fill in for us David's position at this time: while Saul was involved with warfare, he did not need his minstrel, and so David was back home with his father, only going to Saul's court when required (17:15). Verse 16 tells us that the taunting of the Philistine went unchallenged for some time; no man from Israel would take on the taunter.

Sent by his father to inquire after and bring provisions to his brothers who were in the army of Saul, David heard the taunting of Goliath, and saw the terror of the men of Israel (17:24). Through this introductory sequence of events, we see David interested, active, eager, inquiring – a vitality that came from his faith in the living God, his assurance of the favour of God. He was tantalised by the promised reward to the one who would slay the Philistine champion (17:25–27). Particularly he was puzzled by the fact that this uncircumcised (uncovenanted) man should defy the armies of the

living God. Israel had been acting as though God were irrelevant to the situation. If that were so, then all was lost to Israel. David knew that God is the living God, present with and giving to His people. This embarrassing question constituted a reprimand to Israel, and so to his elder brothers – who resented the fact, and so rebuked him. David was not dissuaded from his faith. He is indeed the one after God's own heart.

David finally came to Saul, summoned because of his brave words. David was not cocky in his confidence; his confidence grew from his experience of the hand of God in his life. 17:34–35 spells out this experience, 17:36 is the conclusion that David drew from the experience, and 17:37 is the basic truth of the experience and the conclusion that David knew – his strength and ability in war and battle was given to him by God; his deliverance was by the hand of God, through the gifts of fighting the Lord had given him. Saul commended David to the Lord (17:37), but also thought best to equip him with armour from his own collection (17:38). David 'tried to go in vain, for he was not used to them...' (17:39) – and instead left armed (only) with the weapons he had used before in the Lord's delivering of him.

The sight of David must have enraged the Philistine – he certainly seemed to take it as an insult, and thought nothing of David, a bit of a 'pretty boy' in his thinking (17:41–44). David was quite certain of himself, or rather of the fact that he went in the power and name of the Lord of hosts (17:45–47), whom Goliath had defied in defying His people. What would be proclaimed through David's victory was that all the earth would know there is a God in Israel – i.e. the Lord of Israel is the living God, and there is none like him – and that this assembly (the people of Israel) would know that the Lord saves by his own gracious favour and kindness; it is not a case of the Lord helping those who help themselves.

The defeat of Goliath is told so simply and directly – Goliath could not even act, so decisive was the victory of the Lord for David

(17:48–51). Following the fall of Goliath, the Philistines were routed thoroughly (17:52–54). Verses 55 to 58 indicate something of Saul’s insistent and unshakeable self-preoccupation; he could not recognise or remember David, even though David had been ministering to him.

### **1Samuel 18–20: Jonathan s Covenant Faithfulness To David**

These chapters begin and end with accounts of David’s relationship with Jonathan, and of their covenanted friendship. The section traces the disintegration of Saul s relationship with David. The contrast between Saul and Jonathan is remarkable in these chapters, and we have an insight into the dynamics of covenant faith in the life of Gods people through the person of Jonathan that is rich and rewarding.

### **1Samuel 18:1–4: Jonathan and David**

This chapter flows from the defeat of Goliath in chapter 17. We are told that from that point on, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David (...became one spirit with ... [NIV]). Both these men were men who knew the covenant faithfulness of God and who lived life in the confidence that such knowledge brings. In Proverbs 22:13, and 26:13 we hear of the sluggard who puts off action with the cry, There is a lion outside or I’ll be murdered in the streets! Proverbs 28:1 contrasts this fearfulness which refuses to act (see Saul v. the Ammonites) with the boldness of the righteous: The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion. Jonathan recognised in David s brave act that he was a man who knew the same Lord as he knew. This gave them an immediate and rich friendship. Jonathan must have recognised the covenant promise to David also: his making of a covenant with him, and his stripping of his robes, armour and weaponry to give to David indicated his placing of any claims to the throne he may have had under Gods promise to David.

### **1Samuel 18:5–16: Saul Became Afraid Of David**

David was by now a permanent member of Saul s court, and was set over the men of war. In this position, he gained great respect and met with much success. This respect, which began with the defeat of Goliath, caused Saul to become angry, being envious for the respect himself. He had not submitted to the judgment of God on him, that he be removed from the kingship, and so he always feared when the judgment would come to be. From that day on, Saul eyed David – suspicious, cautious, envious in all his dealings with him.

This opened Saul up to the influence of an evil spirit (18:10, cf. Eph. 4:26–27). and what had previously been a gift to him for respite (the music of David) now provoked him and enraged him, moving him to attempt to murder David twice by spearing. The gift of God to him became unbearable because of his envy, and his envy erupted into murder.

18:12 is very important in understanding the chapter – Saul was a fearful man, knowing the fact of God s judgment but refusing to come under it. As long as we flee God s judgment and are angry at him, we are not righteous before him. (Melancthon, Article 4: *Justification, Apology of the Augsburg Confession*)

Saul s response to this threat was manifold; firstly, he tried to remove the problem from his mind, by sending David away as a battle leader (18:13); secondly, by trying to bring him in league through marriage (18:17); thirdly, by hoping for David to fall in battle (18:17,25). All these attempts to subvert the judgment of God failed, for the Lord worked all things for good for David, his covenant friend. The people loved David more, David had the love of both Jonathan and Michal, the Lord was with David, and David enjoyed military success. This made Saul even more afraid of him, and so Saul was David’s enemy continually (18:28–29). He was a man obsessed.

### 1Samuel 19:1–7: Jonathan Interceded For David

Saul made plans for the death of David, trying even to involve Jonathan in his scheme. Yet Jonathan remained true to the covenant friendship he had with David, and true also to his being son of Saul. He warned David of the danger he faced, but also took it on himself to intercede for David to Saul. He did not try to contradict outright the evil intention of Saul, but rather brought to remembrance the good that David had been to Saul, and of the blessing of the Lord (19:5) that had come through him. In this context, the killing of David would be clearly sinful. Saul saw the logic of Jonathan's plea, and David was restored to his former position. Saul's promise (19:6) was an oath invoking the name of the living God – his almost immediate breaking of this promise indicates that he did not know the living God.

### 1Samuel 19:8–24: David Escaped By The Hand Of The Lord

The situation of restored relationship with Saul was undone by the continued success of David in battle, and Saul's unquenched envy of him. Again David escaped a murder attempt within the house (19:10). Psalm 68:19–20, one of David's psalms, speaks clearly of where this rescue from danger came from: Blessed be the Lord, who daily bears us up; God is our salvation. Our God is a God of salvation; and to GOD, the Lord, belongs escape from death.

A further assassination attempt was arranged, but David this time was warned by Michal, his wife, Saul's daughter, and so was able to escape. (David did not see Michal again until after he had ascended to the throne, and then had to win her back from Paltiel, to whom she had been given (2Sam. 3:13–16). It may be this that led to the despising of David by Michal that we read of later in 2Samuel.) The rescue was effected by the placing of a household god in his place in the bed, and the claim that David was unable to rise to see Saul, for he was sick (19:13–17). David was not rescued by recourse to the

image – in fact, the best the image can do is lie down and play dead! It was the Lord who rescued him.

David fled to Samuel at Ramah, and filled in all that had happened to him. Saul became aware of his whereabouts, and sent a posse to round him up. The hand of the Lord in David's protection now became abundantly clear, as the three posses sent each were overtaken by the Holy Spirit and began to prophesy. Finally Saul himself went, and likewise he was caught up into the ecstatic prophesying that had come upon all the others. The purposes of God could not be overturned, and those opposed to His purposes were forced to own them with their own lips. In prophesying, these men would all have been speaking of the suffering of Christ and the glory that would follow – and all this flowed from the salvation history events that were centred on David at the time.

### 1Samuel 20:1–42: The Covenant Bond Between Jonathan And David

The events that overtook Saul enabled David to flee back to Jonathan. David did not go back self-righteously, but with the possibility of some unseen sin on his part as being behind the trouble with Saul. Jonathan was clear in declaring David's innocence from offence (20:2,9) and was obviously unaware of the events of the past few days, and initially found it hard to believe that his father had broken the oath he gave him concerning David (20:2, cf. 19:6).

A plan was conceived to test and validate David's claim (20:5–8). The test would involve Saul revealing, in his reactions to David's absence from the festival, what his intentions towards David actually were. David reminded Jonathan of the sacred covenant they had with each other, and called on him to act in covenant kindness (*chesed*) to him. The ties and demands of the covenant of God are greater than those of family faithfulness (cf. Luke 9:61, 12:51–53). It is important to see that David did not obligate Jonathan if there was guilt in him, that is if David had in any way been guilty of disloyalty to the king.

In fact, in such a case, Jonathan had the right to execute David (20:8b).

The two men went out to the field to continue their conversation, perhaps to avoid being overheard as they planned how news of Saul's reaction would be delivered to David. Jonathan affirmed a covenant promise, and sealed it with an oath. He prayed for the blessing of the presence of the Lord with David (20:13), and for the success of the Lord to attend him (20:15–16). Clearly Jonathan saw that the kingdom had been given to David (20:14) and so this prayer was a renunciation of any claim on the throne that he may have had. He petitioned David for covenant loyalty to him and his household when he became king, and there is a hint that he expected to die, which happened due to his sonly faithfulness to his father. David affirmed this, swearing by his love for Jonathan, a love for him which was as strong as his love for his own soul. Such love could only flow from knowing the God of love who loved us so much that He gave us His only Son (cf. John 13:34).

The arrangements to inform David then were made (20:18–23), and the hand of the Lord in all that is to transpire was acknowledged by them (20:21,22). 20:23 is both a statement of promise and also of warning against any breach of covenant faithfulness. As events transpired, the determination of Saul to kill David were unveiled by this plan of action. Saul's response was to attack Jonathan, first verbally by accusation, and then physically, as he had attacked David (20:30–34). Saul's refusal to live in glad submission to the action of the God of grace destroyed any possibility he had for true friendship, and any possibility he had for true relationship with his son. The accusation against Jonathan, You son of a perverse, rebellious woman, do I not know that you have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame, and to the shame of your mother's nakedness?... , is one that grieved Jonathan, for by it Saul had disgraced David (20:30,34). These words to imply something of a perverse sexual nature to Jonathan and David's friendship. To uncover the nakedness of a person is linked to illicit sexual activity (Lev. 18). Saul's error in

reading this covenant friendship is an error made by those commentators today who try to find a homosexual relationship hinted at here, and in 2Sam. 1:26. Homosexuality is the expression of the exact opposite of covenant faithfulness grounded in the covenant faithfulness of God – it is the activity of those who are given over to their denying of the truth of God (Rom. 1:24–27). Saul and the commentators error illustrates this point very clearly: To the pure all things are pure, but to the corrupt and unbelieving nothing is pure; their very minds and consciences are corrupted (Titus 1:15) – and here the pure are those who live by and in the grace of God.

In **20:35–42** the resolution of the chapter follows very sweetly and simply. Jonathan was clearly deeply moved by love as he went to bring the news to David, and could barely contain himself even when the servant lad was there. He had to talk face to face with David, and so sent the lad back home. This conversation was one of deep and rich emotion. The deep friendship that the two shared was only be expressed in meeting once more following this occasion. Jonathan sent David off with a blessing, knowing that the Lord stood between them and their descendants for ever.

### **1Samuel 21–26: David's Covenant Faithfulness To Saul**

The determination of Saul to kill David led David to flee Saul's court, and the figure of David appears now in these chapters always as fugitive, as man on the run. The disintegration of the relationship between the two governs all that takes place.

### **1Samuel 21: David Flees To The Gittites**

David's first recourse on leaving Saul's courts was to the priest, to discover the will of God for him. Ahimelech the priest was obviously aware of some problem (21:1), but was reassured by David's answer to his question (21:2,3). The giving of the loaves of bread (from the twelve loaves (each was large, about 3.5 lbs of flour in each)

presented daily in the Tabernacle, and usually eaten only by priests) was on the basis that David and his men (who these were at this stage is unclear – probably none) were ritually pure. Verse 7 introduces a problem character, Doeg, who will be dealt with later. Goliath's sword, properly David's possession, had been kept at the Tabernacle, and David claimed it for his weapon.

From there, David went to Achish the king of Gath – Goliath's home! David's reputation was known to the servants of the king, and they recognise (inadvertently, through their misinterpretation of the song of victory) also the claim of David on the kingship of Israel. David, who had come as a fugitive, saw that this placed him in a dangerous position, and so he feigned madness. Achish then sent David on his way, having enough madmen in his courts already! Psalm 34, written with this event in mind, makes clear that David saw this strategy as a God-given wisdom (v. 4), by which the Lord delivered him from a dangerous situation.

### **1Samuel 22: The Suffering Of The Priests**

Psalm 34:2 says, My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the afflicted hear and be glad. Saved from his affliction, David became one to whom the afflicted gathered, first his family (under political threat from Saul) (22:1), and then those in distress, in debt, or in discontent (those embittered) (22:2). It was a very mixed bunch, and David would need wisdom in handling this situation. Without such wisdom, he would be easily led into action that was unwise, that did not flow from covenant faithfulness. All who came were to come under that covenant of God themselves. Cf. Matthew 11:28–30 – coming to Christ and finding his rest involves taking on his yoke.

The faithfulness of Ahimelech to David brought the suffering of David and his family upon this priestly family. (NB 22:6ff – Saul again has his spear at hand – a preoccupation with power and might) Through the self-serving treachery of Doeg, Ahimelech was dobbed in as aiding David, although the full story is not recounted. Doeg was

an Edomite, probably taken prisoner during one of Saul's campaigns. He had been made chief of Saul's herdsmen, but was under detention. He then became the willing executioner of the priestly family, doing more even than Saul commanded him to do. Doeg manipulated Ahimelech's transparent honesty and made him look guilty. Psalm 52 speaks of the craftiness of Doeg's tongue. Behind all of Doeg's action lay this – the love of wealth, rather than the love of God (see Ps. 52:7). David was sure of the vengeance of God on him (Ps. 52:5). Abiathar, one of Ahimelech's sons, escaped this destruction, and entered into the protection of David's covenant faithfulness (22:22–23).

### **1Samuel 23–24: The Lord Protects David From Saul**

David's decision to rescue Keilah from the Philistines was an expression of family loyalty, it being a city of Judah, at that time very much behind enemy lines. His rescue of the city put him at risk in more than one way. The first risk was from the Philistines; the Lord, through the priest, promised David victory. The second risk – greater than that of the Philistines – was from Saul. Keilah was a walled city, and so David was at risk of being besieged there. Again the priest brought to him the word of the Lord, and David was able to escape from there in the nick of time.

In the midst of this dangerous situation, Jonathan came to encourage David and to strengthen his hand in God. Jonathan was certain of the plan of God, and so, he said, was Saul (23:16–17). Jonathan was a man of faith indicated by his submission to the plan of God; Saul continued his stubborn resistance, despite some tearful moments of remorse.

The first of these times we saw in the occasion of David's sparing of Saul's life at the cave in Wildgoats Rocks. Given the opportunity to slay Saul (and the encouragement of his men – 24:4), David only cut off the hem or corner of Saul's robe – a manoeuvre requiring some skill! This was an act that was perhaps seen as an act of treachery or

rebellion. It may be this which led to David's heart smiting him (24:5) – and his words to his men indicate that he saw the act as equivalent to putting his hand forth against the king. The disrespect shown in his act may well have led to the men rising to kill Saul (24:7). David refused this line of action. The act gave David, though, an opportunity to demonstrate his continuing faithfulness to Saul (24:8ff.) David made clear his intention that whatever Saul decided to do to him, he would not set his hand against Saul (24:12). 24:13 speaks of the pure heart of David from which flowed this faithful action. Saul's tearful response was one of confession, but not of repentance. Saul was left only able to acknowledge the covenant purposes of God for David, and even to pronounce a blessing on David (24:19b), but still he did not enter into those purposes by faith. David did not entrust himself to Saul, even though he swore covenant faithfulness to him (24:22).

### **1Samuel 25: David Is Saved From Foolishness**

The encounter between David and Nabal and Abigail is important in seeing the development of the covenant theme. David had acted in kindness to Nabal – whose name means foolish, and who is described in 25:3 as churlish (lit. hard) and ill-behaved (lit. evil in his doings), a Calebite (!) – by not taking advantage of Nabal's shepherds out in the fields (25:7), but rather protecting them from enemies (25:15–16). He sought some hospitality from Nabal – which rightly speaking Nabal should have given. Caleb had seen the bounty of the Lord in giving the people the land; Nabal had turned all the gifts of God into his possession (... my bread ... my water ... my meat ... my shearers ...). David and his men at this time may well have been in some desperate need of food. Nabal, a rich man with many resources, dismissed David's request on the basis that David is persona non grata. David flared into anger, and summoned two thirds of his army to come and take vengeance on Nabal. Abigail was warned of the impending doom by one of the servants of Nabal, and she acted wisely to placate David.

David was in fact in danger of acting foolishly here, taking vengeance into his own hands. This is on the basis of him demanding some recompense for his kindness to Nabal (25:21–22). David was in grave danger of moving out of covenant trust in God. To demand rights or recompense and to seek to exact such is a refusal to trust in the Lord who disposes rewards. David had recognised in the affair of Doeg the Edomite that it is the Lord who takes vengeance. Abigail's gift and intercession remind him. See 25:32–35 spell out the sudden seeing of the danger he was in. The events of 25:36–38 show that the Lord is not slow in doing right. Note that Nabal's party has been able to go in regal style despite the huge amount of provisions that Abigail had taken to David and his men. Nabal's refusal had been entirely selfish and arrogant. Something of the horror of what he had done and the danger in which he had placed himself must have settled in his heart, and he was dead within ten days.

### **1Samuel 26: David Again Spares Saul**

This chapter mirrors very much chapter 24. Here David was not moved to act in any way against the king, and had rather to restrain Abishai from taking action against Saul. David was certain that the Lord was sovereign, and this governed his action – 26:10–11 And David said, As the LORD lives, the LORD will smite him; or his day shall come to die; or he shall go down into battle and perish. The LORD forbid that I should put forth my hand against the LORD's anointed; but take now the spear that is at his head, and the jar of water, and let us go.

### **1Samuel 27–30: David's Faithfulness to the Lord amidst the Philistines**

#### **1Samuel 27:1–28:2: David Flees To The Philistines**

David entered this chapter as desperate as a hunted animal. There was a note of despair in his voice in 27:1 – 'I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul; there is nothing better for me than that I should escape to the land of the Philistines; then Saul will despair of seeking

me any longer within the borders of Israel, and I shall escape out of his hand.’ He could not see how continuing the cat and mouse game of hiding in the wilderness could lead to the fulfilling of God’s promise. He was certain (and rightly so) that, despite Saul’s tears of remorse (26:17–25), Saul was intent on killing him. He decided to go to the Philistines for shelter. The effect of this was to bring upon himself the name of traitor, the name of one who was unfaithful to the Lord’s people.

When David had gone to Achish before (21:10–15) he had gone alone; this time he came with a strong army. Achish may have seen political gain in having this band of ‘mercenaries’ come to dwell in his territory, especially given that David bore the name of traitor. Perhaps he believed that he could enlist David and Judah against Saul. The ready acceptance of David by the Philistine king was remarkable, and was of God’s providential care for David and his family. David wisely asked to be given residence in a town away from the immediate scrutiny of the king (27:5). Here he could carry out his own policy without being observed too closely. Ziklag was given to David and this city became the inheritance of the Davidic kingship (27:6). It was a town in the far south of Israel, on the border between Philistia and Simeonite territory, allocated to Simeon (Josh. 19:5) but somehow becoming a Philistine possession.

Being an outpost as it was, it was a town which suffered much from raids from various bands of Amalekites, Geshurites and Girzites (27:8). In this town for 16 months (27:7) David had the opportunity to build up good relationships with Israelites living in the south. This he did by his kindness in protecting them from these raiding hordes. These raiders came from tribes that were destined to be ejected from the land; David was acting according to the Abrahamic covenant in this act. Saul had been given the command in 1Sam. 15 to completely wipe out the Amalekites and their flocks etc. David here was given no such command, and so his keeping of the booty of the battle was not sinful. In fact, the booty helped consolidate the ruse he had with Achish, who received the booty gratefully (27:9). Achish (believed

David was raiding his own people (27:10); David made sure there were no survivors so that his ruse could not be discovered, and so Achish trusted David (27:11–12). All this however suddenly placed David in a difficult situation when Achish enlisted him to fight against God’s people, with David as his bodyguard (28:1–2).

### **1Samuel 28:3–25: Rebellion is as the Sin of Divination**

This section is an interlude, a break in the flow of the narrative surrounding David, and shows us the progress of Saul in his sin. In 15:22–23, Samuel had prophesied to Saul, ‘Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has also rejected you from being king.’

The refusal of the Lord to speak to Saul (28:6) reflected this rejection of him as king. In chapter 15 we saw the refusal of Saul to submit to the direct word of the Lord, arguing against God. Saul had put the wizards and mediums out of the land. He should actually have ensured that they were put to death – Lev. 19:31, 20:27; Deut. 18:11–14. He knew where he could find them should it prove that he would need them. In desperation from fear of the Philistines Saul turned to what he knew to be wrong. Cf. David’s heart expressed in Psalm 141. A witch was sought out, and found at Endor.

That Saul knew the wrongness of what he did is seen in his seeking to disguise himself, and his failure to identify himself to the witch. The woman sensed some trouble and sought to evade the trap. Saul almost gave himself away by swearing in the Lord’s name, ‘No punishment shall come upon you for this thing!’ He used the Lord’s name to swear disobedience to the Lord! Saul in coming to the woman was actually seeking a word that would reverse the judgment of God against him.

The appearance of Samuel to the woman shocked her, and frightened her. Whatever experience she had had in divination before, she had not met one with this authority. Her own doom must have been made clear to her by Samuel's coming. She was not in control. Saul could not see the apparition, until the woman spoke to him, but then he did obeisance and bowed to the ground (28:14). Samuel's message to Saul in no way reversed the judgment at Ramah. All that the prophet had spoken to Saul had been the word of the Lord; why did Saul think that now he could get a word from Samuel, when he knew the Lord was not speaking to him. Yet a word of judgment does come – the next day Israel will fall into the hand of the Philistines, and Saul and his sons will be with Samuel in the grave. So much for the reversing of the judgment!

The fear of death overwhelmed Saul (28:20). Having been out of control, perhaps for the first time in her illicit practice, the woman saw a chance for getting the upper hand again. Fear of death in another person opens up all kinds of possibilities for the exercise of power and control. Saul was invited into a covenant with the witch, in the words, 'Hearken to me as I have hearkened to you (28:21–22).' This is precisely the opposite to his relationship with the Lord, to whom he hadn't listened, and who would now not listen to him (28:18). It is hard to envisage a more terrible situation for a person to come to. The feast that followed this conversation (28:24–25) was so normal and domestic – quite incongruous given that in a few hours Saul would be dead. It was an attempt to deny the truth of what was coming.

### **1Samuel 29–30: The Lord Keeps David from the Battle with Saul**

The story, having given us a key to read the following chapters with this description of Saul, now returns to the main focus. Chapter 28 has in fact jumped ahead in the story and now we go back to pick up the thread again.

The Philistine commanders were angered by the presence of David and his men in the force mustered to attack Saul (29:1–6). They recognised that this could provide an opportunity for David to win back favour with Saul. They do not know the prophetic word concerning Saul and David. They can only operate politically. Yet their thinking is what the Lord used to spare David from having to take up arms against Israel. It is unlikely that David would ever have done such a thing; his ambiguous speech in these chapters is remarkable! – see 28:2, 29:8. There is threat veiled under each of those statements.

David and his men returned to Ziklag, to find that it had been devastated by the Amalekite raiders. Their wives and children had been taken captive (30:1–6). This caused immense grief to the people, and led them to question David's leadership – it was he who had taken the men to muster with Achish. 'But David strengthened himself in God.' Previously Jonathan had been able to come to assist in prayer and encouragement (23:16); now David had to find recourse to the Lord alone, and he did.

With this fresh resolve, David sought the will of God through the intercessory ministry of the priest. The word came to pursue the band of raiders, and he took four hundred of the men, leaving the two hundred most exhausted behind (30:7–10). Having discovered the Amalekites, the Lord kept his word of promise and David and his men scored a great victory. Nothing was missing of all that had been taken. The 'wicked and base' amongst those who had gone with David believed that those who stayed behind should miss out on the booty (apart from the restoration of their family) and that they should be made to leave. David prevented them, and in fact made a statute that all of Israel share in the blessing of God. 30:23 again shows us the principle that David operated under – the booty was not the hard-earned right of the soldiers; it was God's gift to them. It was given freely and sovereignly and graciously. The booty was not only kept for the army – it was shared also for all who were friends of David in the region.

## 1Samuel 31 – 2Samuel 1: The Death of Saul

### 1Samuel 31: Saul Dies in Battle

The fighting of the Philistines against Israel was no new thing; Saul had encountered this at the beginning of his reign (1Sam. 13:5), and Israel had faced it even earlier (1Sam. 4:1–11). Saul had been raised up to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines (1Sam. 9:16), but such was the measure of his failure that he ended up dying at their hand. The word of the Lord concerning Saul and his family comes to pass – the death of the sons of Saul, including Jonathan by the hands of the Philistines is recorded first (31:2). In the battle, Saul was wounded by arrow. He asked his armour bearer to finish him off, to save him ignoble death by the uncircumcised Philistines, which may well have involved a degree of torture (31:3–4). David had once been the armour bearer, and would have approved of the armour bearer's refusal to do as Saul requested. This came from the fact that he 'feared greatly' – that is, he held the Lord's anointed king in awe. Saul fell on his own sword, suiciding rather than face the judgment of God upon him. His remorse was bitter, angry, and self-pitying right to the end. 31:7 gives the terrible picture of Israel fleeing and forsaking their inheritance, and the Philistines coming to dwell in their cities.

**31:8–13:** The discovery of the dead body of Saul became an opportunity for the Philistines to exult. They became 'evangelists' and sent messengers throughout the land 'to carry the good news to their idols and to the people.' That the idols need messengers to tell them tell us that they have no word to give, and that in fact they can do nothing themselves to bring good news. Saul's armour became a trophy in the temple of Ashtaroth, and his body was dishonoured by decapitation and public display. The inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead came to bring honour to Saul again, taking his body by night (as well as the bodies of his sons), burning them (to purify them) and burying them properly. Jabesh-gilead was the city that was destroyed in

Judges 21 to provide wives for the remaining Benjamites. So, there was a long association with the family of Benjamin. In 1Sam. 11 it was the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead who had been rescued by Saul in his first act of kingship, when they were under threat from Nahash the Ammonite. Now Saul was buried there, and all that had seemed so promising at the time of his call had fallen to the ground.

### 2Samuel 1: David's Response to Saul's Death

**1:1–2:** The discovery of Saul's death by David came by 'accident', when a refugee from Saul's camp stumbled into David's camp at Ziklag, three days after David had returned from the defeat of Amalekites. At this time, he and his men would have been busy engaged in rebuilding their city. The man's torn clothes and hair caked with dirt were signs of mourning. His falling to the ground before David indicated that he recognised in David the new king.

**1:3–5:** The man had 'escaped' from the camp of Israel, and was, as we see later, a conscripted Amalekite in the Israelite army, with no loyalty to the Lord or to Saul. The man reported to David the sad news of the defeat of the people of Israel in the battle with Philistines, and also the news of the death of Saul and Jonathan. David wanted to be sure that this news of Saul and Jonathan was accurate, and so asked for further details.

**1:6–10:** The man may well have thought that David was pleased to hear of these deaths, and so gladly gave more details. It may be that the man told a story that was not true when speaking of his killing of Saul, for it does not tally exactly with the details of 1Sam. 31, but possibly we are given details about what happened that fill out more the chain of events leading to Saul's death. Saul's suicide bid may well have failed, and so he suffered the ignominy of dying by the hand of an Amalekite. Unlike the armour bearer, the Amalekite did not fear greatly, and had no qualms in slaying Saul. Then he had been able to take Saul's crown and amulet from the body and had brought them to David.

**1:11–16:** David’s reaction was one of immediate mourning, which continued until evening – mourning over Saul and Jonathan and the people of the Lord. Then David reversed the Amalekite’s expectation. He had thought he was bringing good news to David, but in fact it was bad news for him. ‘How is it you were not afraid to put forth your hand to destroy the Lord’s anointed?’ As a sojourner he was a man who should have known the awe of the king, the Lord’s anointed. The man was executed on the spot for his arrogance and presumption. David’s word to him as he was in his death throes was, ‘Your blood be upon your head.’ It is a terrible thing to hear the crowd’s cry at the trial of Jesus, as the Lord’s anointed, great David’s greater son is being handed over to slaying, ‘His blood be on us and on our children (Matt. 27:25).’ No wonder then they were cut to the quick when Peter preached at Pentecost, and they saw that God had made both Lord and Christ this Jesus whom they had crucified (Acts 2:36–37). It was the recognition that death belonged to them – but amazing grace that the Lord they crucified poured out upon them a time of refreshing, a time of grace, and time of forgiveness and salvation (Acts 2:38–39, 3:18–21).

**1:17–27:** The lament of David flows from a heart full of sorrow, full of covenant confidence, and full of love. The repetition of the phrase, ‘Saul and Jonathan his son’ in vv. 4, 5, 12, and 17 adds to the poignancy of this chapter as we see the sorrow that David would have known to lose such a close friend, and also the faithfulness of Jonathan to his father to the end. ‘Thy glory...’ is literally, ‘The gazelle...’ What a scene of defeat if the gazelle, which so easily eludes the hunter in the heights is slain in that safest of environments. How are the mighty fallen – this phrase echoes in David’s mind, and recurs through the song of lament. It drips with grief that cannot be expressed. This scene is so devastating that it should not be published abroad; David did not want the enemies of the Lord exalting in so sad an occasion (1:20). Gilboa, where the tragedy occurred is to bear geographically the memory (1:21). As David mourns, the memory of Saul and Jonathan rushes back, especially at the height of their

powers. He says of them, ‘beloved and lovely’ – perhaps the former applying to Saul, the latter to Jonathan. He celebrates Jonathan’s faithfulness to his father. He thinks then of Saul specifically, calling on the women to mourn him. In his remembering of Jonathan his own grief is poured out – ‘I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan.’ He addresses him as he remembers him. ‘Very pleasant’ is better ‘very dear’ – his love was unlike anything David had known from any other, flowing from covenant loyalty as it did.

David wanted all Israel to know this song by heart, and it was to be written in the Book of Jashar, the nation’s anthology of great events. Such is David’s covenant loyalty that his ascension to the throne is marked by his lament for the passing of the kingship of Saul.

### **2Samuel 2–3: Abner Attempts to Maintain the Kingdom for Saul’s Family**

**In 2:1–4a** we see David return, with his wives, his family, and his army, from his exile to the territory of Judah, and take up residence in Hebron. This is tactically wise, but it is a decision which is given to him not by human wisdom but by the Lord. It was at Hebron that the men of Judah came to anoint David king over them. The event is told in such a passing manner, that it is clear much needed to be done to bring the reality of kingship to full fruit.

**2:4b–7:** When their act was reported to him, David sent an embassy to the men of Jabesh–gilead, who had buried Saul. He sent a greeting of covenant love, a pledge of kingly covenant faithfulness to them for the kindness of this act, and also an invitation for them to continue in their covenant faithfulness by acknowledging the act of the men of Judah in anointing him king.

**2:8–3:1:** We meet Abner, the commander of Saul’s army in more detail in these chapters. We were introduced to him as general in 1Sam. 14:50,51. He was Saul’s cousin. He was with Saul when David went to fight Goliath, and did not know to which family David

belonged (1Sam. 17:55). He saw his opportunity when David defeated the Philistine, and presented David to Saul with Goliath's head in his hand (1Sam. 17:57). Through this occasion we see in him that he was a skillful politician, getting on side with the right people. He was at the meal table when David was missing from the feast, and Saul's temper flared up in murderous anger against Jonathan (1Sam. 20:25). Finally we have seen previously when David snuck into the camp and took the spear and the water pot from beside Saul, whilst the king was under Abner's protection (1Sam. 26). This act of humiliation may have set his heart against David permanently.

Abner attempted to keep the line of Saul in power through his establishing of Ishbosheth as king. The people had clearly been divided in their loyalty by the fall of Saul's family, with the people of Judah following David. There was something of a stalemate until Abner took his men out to Gibeon. There, when the two opposing armies (David's army under the general Joab) faced each other across the pool there, it was agreed to set some champions against one another in a tournament, twelve from each army. Far from being play, these 24 strapping soldiers took swords with them and all 24 died together. If the tournament was meant to settle which was the victor army, no such resolution was possible, and instead a fierce battle broke out, which saw the army of Abner beaten back (v. 17).

The three sons of Zeruiah (David's sister) (v. 18) were key military men in David's army (and included Joab, the general), and they made it their aim here to eliminate Abner. Asahel was swift-footed, and set Abner in his target doggedly. He would not be shaken from this course. Even though Abner warned him, he would not stop pursuing, and so finally Abner struck him in the belly with his spear, piercing him through so that he died instantly. The discovery of his body must have shocked those who passed by, for all stopped there.

Joab and Abishai, Asahel's brothers, pursued Abner even more fiercely – this death would one day be avenged, although it was not to be on the battlefield that day. Reinforcements for Abner's army

gathered by nightfall, and Abner appealed to Joab for a truce on the basis that only bitterness could come from the continuing of this battle, for both sides were brethren in Israel. (It is interesting that Abner says this only from the position of weakness! – he does not actually operate in the covenant framework, but from expediency.) Following the truce, Abner and his army returned to their headquarters at Mahanaim, and Joab returned to Hebron, after having buried Asahel at Bethlehem. The urgency with which he returned to Hebron indicates the uncertainty of the times. As much as a truce was called, it was only a temporary halt to the hostilities which continued long and hard, slowly draining away the strength of Abner's army. This set the scene for a change of heart on the part of Abner the opportunist.

**3:2–5:** David's family continued to grow. We see in the narrative signs of the blessing of God on the Davidic kingship – the fact that only 19 of David's servants (not including Asahel) died in battle; and now the birth of the six sons at Hebron.

**3:6–21:** At Mahanaim, Abner, who was the real power behind Ishbosheth, was consolidating his position. He saw that Ishbosheth obviously would never make a strong king. In this powerful position, he also took liberties that were improper. Rizpah, Saul's concubine, was a sign of Saul's authority, and so of Ishbosheth's, and for Abner to take her as his was to disdain Ishbosheth's authority publicly and to attempt to take the throne for himself. Abner repudiated the idea that he was attempting to seize the throne, but there must have been power and threat in his anger, given that Ishbosheth was at a loss as to what course of action to take (v. 11). Abner implied that his action (not denied) was a trifling thing, given all his loyalty to Saul and his family. Because of this he turned sides, and promised to accomplish for David what the Lord has sworn to him. His professed loyalty to Saul and his family went out the window in a flash. He recognised the promise of the Lord to David, and yet he had set himself upon a course contrary to that promise until that time, by his attempt to secure for himself a powerful position through continuing the rule of

the line of Saul. And he had the gall to imply that he could accomplish what the Lord had promised, as though the Lord needed him to help! Proud, arrogant, self-serving, untrustworthy, a cunning opportunist – this is Abner (cf. James 1:5–8, 2Peter 2:10–22).

Abner sent messengers to David with the news of his changed loyalty. David required of Abner that he bring Michal, his wife, the daughter of Saul, to him again. He also sent messengers to Ishbosheth setting out this request. Given the difficulty that Rizpah had proved to the line of Saul, David may well have been wise in making this request of Abner. Abner then set about getting the elders of the northern tribes to consent to David's kingship, a state they had been looking for for some time. The people of Benjamin required special dealing, which Abner was able to accomplish. At a feast at Hebron, the deal was finalised, and Abner was sent off by David in peace to gather the tribes for a formal covenant making gathering.

**3:22–39:** The fact that David had entered into this arrangement with Abner enraged Joab when he heard of it. He protested to the king, and the fact that there is no record of David's reply may tell us of Joab's refusal to hear any response. He had instead a course of action that he was determined to follow through, based in his desire for revenge for his brother's death (and perhaps by a sense of threat for his own position), and which may have jeopardised all that David had arranged with Abner for the bringing together of the kingdom. Joab pursued a course of action hidden from the king, and assassinated Abner. When David heard of it, he indicated that he believed Joab and Abishai to be guilty in this death, and that he was innocent. He prayed for a thorough and ongoing judgment on Joab's family. Had he any part in this murder, then the judgments would have fallen on his own head.

Rather than celebrate Abner's death, Joab and those who were with him were told to mourn for him. Abner was given a state funeral, and David's lament (vv. 3–34) indicated a strong judgment on the sons of Zeruah. David also fasted a day for Abner, and this mourning was

noted and well received by the people. David's integrity at this point was what established all that Joab's vengeful deceitfulness had threatened to undo. At this point David felt his weakness particularly (v. 39).

## 2Samuel 4:1–5:5: The Kingship Comes To David

**4:1–4:** In these verses we are introduced to characters from Saul's kingdom who will feature in future events. The death of Abner meant the end of any attempt to revive the Saul kingship, and the future of those who had supported that line must have seemed to them dangerous (operating politically as they did.) Two key soldiers in Saul's army were brothers, Baanah and Rechab, leaders of raiding bands. Jonathan had a son, Mephibosheth, who was a five year old boy when his father died in battle. He had been dropped by his nurse at the time, and was lame.

**4:5–12:** The sons of Rimmon believed they could win the favour of David by removing Saul's descendant Ishbosheth from the scene. They murdered him as he slept, beheading him and taking his head to David as a trophy of war. Their words to David indicated that they did not understand the way David related to Saul – Here is the head of Ishbosheth, the son of Saul, your enemy, who sought your life; the Lord has avenged my lord, the king this day on Saul and on his offspring. David knew that the Lord had redeemed him out of all trouble without him ever having to act against the Lord's anointed one. The bloodthirsty two were executed on the spot, and Ishbosheth's head was given burial with Abner at Hebron.

**5:1–5:** All the tribes of Israel recognise David to be king at Hebron. They pledged covenant relationship with him – hence the phrase, We are your bone and your flesh. (Cf. Gen 2:23) They recognised all that the Lord had done for them through him even during the reign of Saul, and they acknowledged the promise of the Lord to him that he be prince and shepherd of the people of Israel.