

1 Samuel 17:19-30

Riches Versus Reproach

Now Saul and they and all the men of Israel were in the Valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines. And David rose early in the morning and left the sheep with a keeper and took the provisions and went, as Jesse had commanded him. And he came to the encampment as the host was going out to the battle line, shouting the war cry. And Israel and the Philistines drew up for battle, army against army. And David left the things in charge of the keeper of the baggage and ran to the ranks and went and greeted his brothers. As he talked with them, behold, the champion, the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name, came up out of the ranks of the Philistines and spoke the same words as before. And David heard him.

All the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him and were much afraid. And the men of Israel said, "Have you seen this man who has come up? Surely he has come up to defy Israel. And the king will enrich the man who kills him with great riches and will give him his daughter and make his father's house free in Israel." And David said to the men who stood by him, "What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" And the people answered him in the same way, "So shall it be done to the man who kills him."

Now Eliab his eldest brother heard when he spoke to the men. And Eliab's anger was kindled against David, and he said, "Why have you come down? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your presumption and the evil of your heart, for you have come down to see the battle." And David said, "What have I done now? Was it not but a word?" And he turned away from him toward another, and spoke in the same way, and the people answered him again as before. – 1 Samuel 17:19-30 ESV

For 40 days, the Israelite and Philistine armies had been in a standoff, as each day the Philistine champion made his way to the front lines and taunted the Israelites to send out their challenger. He continued to propose a simple solution to their conflict: A man-to-man fight between the greatest Israelite warrior and himself. The only problem was that the Israelites, should they agree to his conditions and their champion lose, would become the slaves of the Philistines. Then there was the other problem concerning Goliath's supernatural size. Based on the numbers in the text, he would have been over nine feet tall. Samuel, the author of the book, spends a great deal of time providing details regarding Goliath's vitals.

He was over nine feet tall! He wore a bronze helmet, and his bronze coat of mail weighed 125 pounds. He also wore bronze leg armor, and he carried a bronze javelin on his shoulder. The shaft of his spear was as heavy and thick as a weaver's beam, tipped with an iron spearhead that weighed 15 pounds. His armor bearer walked ahead of him carrying a shield. – 1 Samuel 17:4-7 NLT

While there is debate over the validity of the numbers involved in Samuel's description and doubt among some theologians as to the exact height of Goliath, it is safe to say that he was most likely a very large individual and a formidable foe. Each time he stood before the Israelites and issued his challenge, they reacted in the same way: "All the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him and were much afraid" (1 Samuel 17:24 ESV).

David arrived on the scene just in time to witness this daily event, and he was shocked; not by Goliath's size but by the Israelites' reaction to him. When he asked those around him what was going on, he was informed that the king had offered a reward to any man who would dare stand against Goliath and defeat him.

The king has offered a huge reward to anyone who kills him. He will give that man one of his daughters for a wife, and the man's entire family will be exempted from paying taxes! – 1 Samuel 17:25 NLT

Talk about incentive. But no one was taking Saul up on his offer. While the reward was great, it had proved insufficient to entice anyone to risk life and limb against Goliath. But David saw things a bit differently. The riches offered by the king were secondary to him. The real issue was the honor of Israel and, by extension, God's reputation.

*What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and **takes away the reproach from Israel**? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy **the armies of the living God**? – 1 Samuel 17:26 NLT*

They were the people of God and had the Almighty on their side. David could not believe they could stand there day after day and allow this uncircumcised pagan to taunt them and their God. Their fear was proof of their lack of faith in God. Their failure to fight was evidence of their limited view of God's power.

But there is an interesting thing going on in this scene that can be easily overlooked. The men who were part of the armies of Israel were there unwillingly. They had been conscripted by Saul. He had formed his armies by enforcing a mandatory draft. God had warned the Israelites that this was going to happen when they made their demand for a king just like all the other nations. In giving them exactly what they asked for, God warned the Israelites:

"This is how a king will reign over you," Samuel said. "The king will draft your sons and assign them to his chariots and his charioteers, making them run before his chariots. Some will be generals and captains in his army, some will be forced to plow in his fields and harvest his crops, and some will make his weapons and chariot equipment. The king will take your daughters from you and force them to cook and bake and make perfumes for him." – 1 Samuel 8:11-13 NLT

Even Goliath recognized what was going on. When he issued his challenge, he was very specific in how he addressed the troops of Israel.

*“Why are you all coming out to fight?” he called. “I am the Philistine champion, but you are only the **servants** of Saul.” – 1 Samuel 17:8 NLT*

In questioning their presence on the battlefield, Goliath was appealing to their feelings of regret and anger at having to be forced into the king's service. These were not professional soldiers. Goliath refers to them as “servants” of Saul. The Hebrew word he used is *`ebed* and it was commonly used to refer to one who was the slave of another. His use of this word was intended to cause the Israelites to turn on Saul, their commander, and to force him to step up and do what needed to be done. This was his battle, not theirs. In demanding that the Israelites choose one man to come out and fight him, he was actually challenging Saul, who knew full well that the daily taunts of Goliath were aimed at him. This explains why Saul will attempt to get David to wear his armor when he goes out to face Goliath. In the off chance that David should win, it might appear that Goliath was defeated by Saul. And if David should lose, it left Saul without his armor and free to blend into the troops when the Philistine came to find him.

But even Saul could find no incentive to face Goliath. His own personal reputation was not enough to make him risk his life standing up to the Philistine champion. Even Eliab, David's oldest brother, was angered to see him at the battlefront. He jumped all over David, accusing him of neglecting the flocks and his duties just so he could witness the battle. But Eliab's emotional outburst was most likely driven by embarrassment at his own fear and failure to face the champion. His youngest brother was witnessing his spinelessness firsthand. But even this was not enough to make Eliab step forward and face Goliath. From the king down to the cooks, no one was willing to fight the giant. No one could find the motivation to do what appeared to be the impossible. But David would, and his motivation would not be the reward offered by Saul, but the reproach issued by this uncircumcised enemy of the armies of the **living** God.

David's view of God as alive and active would become a recurring theme in his psalms. His God was not distant and disconnected from everyday life, but actively involved.

*The Lord **lives**, and blessed be my rock, and exalted be the God of my salvation. – Psalm 18:46 ESV*

*My soul thirsts for God, for the **living God**. – Psalm 42:2 ESV*

David's God was living, not dead. His God was active, not absent. His God's power was greater than that of the Philistines or even that of their champion. David was about to prove that what was missing in this scenario was not a powerful man to defeat Goliath, but a faithful man who believed in the power of God.

1 Samuel 17:31-40

The Lord Will Deliver

When the words that David spoke were heard, they repeated them before Saul, and he sent for him. And David said to Saul, "Let no man's heart fail because of him. Your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." And Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him, for you are but a youth, and he has been a man of war from his youth." But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep sheep for his father. And when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him. Your servant has struck down both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God." And David said, "The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." And Saul said to David, "Go, and the Lord be with you!"

Then Saul clothed David with his armor. He put a helmet of bronze on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail, and David strapped his sword over his armor. And he tried in vain to go, for he had not tested them. Then David said to Saul, "I cannot go with these, for I have not tested them." So David put them off. Then he took his staff in his hand and chose five smooth stones from the brook and put them in his shepherd's pouch. His sling was in his hand, and he approached the Philistine. – 1 Samuel 17:31-40 ESV

For most of us, the story of David and Goliath has become little more than a motivational lesson used to conjure up images of facing the giants in our lives. Like David, we can stand up against the formidable foes we face and come out victorious – as long as we have faith. And while there may be aspects of this story that can be used to encourage our personal faith and motivate us to stand up to the seemingly insurmountable obstacles in our lives, I don't think that was intended as the main takeaway. We must read this story while keeping it in its appropriate context. It is when we isolate biblical narratives and remove them from their context that we run the risk of arriving at interpretations that fail to meet the author's original intentions.

This is a story about God and the people of Israel. They have had a less-than-stellar relationship with the God who chose them over all the other nations on earth. He had rescued them out of captivity in Egypt. He had faithfully led them through the wilderness. He had given them the land of Canaan just as he had promised. But they had failed to eliminate all the nations that occupied the land. As a result, they were surrounded by hostile enemies that not only attempted to eliminate them, but were highly successful in negatively influencing their faithfulness to God by causing them to worship false gods.

The period of the judges, which followed their occupation of the land, was a time of turmoil, marked by their constant unfaithfulness, God's punishment, their eventual remorse, and their deliverance by God's appointed judge. This cycle repeated itself over and over again. Then it

ended with the people demanding that God give them a king just like all the other nations. So, God gave them Saul. He fit the bill. He met the requirements they asked for. But he not only proved to be a lousy king, but an unfaithful and disobedient one as well. So, God determined to replace him with a man after His own heart. He chose David, a young shepherd boy. The story of David and Goliath is the first glimpse we are given of this young man's faith and the stark contrast it provides to the unfaithfulness of Saul.

Goliath's call that the Israelites send out a man to face him was a direct challenge to King Saul. He clearly indicated that the soldiers in Saul's army were nothing more than his slaves or bondservants. They had been drafted into military service just as God had warned they would be (1 Samuel 8:11-13). Goliath was challenging Saul to a winner-take-all, one-on-one face-off. But Saul cowered far from the front lines, unwilling to take on the giant. In fact, he offered an attractive reward to anyone who would step up and take on the challenge. But there had been no takers.

Until David arrived on the scene. As Saul's armor bearer, he had direct access to the king and was able to tell him to his face, "Let no man's heart fail because of him. Your servant will go and fight with this Philistine" (1 Samuel 17:32 ESV). Saul attempted to dissuade David, reminding him that he was no match for this veteran warrior. But David simply recounted his own exploits while serving as a shepherd over his father's flocks.

*Your servant used to keep sheep for his father. And when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him. Your servant has struck down both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, **for he has defied the armies of the living God.** – 1 Samuel 17:34-36 ESV*

For David, it was all about doing the right thing. As a shepherd, it was his duty to protect the flock and he was willing to do whatever it took to fulfill his responsibility. Why would this situation be any different? This uncircumcised Philistine was defying the armies of the living God. He was treating the king of Israel, and therefore the God of Israel, with disrespect. In David's mind, this had nothing to do with the size of the foe or the odds against victory. It was about integrity and faithfulness. Someone had to stand up to the enemy of God, and if no one else was willing, David would do it in the strength of the Lord.

"The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." – 1 Samuel 17:37 ESV

Saul reluctantly agreed, telling David, "Go, and the Lord be with you!" (1 Samuel 17:37 ESV). And then he came up with a plan. He would dress David in his own armor in the hopes that this might fool the Philistines into thinking that the king of Israel had finally agreed to do battle with their champion. In the unlikely case that David won, the glory would go to Saul. Should he lose,

it would be easy for Saul, without his armor, to disappear into the crowd and not be humiliated as the defeated king of Israel.

But Saul's armor was much too large for David, so he removed it. He would face Goliath with the very same weapons with which he used against the lion and the bear: A sling and a few stones. His real weapon was God Himself. Remember what he told Saul: "The Lord ... will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." To David, Goliath was nothing more than another enemy of God. He doesn't mention his height or the weight of his weapons. He doesn't dwell on the size of the task or the odds against his victory. He simply recognized an enemy of the living God and the need for someone to do something about him.

Goliath represented an enemy of God, not David. This Philistine had done nothing to David. He didn't stand as a personal problem or insurmountable obstacle in the young shepherd boy's life. Goliath is presented in the story as the epitome of the ungodly and unrighteous enemy of God and His people. He is formidable and seemingly invincible. He is loud and brash. He questions the bravery of God's people and the power of God Himself. He is self-assured and confident of his victory. He sees Saul as a coward and the people of God as nothing more than slaves of their king. So, he taunts and ridicules them. And they take it, day after day.

But not David. He is a man after God's own heart, and as such, he is unwilling to sit back and listen to this Philistine berate his people and demean the honor of God's name. He fully believed that the living God of Israel was capable of bringing victory over Goliath and he would be God's chosen instrument.

1 Samuel 17:41-49

The Battle is the Lord's

And the Philistine moved forward and came near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him. And when the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him, for he was but a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance. And the Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. The Philistine said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the beasts of the field." Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hand."

When the Philistine arose and came and drew near to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. And David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone and slung it and struck the Philistine on his forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell on his face to the ground. – 1 Samuel 17:41-49 ESV

As usual, it would be so easy to make this passage about David, but while he is the central character of the narrative, he is far from the main focus. Even David himself will not allow us to make him the leading man. He goes out of his way to place the attention where it rightly belongs: On God. Repeatedly, Samuel, the book's author, draws the reader's attention to the words of David as he stands to face the giant, Goliath:

*"I come to you in the name of **the Lord of Heaven's Armies**—the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied." – 1 Samuel 17:45 NLT*

*"Today **the Lord will conquer you...**" – 1 Samuel 17:46a NLT*

*"...and the whole world will know that **there is a God in Israel!**" – 1 Samuel 17:46b NLT*

*"And everyone assembled here will know that **the Lord rescues his people...**" – 1 Samuel 17:47a NLT*

*"**This is the Lord's battle**, and he will give you to us!" – 1 Samuel 17:47b NLT*

It is so easy for us to focus on David, his sling, and the five smooth stones. We could even spend time trying to conjecture why he chose five stones when only one was needed. Was this a sign of a lack of faith? Based on 2 Samuel 21:15-22, some have conjectured that Goliath had four equally large brothers whom David was prepared to deal with once Goliath was dead. But no

explanation is given as to why David selected five stone instead of one. While the details provided to us by Samuel are important, we should not allow them to overshadow what is going on in the narrative. David, the man after God's own heart, who has been anointed to be the next king of Israel, has stepped into a situation where he has found the armies of Israel in an awkward stalemate with the Philistines. They have been offered a challenge by the Philistine champion to send out a warrior to do battle with him, man to man. But Saul, who has been rejected by God as king, is gripped by fear and unwilling to do what needs to be done. He has no faith – in himself or his God. And his lack of faith in God was not a recent development. Early on in Saul's reign, Samuel warned the people of Israel:

“And when you saw that Nahash the king of the Ammonites came against you, you said to me, ‘No, but a king shall reign over us,’ when the Lord your God was your king. And now behold the king whom you have chosen, for whom you have asked; behold, the Lord has set a king over you. If you will fear the Lord and serve him and obey his voice and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, and if both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the Lord your God, it will be well. But if you will not obey the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then the hand of the Lord will be against you and your king.” – 1 Samuel 12:12-15 ESV

Several years later, Saul found himself in a predicament. The Philistines had gathered to do battle with the Israelites, fielding “thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen and troops like the sand on the seashore in multitude” (1 Samuel 13:5 ESV). And Saul's “crack” troops scattered when they heard the news.

When the men of Israel saw that they were in trouble (for the people were hard pressed), the people hid themselves in caves and in holes and in rocks and in tombs and in cisterns. – 1 Samuel 13:6 ESV

The soldiers who remained with Saul were petrified at the prospect of having to face the Philistines. And this was after Jonathan, Saul's son, had just defeated the Philistines in a battle.

Saul had been instructed by Samuel to go to Gilgal and to wait seven days. On the seventh day, Saul became anxious because the prophet had not shown up, so he decided to do the prophet's job and offer a burnt offering to God. But as soon as he had done so, Samuel arrived and expressed his anger with Saul at his impetuosity and disobedience.

“You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command of the Lord your God, with which he commanded you. For then the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you.” – 1 Samuel 13:13-14 ESV

Saul lacked faith in God. When confronted with a desperate situation, he took matters into his own hands. Yes, he offered a sacrifice to God, but he did so more out of a sense of superstition

or as a form of good luck than anything else. Like rubbing a rabbit's foot, Saul hoped that offering a burnt offering to God would somehow obligate Him to provide victory. But notice the difference between his actions and those of David. David faced the very same enemy and was greatly outmanned; a shepherd boy facing a well-trained Philistine champion. But unlike Saul, David was fully confident in the face of overwhelming odds because he focused on God and not himself. This wasn't going to be his battle, it would be God's. And the victory that was coming would not be his doing, it would be God's. The Philistines were not his enemies, they were the enemies of God. And the taunts and jeers of Goliath weren't really directed at David, but against God. Whether he realized it or not, Goliath had defied the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel. Now he was going to have to face the consequences.

The real lesson here is that the battle between the enemies of God and the people of God is always the Lord's battle. Yes, we may have to get involved, but our participation is not what guarantees the victory. David's sling and stone were used by God to defeat Goliath, but they were not the primary cause of victory. God was. He always is.

When the people of Judah had faced the Moabites and Ammonites, God said to them:

"Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed at this great horde, for the battle is not yours but God's. Tomorrow go down against them. Behold, they will come up by the ascent of Ziz. You will find them at the end of the valley, east of the wilderness of Jeruel. You will not need to fight in this battle. Stand firm, hold your position, and see the salvation of the Lord on your behalf, O Judah and Jerusalem." Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed. Tomorrow go out against them, and the Lord will be with you. – 2 Chronicles 20:15-17 ESV

Years later, when the people of Judah faced the Assyrians, King Hezekiah encouraged them with these words:

"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or dismayed before the king of Assyria and all the horde that is with him, for there are more with us than with him. With him is an arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God, to help us and to fight our battles." – 2 Chronicles 32:7-8 ESV

David understood that this was far more than just another battle. They were being confronted by the enemies of God and, as the people of God, they had an obligation to place their faith in the superiority of the Lord of Heavens Armies. This wasn't about a shepherd boy facing a well-armed, seasoned soldier. This was about the God of Israel doing battle with those who would defy His name and His honor. And David had all the confidence in the world that his God could use a simple shepherd boy, a sling, and a few smooth stones to snatch victory out of the jaws of defeat.

1 Samuel 17:50-58

A King to Come

So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and struck the Philistine and killed him. There was no sword in the hand of David. Then David ran and stood over the Philistine and took his sword and drew it out of its sheath and killed him and cut off his head with it. When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled. And the men of Israel and Judah rose with a shout and pursued the Philistines as far as Gath and the gates of Ekron, so that the wounded Philistines fell on the way from Shaaraim as far as Gath and Ekron. And the people of Israel came back from chasing the Philistines, and they plundered their camp. And David took the head of the Philistine and brought it to Jerusalem, but he put his armor in his tent.

As soon as Saul saw David go out against the Philistine, he said to Abner, the commander of the army, "Abner, whose son is this youth?" And Abner said, "As your soul lives, O king, I do not know." And the king said, "Inquire whose son the boy is." And as soon as David returned from the striking down of the Philistine, Abner took him, and brought him before Saul with the head of the Philistine in his hand. And Saul said to him, "Whose son are you, young man?" And David answered, "I am the son of your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite." – 1 Samuel 17:50-58 ESV

David had just conquered the enemy of the Lord. He had slain Goliath and cut off the giant's head with his own sword. As a result, the Philistines ran rather than face the prospect of becoming slaves to their much-hated enemies, the Jews. It had been Goliath who had set the conditions for the battle, guaranteeing the enslavement of the army of the losing combatant. But his troops, never expecting him to lose, were unwilling to keep the terms he had established. They turned and ran. David's unexpected victory gave the troops of Israel new life and the boldness to pursue the Philistines, all the way back to Goliath's home town. One man's faith in God had revealed the power of God, and provided the people of God with the incentive they needed to fight the enemies of God.

David, fresh off his victory and still carrying the severed head of Goliath in his hand, was brought before King Saul. It seems that, while David was already in the employment of Saul, acting as his armor bearer and court musician, the king knew little about him. Neither Saul or his commander, Abner, knew who David's father was. Which is interesting, because chapter 16 makes it quite clear that Saul had been well-informed about David before he conscripted him into service.

One of the servants said to Saul, "One of Jesse's sons from Bethlehem is a talented harp player. Not only that—he is a brave warrior, a man of war, and has good judgment. He is also a fine-looking young man, and the Lord is with him."

So Saul sent messengers to Jesse to say, "Send me your son David, the shepherd." Jesse responded by sending David to Saul, along with a young goat, a donkey loaded with bread, and a wineskin full of wine. – 1 Samuel 16:18-19 NLT

But enough time had passed so that Saul had forgotten how David had come into his service. It seems that Saul was not in the habit of concerning himself with the life details of the men whom he forced into service as his soldiers. God had warned the people of Israel just what kind of king Saul would become.

The king will draft your sons and assign them to his chariots and his charioteers, making them run before his chariots. Some will be generals and captains in his army, some will be forced to plow in his fields and harvest his crops, and some will make his weapons and chariot equipment. The king will take your daughters from you and force them to cook and bake and make perfumes for him. – 1 Samuel 8:11-13 NLT

So, it's not surprising that Saul had no idea who David really was. But it was important that he learn the name of David's father so that he could fulfill his promise of the reward.

The king has offered a huge reward to anyone who kills him. He will give that man one of his daughters for a wife, and the man's entire family will be exempted from paying taxes! – 1 Samuel 17:25 NLT

When Saul asked David who his father was, David responded, "I am the son of your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite" (1 Samuel 17:58 ESV). In answering Saul's question, David was revealing something even more significant. This young shepherd boy was from the village of Bethlehem, a somewhat obscure and insignificant spot on the map that would one day become the most important destination in the world. It is there that the future Messiah of the Jews would be born.

And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. – Luke 2:4 NLT

The prophet Micah prophesied regarding the village of Bethlehem:

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, are only a small village among all the people of Judah. Yet a ruler of Israel will come from you, one whose origins are from the distant past. – Micah 5:2 ESV

While David's defeat of Goliath seems to be the central focus of the story, there is far more going on than initially meets the eye. God is actually paving the way for a much greater victory over a much more powerful enemy. He is setting the stage for not only David's kingship, but also that of His Son, the future Messiah who would be the King of kings and Lord of lords. David slew one man and provided his people with temporary relief from slavery. But Jesus Christ

would defeat sin and death, providing men and women with the means by which they might be free from slavery to both. David's victory breathed new life into the Israelite army, but the victory accomplished by Jesus brought eternal life to all those who place their faith in Him. David defeated Goliath. Jesus defeated Satan. David's victory was temporary. Jesus' victory was permanent. The victory David accomplished required the life of a pagan, godless Philistine. The victory Jesus accomplished required the innocent life of God's own Son. Goliath died for his own sins, having defied the armies of the living God. Jesus died for the sins of others, so that He might satisfy the just demands of a holy God.

The story surrounding the life of David is intended to foreshadow and point towards the life of Jesus. The young shepherd boy from Bethlehem serves as a representation of the Good Shepherd to come.

David was about to find out that his victory, while good news to many, was going to end up creating bad news for him. His defeat of Goliath was going to make him a household name and a hero among the people of Israel. And his growing reputation was going to result in a growing rift between he and King Saul. David's greatest conflicts were ahead of him, not behind him. And his most formidable enemy would prove to be none other than the king of Israel, Saul himself. David's victory would produce in Saul a growing jealousy, resentment, and animosity.

1 Samuel 18:1-9

A Friend and a Foe

As soon as he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. And Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house. Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt. And David went out and was successful wherever Saul sent him, so that Saul set him over the men of war. And this was good in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of Saul's servants.

As they were coming home, when David returned from striking down the Philistine, the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with songs of joy, and with musical instruments. And the women sang to one another as they celebrated,

*"Saul has struck down his thousands,
and David his ten thousands."*

And Saul was very angry, and this saying displeased him. He said, "They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed thousands, and what more can he have but the kingdom?" And Saul eyed David from that day on. – 1 Samuel 18:1-9 ESV

David's victory over Goliath was going to bring him great fame and a full-time position on Saul's staff. There would be no more dividing his time between the sheepfold and the palace. Saul gave him a permanent place on the royal payroll. Not only that, David was able to strike up a deep and lasting friendship with Saul's son, Jonathan. But David's close proximity to the king was going to result in a growing tension. His popularity among the people was unprecedented. He was a rock star with a growing fan base, and people were not only singing his praises, but they were also writing songs about him. All of this was far from pleasing to Saul. He could recall the warning from Samuel the prophet.

"But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you." – 1 Samuel 13:14 ESV

Those words rang in his ears and he couldn't help but be paranoid and a bit defensive regarding David's growing popularity. He began to question David's loyalty and wonder whether this ambitious young man would be satisfied with fame. Would he eventually set his sights on the throne? Saul was concerned that David would use his friendship with Jonathan and his access to the palace to stage a coup. He intended to keep David close so that he could keep an eye on him.

This part of David's life is fascinating. So far, he has done everything right. He had proven to be a faithful son, caring for his family's flocks, even returning to care for them after having received the anointing of the prophet Samuel. He had obediently followed his father's commands, taking food to his brothers on the front line. Then, when he had seen the Philistine champion and heard his taunts, he had been shocked that no one had stepped forward to deal with this pagan who was defying the God of Israel. So, he offered his services to the king, and placing his hope in God, he defeated Goliath with nothing more than a sling and a stone. But despite all this, David found himself under the suspicious and watchful eye of the king. He had made a new friend in Jonathan, but was quickly developing a formidable enemy in Saul. And it is not yet clear whether David even knew that his anointing by Samuel had been for the kingship of Israel. He most likely saw himself as just another servant of Saul, trying to do the right thing and serve the king in whatever way he could. Up to this point, David had been Saul's armor bearer and harp player. He had done the king a huge favor by eliminating the threat of Goliath. And it seems that whatever David did, he did well. In fact, the text tells us:

Whatever Saul asked David to do, David did it successfully. So Saul made him a commander over the men of war, an appointment that was welcomed by the people and Saul's officers alike. – 1 Samuel 18:5 NLT

David was faithful, and had the Spirit of God dwelling upon him. But all his success would prove his downfall. In God's providential plan, He had David right where He wanted him. None of this was a surprise to God. Saul's hatred of David was not only expected, but it was planned. All of this was part of God's divine strategy for preparing David to be king. David had received the anointing to be king, but now he was going to get the practical training required for him to be the kind of king God intended for him to be.

Whether David realized it or not, he was being placed in God's boot camp for kingship. David was going to have a ringside seat to watch lousy leadership on display. But there were other valuable lessons that David would need to learn for him to rule righteously. His world was about to be rocked. Those days in the pasture tending sheep were going to look increasingly more appealing. But God had much to teach David. He was a man *after* God's own heart. In other words, he had a passion for the same things God did, but now God was going to begin the process of giving David a godly heart. His passions for the things of God were going to deepen. His love for the ways of God would become richer and fuller. His trust in the strength of God would grow. His reliance upon the care and provision of God would increase exponentially. And it would all begin with Saul's growing hatred and animosity for him. Things were about to heat up, because God's lessons for David were about to start up.

1 Samuel 18:10-16

King Class 101

The next day a harmful spirit from God rushed upon Saul, and he raved within his house while David was playing the lyre, as he did day by day. Saul had his spear in his hand. And Saul hurled the spear, for he thought, "I will pin David to the wall." But David evaded him twice.

Saul was afraid of David because the Lord was with him but had departed from Saul. So Saul removed him from his presence and made him a commander of a thousand. And he went out and came in before the people. And David had success in all his undertakings, for the Lord was with him. And when Saul saw that he had great success, he stood in fearful awe of him. But all Israel and Judah loved David, for he went out and came in before them. – 1 Samuel 18:10-16 ESV

Saul had his eye on David. He didn't trust him, and viewed David as a threat to his crown and resented this young upstart's growing popularity among the people. While he had been grateful for David's victory over Goliath and the Philistines, it had actually made things much worse for Saul. And it wasn't long before his oversensitive ego and the "harmful spirit from the Lord" (1 Samuel 16:14 ESV) ganged up on him and produced some less-than-normal outcomes.

At one point, Saul was having one of his "fits" and David was playing his usual role as musical therapist, when the king grabbed a spear and attempted to pin David to the wall with it. Not once, but twice. The text tells us that Saul feared David. He knew that the same Spirit of God that used to dwell on him was now on this young man. And Saul knew that fact did not bode well for him. He was crazy, but sane enough to remember what the prophet, Samuel, had said.

"I will not return with you. For you have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you from being king over Israel." – 1 Samuel 13:26 ESV

"The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you. – 1 Samuel 13:28 ESV

Saul had put two and two together and reached the conclusion that David was the one who would be replacing him as king, and it scared him. He knew his days were numbered. So, to deal with the frustration created by David's constant presence, Saul decided to send him away. Part of the reasoning behind this move was likely out of his love for David. He genuinely loved this young man, and regretted his inability to control his anger against him. By sending David away, he removed any temptation to harm David and provided a distance between the two of them that acted as a buffer of protection.

Saul made David a commander over a thousand men. But this new role did little to solve Saul's jealousy problem. It seems that David was quite successful as a leader and continued to impress

the people with his skills as a soldier. Verse 14 tells us, “And David had success in all his undertakings, for the Lord was with him.”

This phrase is very reminiscent of statements made regarding Joseph during his stay in Egypt. It seemed that wherever Joseph ended up, God blessed him and all those around him. God’s presence assured Joseph’s success, and the same thing proved true for David. His success and subsequent popularity only served to drive an even greater wedge between he and the king. We’re told, “when Saul saw that he had great success, he stood in fearful awe of him” (1 Samuel 18:15 ESV). All Saul could do was stand back and watch in wonder as David’s stock continued to rise as his own fell. The prophesy of Samuel was coming true right before his eyes. God had rejected him as king, and was ripping the kingdom out of his hands and giving it to someone better. This was a difficult pill for Saul to swallow and he would prove to be a lousy patient, refusing to accept God’s remedy for his own disobedience.

Yet, David was loved by all. He was young, handsome, successful, and extremely popular. God was with him and all the people were for him. All Saul could do was wait for the inevitable to happen. But Satan, the arch-enemy of God would not take this change in leadership lying down. He was not about to relinquish Saul’s hold on power because Saul was the kind of king Satan wanted ruling over Israel. He was disobedient to God. He was self-centered and egotistical. He had proven adept at twisting the words of God and blaming everyone else for his mistakes. Watching Saul get replaced by a man after God’s own heart was not something Satan was eager to experience. So, he did everything in his power to resist the will of God by influencing the king God had rejected.

The following years of David’s life would be marked by ongoing and increasing animosity between himself and the king. His path to the throne would be a rocky one and far from a smooth transition of power. But God was in control of the entire process. None of the events recorded in David’s life reflect a flaw in God’s plan or an inability on His part to control the situation. This was all part of the divine strategy for preparing God’s anointed king for his role as the shepherd of Israel. David was going to learn that being in the will of God does not guarantee a trouble-free life. Becoming the kind of man God intended him to be was going to require painful lessons in failure, defeat, loss, and abandonment. But he would also learn to recognize his own weakness and trust in the power and presence of God.

1 Samuel 18:17-30

Curses, Foiled Again!

Then Saul said to David, "Here is my elder daughter Merab. I will give her to you for a wife. Only be valiant for me and fight the Lord's battles." For Saul thought, "Let not my hand be against him, but let the hand of the Philistines be against him." And David said to Saul, "Who am I, and who are my relatives, my father's clan in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the king?" But at the time when Merab, Saul's daughter, should have been given to David, she was given to Adriel the Meholathite for a wife.

Now Saul's daughter Michal loved David. And they told Saul, and the thing pleased him. Saul thought, "Let me give her to him, that she may be a snare for him and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him." Therefore Saul said to David a second time, "You shall now be my son-in-law." And Saul commanded his servants, "Speak to David in private and say, 'Behold, the king has delight in you, and all his servants love you. Now then become the king's son-in-law.'" And Saul's servants spoke those words in the ears of David. And David said, "Does it seem to you a little thing to become the king's son-in-law, since I am a poor man and have no reputation?" And the servants of Saul told him, "Thus and so did David speak." Then Saul said, "Thus shall you say to David, 'The king desires no bride-price except a hundred foreskins of the Philistines, that he may be avenged of the king's enemies.'" Now Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines. And when his servants told David these words, it pleased David well to be the king's son-in-law. Before the time had expired, David arose and went, along with his men, and killed two hundred of the Philistines. And David brought their foreskins, which were given in full number to the king, that he might become the king's son-in-law. And Saul gave him his daughter Michal for a wife. But when Saul saw and knew that the Lord was with David, and that Michal, Saul's daughter, loved him, Saul was even more afraid of David. So Saul was David's enemy continually.

Then the commanders of the Philistines came out to battle, and as often as they came out David had more success than all the servants of Saul, so that his name was highly esteemed. – 1 Samuel 18:17-30 ESV

In attempting to rid himself of David, Saul had tried the direct approach. On multiple occasions, in a fit of rage, he unsuccessfully attempted to kill David with a spear. But his failures only fueled his desire to get rid of this threat to his reign as king. So, he became more clandestine and creative in his efforts. He would develop plans to expose David to life-threatening circumstances, while retaining a façade of innocence and non-complicity.

For whatever reason, Saul had not yet kept his promise to reward the one who killed the Philistine champion. He had promised to "enrich the man who kills him with great riches and will give him his daughter and make his father's house free in Israel" (1 Samuel 17:25 ESV). Yet, David, the one who had met the conditions to receive the reward, had not been given Saul's daughter to marry. And when Saul finally decided to give David his eldest daughter, Merab, to

marry, he added conditions and exposed his expectations. David could marry Merab as long as he agreed to fight Israel's enemies. It was this added condition that revealed Saul's true motivation. He cleverly disguised his intent by telling David, "Only be valiant for me and **fight the Lord's battles**" (1 Samuel 18:17 ESV). He appealed to David's sense of valor and his dedication to God. He was going to use David's faithfulness to God and country to bring about his demise.

For Saul thought, "Let not my hand be against him, but let the hand of the Philistines be against him." – 1 Samuel 18:17 ESV

But David, ignorant of Saul's devices, simply turned down the king's generous offer, because he did not see himself as worthy of the honor.

Because of David's polite refusal to accept Merab's hand in marriage, she was eventually given to another. But Saul would soon learn that his other daughter, Michal, loved David very much. It has already been revealed that David and Saul's son, Jonathan, had developed a very close friendship. No doubt, David spent a great deal of time in Jonathan's company and, as a result, had gotten to know Michal well. Upon discovering his daughter's affection for David, Saul saw another opportunity to rid himself of David once and for all.

Saul thought, "Let me give her to him, that she may be a snare for him and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him." – 1 Samuel 18:21 ESV

He already had a plan. He would give Michal to David but only on the condition that he pay a dowry that consisted of one hundred Philistine foreskins. Once again, Saul appeals to David's sense of duty. He knew full well that David came from a less-than-affluent family and would be unable to pay the customary dowry fit for the daughter of a king. He would allow David to use his military skills and his hatred for the enemies of God to come up with a somewhat unorthodox dowry payment. In all of this, we are given a glimpse into David's character. Saul sent his servants to prime the pump and to convince David to strongly consider Saul's offer of marriage to Michal. But David simply responded, "How can a poor man from a humble family afford the bride price for the daughter of a king?" (1 Samuel 18:23 NLT). He knew he was out of his league. He was unworthy to be the son-in-law to the king. He didn't have the financial means or the family heritage to warrant such a thing. But that was not going to deter Saul. He would actually use David's financial condition to his advantage, replacing the customary dowry price with that of the 100 Philistine foreskins. He knew that David, being a man of integrity, would take him up on his offer. But he also knew that the risk involved in David accomplishing such a feat was going to be great, and the likelihood of David dying in the process was even greater.

Verse 27 matter-of-factly states: "David arose and went, along with his men, and killed two hundred of the Philistines. And David brought their foreskins, which were given in full number to the king, that he might become the king's son-in-law. And Saul gave him his daughter Michal for a wife" (1 Samuel 18:27 ESV).

Much to Saul's chagrin, David took the king up on his offer and fulfilled the requirement to take Michal as his wife. He even doubled the number of foreskins, just to make sure that he didn't underpay for the privilege of becoming the king's son-in-law.

Saul's plan failed, and his strategy to eliminate David actually elevated him. Now David was a permanent member of his family. He was married to his daughter and would more than likely give him grandchildren and potential heirs to the throne. Not only that, Saul became increasingly aware that God was with David. Everything he did was successful, and with each successive blessing of God, Saul's fear of David grew exponentially.

So Saul was David's enemy continually. – 1 Samuel 18:30 ESV

This last line is significant, because it reveals that the animosity between Saul and David was one-way. David had done nothing but honor Saul, serving him as his personal armor bearer, court musician, and military commander. While David's reputation had grown, it never appears that David was out for fame and glory. He was not prideful or arrogant. There is no indication that he had aspirations for the crown. It is still unclear whether David even knew that his earlier anointing by Samuel had been to make him the next king of Israel. No, David simply served, faithfully and unselfishly.

At no time does he seem to view Saul as his enemy, even though the king had tried to kill him with his own hands. He never utters a bad word about the king. Saul's hatred for David was one-directional, and his attempts to kill David continued to prove unsuccessful, because God had a greater plan in place. David would be the next king, whether Saul liked it or not, and regardless of whether Saul loved David or not. David's fame would continue to grow; so would Saul's hatred for David. But God was not yet done. His preparation of David for the throne was not yet complete, and things would get worse before they got better. The tension between David and Saul was about to reach a boiling point and the next phase of God's king-creating curriculum was about to begin.

1 Samuel 19:1-10

The Calm Before the Storm

And Saul spoke to Jonathan his son and to all his servants, that they should kill David. But Jonathan, Saul's son, delighted much in David. And Jonathan told David, "Saul my father seeks to kill you. Therefore be on your guard in the morning. Stay in a secret place and hide yourself. And I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where you are, and I will speak to my father about you. And if I learn anything I will tell you." And Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father and said to him, "Let not the king sin against his servant David, because he has not sinned against you, and because his deeds have brought good to you. For he took his life in his hand and he struck down the Philistine, and the Lord worked a great salvation for all Israel. You saw it, and rejoiced. Why then will you sin against innocent blood by killing David without cause?" And Saul listened to the voice of Jonathan. Saul swore, "As the Lord lives, he shall not be put to death." And Jonathan called David, and Jonathan reported to him all these things. And Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence as before.

And there was war again. And David went out and fought with the Philistines and struck them with a great blow, so that they fled before him. Then a harmful spirit from the Lord came upon Saul, as he sat in his house with his spear in his hand. And David was playing the lyre. And Saul sought to pin David to the wall with the spear, but he eluded Saul, so that he struck the spear into the wall. And David fled and escaped that night. – 1 Samuel 19:1-10 ESV

David had to be one confused young man. On two separate occasions, the king of Israel had tried to pin him to the wall with a spear. But then, the same man turned around and offered his daughter's hand in marriage. Yet David's demureness and subsequent delay caused Saul to give his daughter to another man. But this was followed by Saul offering David his younger daughter, Michal, whom David eventually married. He became the son-in-law of the king, making him part of the royal family and best friends with the king's own son. And yet, unbeknownst to David, Saul continued to plot ways to rid himself of his new son-in-law, whom he believed posed a major threat to his reign.

Perhaps David simply wrote it all off as nothing more than a symptom of Saul's fits of rage. After all, David had originally been hired to serve as Saul's "music therapist," playing his harp to calm the king when he had one of his bouts of uncontrolled anger. He would have known first-hand just how violent Saul could become. Even when Saul had attempted to kill David with a spear, he probably convinced himself to not take it personally; he was in the wrong place at the wrong time. But things were much worse than David knew.

Saul was so desperate to eliminate David that he commanded his son, Jonathan, and all his servants to kill him. Basically, he ordered a hit on David. He put a bounty on his head and brought in reinforcements. But Jonathan took this news hard because he and David were best friends. His father and king was commanding him to kill someone he cared about deeply. It's interesting to note that Jonathan, the heir to the throne of Saul, did not perceive David as a

threat. He did not share his father's paranoia regarding David. In fact, he pleaded with his father to reconsider and reminded him of all that David had done for him.

"The king must not sin against his servant David," Jonathan said. "He's never done anything to harm you. He has always helped you in any way he could. Have you forgotten about the time he risked his life to kill the Philistine giant and how the Lord brought a great victory to all Israel as a result? You were certainly happy about it then. Why should you murder an innocent man like David? There is no reason for it at all." – 1 Samuel 19:4-5 NLT

And Saul seemed to listen to the words of Jonathan, vowing to spare David's life and welcoming him back into his presence as before. But this happy reunion would prove to be short-lived. It would simply be the calm before the storm. The king whom God had rejected and the man whom God had anointed as his replacement were not be able to coexist for long. Eventually, Saul would have to go away. He was the one who would need to be eliminated, not David. God's plan to place David on the throne of Israel was not going to be curtailed or compromised by anyone or anything. But things were going to get worse before they got better.

While things appeared to return to normal, with David winning victories over the Philistines by day and playing his harp for Saul in the evenings, the animosity of Saul remained unchanged. And eventually, in one of his tormented moments, Saul attempted to kill David for the third time, and he was forced to run for his life again. This would prove to be a foreshadowing of David's life for years to come. He was about to discover that his lot in life was to be that of a man on the run. He was to become a fugitive, a wanted man with a price on his head and a relentless pursuer on his trail, who would stop at nothing until David was dead.

David must have looked back on his anointing by Samuel and wondered what it all meant. Why had the prophet chosen him? What had the anointing meant? What had he been anointed for? David must have assumed that he had been chosen by God to be a great military leader. After all, he had killed Goliath and enjoyed numerous victories over the Philistines since becoming a commander in Saul's army. But why would God give him success in battle and then allow him to suffer at the hands of his own king? How was he supposed to do his job when he was constantly having to worry about being killed by the king? All of this must have created a great deal of confusion in the mind of David, and led him to have some frank and open conversations with God. Due to all that he was about to experience, David would learn to talk to God with an honesty that only suffering can produce. Many of his psalms reflect the nature of his relationship with God, revealing his total transparency and somewhat shocking bluntness.

*How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I take counsel in my soul
and have sorrow in my heart all the day?
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?* – Psalm 13:1-2 ESV

*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
 Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?
 O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer,
 and by night, but I find no rest. – Psalm 22:1-2 ESV*

*I pray to you, O Lord, my rock.
 Do not turn a deaf ear to me.
 For if you are silent,
 I might as well give up and die. – Psalm 28:1 NLT*

David was learning to trust God. But first, he had to develop a level of honesty and openness with God. He would discover his limitations and come to grip with his weaknesses – the hard way. His anointing by Samuel was just the beginning of his preparation. The Spirit of God coming upon David was instrumental in his early success, but the Spirit of God transforming the heart and character of David was going to be the key to his future rule and reign. What would eventually make David a great king are the lessons he would learn while on the run. The time he spent hiding in caves would play a vital role in preparing him for the crown. David was going to learn a lot about himself over the next few years but he was going to learn even more about God. What would eventually make him a great king would be his understanding of the greatness of God.

1 Samuel 19:11-24

Spiritual Warfare

Saul sent messengers to David's house to watch him, that he might kill him in the morning. But Michal, David's wife, told him, "If you do not escape with your life tonight, tomorrow you will be killed." So Michal let David down through the window, and he fled away and escaped. Michal took an image and laid it on the bed and put a pillow of goats' hair at its head and covered it with the clothes. And when Saul sent messengers to take David, she said, "He is sick." Then Saul sent the messengers to see David, saying, "Bring him up to me in the bed, that I may kill him." And when the messengers came in, behold, the image was in the bed, with the pillow of goats' hair at its head. Saul said to Michal, "Why have you deceived me thus and let my enemy go, so that he has escaped?" And Michal answered Saul, "He said to me, 'Let me go. Why should I kill you?'"

Now David fled and escaped, and he came to Samuel at Ramah and told him all that Saul had done to him. And he and Samuel went and lived at Naioth. And it was told Saul, "Behold, David is at Naioth in Ramah." Then Saul sent messengers to take David, and when they saw the company of the prophets prophesying, and Samuel standing as head over them, the Spirit of God came upon the messengers of Saul, and they also prophesied. When it was told Saul, he sent other messengers, and they also prophesied. And Saul sent messengers again the third time, and they also prophesied. Then he himself went to Ramah and came to the great well that is in Secu. And he asked, "Where are Samuel and David?" And one said, "Behold, they are at Naioth in Ramah." And he went there to Naioth in Ramah. And the Spirit of God came upon him also, and as he went he prophesied until he came to Naioth in Ramah. And he too stripped off his clothes, and he too prophesied before Samuel and lay naked all that day and all that night. Thus it is said, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" – 1 Samuel 19:11-24 ESV

Saul's fear of and subsequent hatred for David continued to intensify. To a certain degree, Saul could not seem to help himself. Throughout the story, we will see that Saul had an underlying, deep-seated love for David. All the way back in chapter 16, when David first came into Saul's employment, we are told, "And David came to Saul and entered his service. And Saul loved him greatly, and he became his armor-bearer" (1 Samuel 16:21 ESV).

But Saul had to deal with a "harmful spirit from the Lord" (1 Samuel 16:14 ESV) which tormented him on a regular basis. This spirit, more than likely demonic in nature, would possess Saul and cause him to lose all control. It was while under the control of this spirit that Saul attempted on three different occasions to kill David with a spear. While the text describes this tormenting spirit as coming *from* God, that does not mean God was the cause of Saul's possession. This would be contrary to the character of God. The apostle James cautions us: "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one" (James 1:13 ESV). By removing the Holy Spirit from Saul, God knowingly and willingly made Saul susceptible to demonic possession. He removed the

protective power of the Holy Spirit and left Saul vulnerable to the influence of the enemy. This was all part of His divine plan.

*“Saul’s evil bent was by the permission and plan of God. We must realize that in the last analysis all penal consequences come from God, as the Author of the moral law and the one who always does what is right.” – Gleason L. Archer Jr., *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, p. 180.*

Saul’s obsession with David’s death was most likely the result of his possession by a demonic spirit. This reveals that the conflict between Saul and David was really a spiritual one. Satan was attempting to use Saul to thwart God’s plans for David. David, the man after God’s own heart, had been anointed by Samuel to be the next king of Israel. Unlike Saul, David was obedient to God and lived his life to please and honor God. Obviously, Satan preferred Saul over David, and his real objective was the destruction of the people of Israel. From the moment when God placed His curse on the serpent in the garden and pronounced his pending doom, Satan had been out to destroy the offspring of Eve.

*“I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel.” – Genesis 3:15 ESV*

When God later called Abram, he revealed His plans for this former pagan from the land of Ur.

“I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” – Genesis 12:2-3 ESV

God would go on to clarify His promise.

“I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.” – Genesis 17:6-8 ESV

And the apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, would give a more detailed understanding of what this promise of God really entailed.

Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ. – Galatians 3:16 ESV

Satan had it out for David because he represented the faithful people of God. He had been anointed by God for a reason, and Satan realized that this young man presented a threat to his rule and reign over the world and all humanity. Throughout the Bible a cosmic conflict takes place between Satan and God, as Satan continually attempts to thwart the will and divine plan of God to bring into existence the “offspring” of Abraham, Jesus Christ the Messiah. This conflict intensifies all the way into the New Testament and reaches its apex at the cross, where Satan believed he had defeated the plan of God once and for all.

But back to the story of David. An earlier attempt by Saul to eliminate David by using his son, Jonathan, had failed. Now he would be foiled by his own daughter. She would betray her father by protecting David, warning him of Saul’s plot and helping him escape. She would even lie to Saul, risking his anger and possible revenge. It is interesting to note that Michal would use a household idol, a false god, to thwart the plans of Satan, the god of this world. A lifeless image of a non-existent god would be used to spare the life of the man whom God had chosen to lead his people. What an amazing picture of the sovereign power of God Almighty. When Saul sent men to capture David, God would intervene again, turning David’s pursuers into prophets.

...the Spirit of God came upon Saul’s men, and they also began to prophesy. – 1 Samuel 19:21 NLT

This would happen three separate times to three different groups of men. Finally, Saul would get fed up and go after David himself. But he would suffer a similar fate.

...the Spirit of God came even upon Saul, and he, too, began to prophesy all the way to Naioth! He tore off his clothes and lay naked on the ground all day and all night, prophesying in the presence of Samuel. The people who were watching exclaimed, “What? Is even Saul a prophet?” – 1 Samuel 19:23-24 NLT

Men who were set on capturing the servant of God ended up prophesying on behalf of God. The enemies of God became the tools of God. The plan of Satan was radically altered by the sovereign will and power of God. This was a spiritual battle being waged behind the scenes and by powers far beyond the comprehension of Saul and his minions. The war going on here was not between Saul and David, but between God and the forces of Satan, and that has always been the case. The apostle Paul reminds us that it will be until Jesus Christ returns and completes God’s redemptive plan.

A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on all of God’s armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil. For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places. – Ephesians 6:10-12 NLT

So, in the meantime, we must be strong in the Lord. We must rely on His power and stand firm in the knowledge that the battle is His. David would have to do the same thing. He was going to

learn that this battle was far more than one man's personal vendetta against him. This was the forces of wickedness waging war against the sovereign reign of God.

1 Samuel 20:1-15

The Long Wait Begins

Then David fled from Naioth in Ramah and came and said before Jonathan, "What have I done? What is my guilt? And what is my sin before your father, that he seeks my life?" And he said to him, "Far from it! You shall not die. Behold, my father does nothing either great or small without disclosing it to me. And why should my father hide this from me? It is not so." But David vowed again, saying, "Your father knows well that I have found favor in your eyes, and he thinks, 'Do not let Jonathan know this, lest he be grieved.' But truly, as the Lord lives and as your soul lives, there is but a step between me and death." Then Jonathan said to David, "Whatever you say, I will do for you." David said to Jonathan, "Behold, tomorrow is the new moon, and I should not fail to sit at table with the king. But let me go, that I may hide myself in the field till the third day at evening. If your father misses me at all, then say, 'David earnestly asked leave of me to run to Bethlehem his city, for there is a yearly sacrifice there for all the clan.' If he says, 'Good!' it will be well with your servant, but if he is angry, then know that harm is determined by him. Therefore deal kindly with your servant, for you have brought your servant into a covenant of the Lord with you. But if there is guilt in me, kill me yourself, for why should you bring me to your father?" And Jonathan said, "Far be it from you! If I knew that it was determined by my father that harm should come to you, would I not tell you?" Then David said to Jonathan, "Who will tell me if your father answers you roughly?" And Jonathan said to David, "Come, let us go out into the field." So they both went out into the field.

And Jonathan said to David, "The Lord, the God of Israel, be witness! When I have sounded out my father, about this time tomorrow, or the third day, behold, if he is well disposed toward David, shall I not then send and disclose it to you? But should it please my father to do you harm, the Lord do so to Jonathan and more also if I do not disclose it to you and send you away, that you may go in safety. May the Lord be with you, as he has been with my father. If I am still alive, show me the steadfast love of the Lord, that I may not die; and do not cut off your steadfast love from my house forever, when the Lord cuts off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth." – 1 Samuel 20:1-15 ESV

It would still seem as though David was unaware of the true meaning behind his anointing by Samuel. He was at a loss as to why Saul would want to have him killed. He even asked Jonathan, "What have I done? What is my crime? How have I offended your father that he is so determined to kill me?" (NLT).

If David had been aware that he was to be the next king of Israel and Saul's replacement, then he would have put two and two together and recognized Saul's attempts on his life for what they were: Acts of jealousy and anger. But instead, David seems to think that he has done something to offend Saul. He is trying to figure out what he could have done to cause such anger in the king that he would want him dead. David even begged his friend Jonathan, "Kill me yourself if I have sinned against your father. But please don't betray me to him!" (1 Samuel 20:8 NLT).

The amazing part of this story is that David's fear for his life was well-justified. Saul was out to kill him. But what made it all so difficult was that David was oblivious as to the reason. He couldn't figure out why the king was so angry with him, angry enough to want him dead. How many sleepless nights must David have had trying to determine what he had done to deserve such animosity. It seems David would have gladly confessed whatever he had done to offend the king if he could just figure out what it was. Years later, David would compose a psalm that reflects his desire to have a guilt-free conscience. David was not one who was content to live with unconfessed sin in his life.

*Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
Point out anything in me that offends you,
and lead me along the path of everlasting life. – Psalm 139:23-24 NLT*

But no matter how hard he tried, David was unable to find a sin to confess or a crime he had committed against Saul for which he could accept responsibility. So, he was left with no other option than to run for his life. Faced with the option of flight, he appealed to Jonathan in a last-gasp attempt to resolve his situation with Saul.

The reference in this passage to the "new moon" has to do with a God-appointed sacrifice and meal that was to be celebrated on the first day of each new month.

On the first day of each month, present an extra burnt offering to the Lord of two young bulls, one ram, and seven one-year-old male lambs, all with no defects. These must be accompanied by grain offerings of choice flour moistened with olive oil—six quarts with each bull, four quarts with the ram, and two quarts with each lamb. This burnt offering will be a special gift, a pleasing aroma to the Lord. You must also present a liquid offering with each sacrifice: two quarts of wine for each bull, a third of a gallon for the ram, and one quart for each lamb. Present this monthly burnt offering on the first day of each month throughout the year.

On the first day of each month, you must also offer one male goat for a sin offering to the Lord. This is in addition to the regular burnt offering and its accompanying liquid offering. – Deuteronomy 28:11-15 NLT

David's plan was to use this feast day as a means to discern the true nature of Saul's relationship with him. He usually celebrated this feast day in the presence of the king and his family, but on this occasion, David chose to remain in hiding, and Jonathan would tell Saul that he had returned home to Bethlehem to be with his family. If Saul became angry, as David suspected, it would prove to Jonathan that David's fears were well-justified. The truth is, Jonathan should have been well-aware of his father's intense anger with David, because Saul had already commanded Jonathan to kill him. But Jonathan, as a loyal son, was probably having a difficult time understanding what was really going on. He knew Saul loved David just as much

as he did. His father's actions were a mystery to him, and he simply wanted everything to return to the way it had been before. But, sadly, that would not be the case.

Jonathan made a pact with David, saying, "I promise by the Lord, the God of Israel, that by this time tomorrow, or the next day at the latest, I will talk to my father and let you know at once how he feels about you" (1 Samuel 20:12 NLT). And Jonathan made David swear that, no matter what happened, he would remain faithful to him.

"And may you treat me with the faithful love of the Lord as long as I live. But if I die, treat my family with this faithful love, even when the Lord destroys all your enemies from the face of the earth." – 1 Samuel 20:14-15 NLT

Jonathan seemed to know that God's favor was on David. He sensed that David was going to go on to do great things and continue to experience victories over the enemies of God and Israel. And Jonathan also seemed to have a premonition that things were not going to turn out well for he or his father. Years later, after Saul and Jonathan were dead and David was king, David would recall the pact he made with Jonathan.

Do not fear, for I will show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan, and I will restore to you all the land of Saul your father, and you shall eat at my table always. – 2 Samuel 9:7 NLT

David would honor his commitment and show mercy and favor to Mephibosheth, the sole remaining son of Jonathan.

It is easy to see why God referred to David as a man after His own heart. With each passing scene, we are given a glimpse into the character of this young man. He is faithful and loving. He is diligent and determined to serve his God and king well. After each attempt by Saul to kill him, David simply returned to duty, conducting himself with honor and integrity. Not once did he attempt to defend himself. We never see him get angry or vindictive toward Saul. He never utters a single harsh word about the king. All David wanted to know was what he had done to make Saul angry. If he was guilty, he would confess it. If he had done something wrong, he would attempt to rectify it. Despite all that had happened to him, David continued to treat Saul with respect, viewing him as God's anointed king of Israel. Not once do we hear him utter the words, "This is not fair!" He doesn't point his finger at Saul and declare him as the guilty one. He doesn't defend himself before God or even Jonathan. He was confused and obviously frustrated, but he remained faithful and willing to accept his lot in life as having come from the hand of God.

Jonathan made a statement to David that rings with prophetic weight: "May the Lord destroy all your enemies!" (1 Samuel 20:16 NLT). Little did Jonathan know that his words would come true. God would end up bringing about the destruction of Saul, the man who would become David's most persistent and perplexing enemy. For the time being, Saul would remain king. He would continue to pursue David, treating him as a fugitive and as an enemy of the state. Yet

David would never feel the freedom to defend himself against Saul. He would never sense God's permission to take Saul's life. For the next several years of his life, David would be dependent upon God's mercy and grace to sustain and protect him, and to eventually crown him as king over Israel.

1 Samuel 20:16-34

A Stubborn Streak

And Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, "May the Lord take vengeance on David's enemies." And Jonathan made David swear again by his love for him, for he loved him as he loved his own soul.

Then Jonathan said to him, "Tomorrow is the new moon, and you will be missed, because your seat will be empty. On the third day go down quickly to the place where you hid yourself when the matter was in hand, and remain beside the stone heap. And I will shoot three arrows to the side of it, as though I shot at a mark. And behold, I will send the boy, saying, 'Go, find the arrows.' If I say to the boy, 'Look, the arrows are on this side of you, take them,' then you are to come, for, as the Lord lives, it is safe for you and there is no danger. But if I say to the youth, 'Look, the arrows are beyond you,' then go, for the Lord has sent you away. And as for the matter of which you and I have spoken, behold, the Lord is between you and me forever."

So David hid himself in the field. And when the new moon came, the king sat down to eat food. The king sat on his seat, as at other times, on the seat by the wall. Jonathan sat opposite, and Abner sat by Saul's side, but David's place was empty.

Yet Saul did not say anything that day, for he thought, "Something has happened to him. He is not clean; surely he is not clean." But on the second day, the day after the new moon, David's place was empty. And Saul said to Jonathan his son, "Why has not the son of Jesse come to the meal, either yesterday or today?" Jonathan answered Saul, "David earnestly asked leave of me to go to Bethlehem. He said, 'Let me go, for our clan holds a sacrifice in the city, and my brother has commanded me to be there. So now, if I have found favor in your eyes, let me get away and see my brothers.' For this reason he has not come to the king's table."

Then Saul's anger was kindled against Jonathan, and he said to him, "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? For as long as the son of Jesse lives on the earth, neither you nor your kingdom shall be established. Therefore send and bring him to me, for he shall surely die." Then Jonathan answered Saul his father, "Why should he be put to death? What has he done?" But Saul hurled his spear at him to strike him. So Jonathan knew that his father was determined to put David to death. And Jonathan rose from the table in fierce anger and ate no food the second day of the month, for he was grieved for David, because his father had disgraced him. — 1 Samuel 20:16-34 ESV

David and Jonathan had come up with a plan. David would miss the feast of the new moon, knowing that his absence would be noticed by Saul. When Saul inquired about David's absence, Jonathan was to follow David's instructions and say he had returned to Bethlehem. If Saul accepted this news without incident, then David would know it was safe to return home. But if Saul became angry and lost his mind like usual, then Jonathan was to secretly let David know so

he could escape. When the fateful day came and David was not at his place for the feast, Saul did miss him, but just assumed that something had come up. But by the third day, Saul became suspicious and asked Jonathan for an explanation, which he did not receive well. He became furious with his son, seeing through his ruse, and recognizing that he and David had conspired against him. Feeling betrayed by Jonathan, Saul lashed out in anger, using very coarse language to express his sentiments.

“Saul, now incensed and enraged over Jonathan’s liaison with David, is actually hurling very coarse and emotionally charged words at his son. The translation of this phrase suggested by Koehler and Baumgartner is ‘bastard of a wayward woman’ (HALOT 796 s.v. עוה), but this is not an expression commonly used in English. A better English approximation of the sentiments expressed here by the Hebrew phrase would be ‘You stupid son of a bitch!’” – NET Bible study notes

Saul was beside himself with rage. His own son had taken sides with someone he viewed to be an enemy and a threat to his throne. Saul even reminded Jonathan that his actions were going to end up keeping him from inheriting the kingship.

“As long as that son of Jesse is alive, you’ll never be king. Now go and get him so I can kill him!” – 1 Samuel 20:31 NLT

What is amazing in all of this is that Saul had been clearly told by the prophet Samuel that his reign was coming to an end. He was going to be replaced.

And Samuel said to Saul, “You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command of the Lord your God, with which he commanded you. For then the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you.” – 1 Samuel 13:13-14 ESV

And Samuel said to Saul, “I will not return with you. For you have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you from being king over Israel.” – 1 Samuel 15:26 ESV

But Saul stubbornly refused to accept the prophet’s words and God’s will. He somehow believed he could hold onto his throne despite God’s statements to the contrary. There is inherent in sin a stubborn streak that seems to reveal itself in a refusal to repent and accept responsibility for God’s just and righteous punishment. Saul had a habit of shifting blame and denying culpability.

When Samuel confronted Saul for offering a burnt offering on his own, rather than waiting on the prophet as instructed, Saul simply offered up excuses:

*“Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the favor of the Lord.’ So I forced myself, and offered the burnt offering.” – 1 Samuel 13:12
ESV*

He **forced** himself. But the truth was, he knew what he was doing was wrong. Only a priest was to offer sacrifices to God, but Saul, impatient and impulsive, took matters into his own hands and decided to do things his way.

On another occasion, when Saul had been instructed by God to wipe out all the Amalekites, he once again chose to do thing his own way. The text tells us, “But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep and of the oxen and of the fattened calves and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them. All that was despised and worthless they devoted to destruction” (1 Samuel 15:9 ESV).

When the prophet, Samuel, confronted Saul about his disobedience, his only response was, “**The people** spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen to sacrifice to the Lord your God, and the rest we have devoted to destruction” (1 Samuel 15:15 ESV). He blamed the people. It was not his fault.

Saul was never one who found repentance easy. He could not bring himself to accept responsibility for his own sinfulness. He also had a difficult time accepting God’s decision to remove him from the throne for his repeated disobedience. It was as if he truly believed he could somehow get around God’s plan to replace him and remain on the throne by sheer will power. Saul was a fool. He had all the attributes of the fool as outlined in the Book of Proverbs.

Fools think their own way is right... – Proverbs 12:15 NLT

*The words of the godly are like sterling silver;
the heart of a fool is worthless. – Proverbs 10:20 NLT*

*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;
fools despise wisdom and instruction. – Proverbs 1:7 ESV*

*For the simple are killed by their turning away,
and the complacency of fools destroys them. – Proverbs 1:32 ESV*

*The way of a fool is right in his own eyes,
but a wise man listens to advice. – Proverbs. 12:15 ESV*

*A prudent man conceals knowledge,
but the heart of fools proclaims folly. – Proverbs 12:23 ESV*

Saul was foolish to think he could escape the inevitable judgment of God. He was foolish to think he could defeat the man who had been chosen by God as his replacement. He was foolish

to believe that his disobedience to God would not have consequences or that the divine will of God could somehow be circumvented. In fact, Saul lived as if there was no God, a hallmark of the foolish lifestyle. David himself would later write, "Only fools say in their hearts, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, and their actions are evil; not one of them does good!" (Psalm 14:1 NLT).

Saul's actions revealed his foolish assumption that God was either impotent or irrelevant. Saul was going to do what Saul wanted to do, as if God didn't even exist. His stubbornness would ultimately be the end of him. But not before he spent the next years of his life foolishly shaking his fist in the face of the Almighty, somehow believing that his wisdom was greater than that of God's. But he would be proven wrong, as fools always are.

1 Samuel 20:35-42

Great Loss. Great Gain.

In the morning Jonathan went out into the field to the appointment with David, and with him a little boy. And he said to his boy, "Run and find the arrows that I shoot." As the boy ran, he shot an arrow beyond him. And when the boy came to the place of the arrow that Jonathan had shot, Jonathan called after the boy and said, "Is not the arrow beyond you?" And Jonathan called after the boy, "Hurry! Be quick! Do not stay!" So Jonathan's boy gathered up the arrows and came to his master. But the boy knew nothing. Only Jonathan and David knew the matter. And Jonathan gave his weapons to his boy and said to him, "Go and carry them to the city." And as soon as the boy had gone, David rose from beside the stone heap and fell on his face to the ground and bowed three times. And they kissed one another and wept with one another, David weeping the most. Then Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, because we have sworn both of us in the name of the Lord, saying, 'The Lord shall be between me and you, and between my offspring and your offspring, forever.'" And he rose and departed, and Jonathan went into the city. – 1 Samuel 20:35-42 ESV

David had experienced incredible life change over a very short period of time. He had gone from shepherding his family's flocks to serving as the king's armor bearer. He had been anointed by the prophet of God, defeated Goliath, and become a great military leader and champion against the Philistines. The people loved him; they even composed songs about him. But at the same time, David had gone through his incredibly confusing, totally inexplicable on-again, off-again relationship with Saul. One day the king loved him. The next, the king was trying to pin him to the wall with a spear. Saul had even tried to use David's wife (Saul's daughter) and best friend (Saul's son) against him. He had sent troops to hunt David down and kill him. In the process, David suffered great loss. He had lost his position on the king's staff. He lost his prominence as one of the king's warriors. He lost his wife, because he was forced to flee for his life. Now he was going to lose best friend, as he received the news from Jonathan that all was not well. He was not going to be able to return to the court, because Saul wanted him dead.

What is so important for us to remember in all of this is that David was anointed by Samuel to be the next king of Israel. It is still unclear from the text whether David knew or fully understood what his anointing by Samuel meant. At no point in the story have we seen any sign that David recognized Saul's evil intentions against him as the result of Saul's jealousy over David's anointing. In fact, David asked Jonathan, "What have I done? What is my guilt? And what is my sin before your father, that he seeks my life?" (1 Samuel 20:1 ESV).

He seemed genuinely at a loss as to why Saul wanted him dead. And David shows no sign of understanding why Jonathan, the son of the king and natural heir to the throne, might have a problem with his anointing to be the next king. It would seem, at least at this point in the story, that David is oblivious to God's future plans for his life. All he could see was loss. Whatever Samuel's anointing had meant, it had left David perplexed and confused. He was now going to

be a man on the run, a fugitive. He was losing his family, wife, job, best friend, dignity, and any hope of living a normal life. When he and Jonathan parted ways, “they kissed one another and wept with one another, David weeping the most” (1 Samuel 20:41 ESV). This was a sad day. And the chapter ends on a very sad note, with the words, “And he rose and departed.”

Whether he fully understood it or not, David *was* the next king of Israel. He had been hand-chosen by God.

The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be prince over his people. – 1 Samuel 13:14 ESV

David was the God-ordained replacement for King Saul, and with God’s help and the Holy Spirit’s anointing, David would become one of the greatest kings in Israel’s history. But long before David gained access to the throne of Israel, he would suffer great loss. It was as if God was knocking out all the props on which David leaned. He had been a good and faithful shepherd, but God had removed him from the pasture and placed him in the palace. He had been the king’s armor bearer, but God promoted him to giant-slayer. He had been a mighty warrior, defeating the enemies of Israel, but now he was fighting for his life. David had been a happily married man, but had been forced to leave his wife behind just to stay alive. He had enjoyed a deep and lasting friendship with Jonathan, but the two of them had to part ways, never expecting to see one another again.

Everything in his life that brought him any fulfillment, joy, support, love, dignity, recognition, accomplishment, or sense of self-worth was being removed. He would give up the comfort of the palace for the dark and dank confines of a cave. He would learn what it was like to go hungry and without sleep. He would struggle with self-doubt, fear, loneliness, despair, and a growing sense of his own weakness.

But God was in it all. I am reminded of the words of Jesus, spoken to His disciples.

“I assure you that when the world is made new and the Son of Man sits upon his glorious throne, you who have been my followers will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has given up houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or property, for my sake, will receive a hundred times as much in return and will inherit eternal life. But many who are the greatest now will be least important then, and those who seem least important now will be the greatest then.” – Matthew 19:28-30 NLT

Like David, the disciples had been called by God, and that calling would prove costly for all of them. Jesus had warned them:

“Look, I am sending you out as sheep among wolves. So be as shrewd as snakes and harmless as doves. But beware! For you will be handed over to the courts and will be flogged with whips in the synagogues. You will stand trial before governors and kings

because you are my followers. But this will be your opportunity to tell the rulers and other unbelievers about me. When you are arrested, don't worry about how to respond or what to say. God will give you the right words at the right time. For it is not you who will be speaking—it will be the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.” – Matthew 10:16-20 NLT

Most of them would die as martyrs. All of them would suffer loss and know what it was like to be hated, despised, abused, and rejected by men. But God had great plans for their lives. He would use each of them to accomplish His will and, as Jesus promised them, they would do greater works than He had done while on earth.

“I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father. You can ask for anything in my name, and I will do it, so that the Son can bring glory to the Father. Yes, ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it!” – John 14:12-14 NLT

David was going to learn that the great gain would be preceded by great loss. Yahweh was in the process of making David God-dependent, rather than self-sufficient. He was teaching David the invaluable lesson of reliance upon Him.

All of us have crutches upon which we learn to lean and with which we grow comfortably incapacitated. But God would have us lean on Him and find our hope, help, strength, worth, fulfillment, and purpose for life in Him. David was a gifted young man, but God was out to make him a godly king. David had in Jonathan a true friend, but he would learn what it meant to have God as his companion. David had risked his life killing 200 Philistines to gain the right to marry Michal. But soon, David would discover what it was like to love and be loved by God—a relationship unlike any other in life.

In all of this, David was going to learn the truth behind the words of Jesus, spoken centuries later: “No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other” (Matthew 6:24 NLT). True allegiance to God requires complete dependence upon Him. Experiencing the full power of God requires that we relinquish our reliance on any source of support other than Him. David was going to be forced to give up a lot, but what he would gain in return would be well worth it.

I love you, Lord; you are my strength. The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my savior; my God is my rock, in whom I find protection. He is my shield, the power that saves me, and my place of safety. – Psalm 18:1-2 NLT

1 Samuel 21:1-9

Man on the Run

Then David came to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest. And Ahimelech came to meet David, trembling, and said to him, "Why are you alone, and no one with you?" And David said to Ahimelech the priest, "The king has charged me with a matter and said to me, 'Let no one know anything of the matter about which I send you, and with which I have charged you.' I have made an appointment with the young men for such and such a place. Now then, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever is here." And the priest answered David, "I have no common bread on hand, but there is holy bread—if the young men have kept themselves from women." And David answered the priest, "Truly women have been kept from us as always when I go on an expedition. The vessels of the young men are holy even when it is an ordinary journey. How much more today will their vessels be holy?" So the priest gave him the holy bread, for there was no bread there but the bread of the Presence, which is removed from before the Lord, to be replaced by hot bread on the day it is taken away.

Now a certain man of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the Lord. His name was Doeg the Edomite, the chief of Saul's herdsman.

Then David said to Ahimelech, "Then have you not here a spear or a sword at hand? For I have brought neither my sword nor my weapons with me, because the king's business required haste." And the priest said, "The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you struck down in the Valley of Elah, behold, it is here wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. If you will take that, take it, for there is none but that here." And David said, "There is none like that; give it to me." – 1 Samuel 21:1-9 ESV

The following ten chapters of the Book of 1 Samuel chronicle the life of David as he spends the next years of his life running from King Saul. Having received the news from Jonathan that Saul was out to kill him, David made his way to Nob, which was about two and a half miles southeast of Gibeah. There, he sought out Ahimelech the high priest. David was running out of options. He could no longer go home. His relationship with Samuel, the prophet, had reached an end. He most likely knew that turning to Samuel was the worst thing he could do, because that would be what Saul expected. The king would have had Samuel under surveillance. David had said his final goodbyes to Jonathan, knowing that they would probably never see one another again. So, in need of food and shelter, he turned to the high priest.

His arrival at Nob caught Ahimelech off guard. He was surprised and a bit scared to see David arrive by himself, without his usual allotment of troops. It seems that Saul's volatile nature was well-known and justly feared. Ahimelech jumped to the conclusion that David had shown up as an agent sent by Saul to wreak havoc on the priests of God. This would ultimately prove not to be a far-fetched idea, because in the very next chapter, Saul commands the execution of every priest in Nob for aiding and abetting David (1 Samuel 22:6-23).

David assured Ahimelech that he was not there to do them harm. He lied to the high priest, assuring him that he was on a top-secret mission for the king, the nature of which he was not free to divulge. This deception was used to obtain food and to keep the high priest from asking further questions. It also reveals a certain sense of fear and distrust on David's part. He was not yet willing, ready, and able to put all his reliance upon God. He was in a tight spot and was willing to lie to preserve his life. As time passed and David began to see God's miraculous provision and protection, he grew increasingly more confident in God's capacity to care for his every need. However, at this point in the story, David was fairly new to the fugitive lifestyle and was doing whatever he had to do to stay alive.

When David asked Ahimelech for bread, the only thing the high priest had available was the showbread that was put on display in the Tabernacle as part of a weekly sacrifice to God. The Book of Leviticus provides important details regarding the showbread. It was to be changed out weekly, and the old bread was to serve as food for the priests. However, they were required to eat it in a holy place and only while in a state of purification because it was considered holy.

"You shall take fine flour and bake twelve loaves from it; two tenths of an ephah shall be in each loaf. And you shall set them in two piles, six in a pile, on the table of pure gold before the Lord. And you shall put pure frankincense on each pile, that it may go with the bread as a memorial portion as a food offering to the Lord. Every Sabbath day Aaron shall arrange it before the Lord regularly; it is from the people of Israel as a covenant forever. And it shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in a holy place, since it is for him a most holy portion out of the Lord's food offerings, a perpetual due." – Leviticus 24:5-9 ESV

Ahimelech's reticence to share the bread with David and "his men" was based on the fact that the bread was holy and not to be eaten by anyone impure. David was able to assure that his soldiers were ceremonially pure because there were no soldiers to begin with. David was alone and had not had sexual relations with Michal that day because he had been forced to leave her several days prior. David took the bread, and, according to Jesus, he was not wrong in doing so.

"Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him to eat nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests?" – Matthew 12:3-4 ESV

Jesus referred back to this historical, real-life event, comparing what David did with the disciples eating the heads of wheat on the Sabbath. The Pharisees, with their legalistic mindset, had accused them of "harvesting" grain on the Sabbath. For Jesus, the actions of the disciples were justified because they were simply meeting the normal human need for nourishment. Jesus used the same reasoning on another occasion when He said to the Pharisees, "If you had a sheep that fell into a well on the Sabbath, wouldn't you work to pull it out? Of course you would. And how much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Yes, the law permits a person to

do good on the Sabbath” (Matthew 12:11-12 NLT). According to Jesus, David was simply trying to stay alive, so his actions were necessary and, therefore, justified.

But what David didn’t know was that his actions were being observed by someone who was on Saul’s payroll. Doeg the Edomite was in charge of all of Saul’s flocks and just happened to be in Nob that day. It may be that Doeg had it in for David because he was jealous of his success. After all, David had started out as a shepherd but had risen to a place of power and prominence in the king’s court and had even married into the king’s family. Perhaps Doeg hoped that by exposing David’s whereabouts, he would be elevated up the royal food chain and move from the pasture to the palace. But regardless of his intent, Doeg made his way to Saul with news about his enemy’s presence in Nob. David’s respite would prove brief, and the role Ahimelech played in helping David would prove deadly.

Having been forced to leave Gibeah in a hurry, David was unarmed and defenseless. So, he inquired of Ahimelech whether there were any weapons in the priestly compound. It just so happened that the sword of Goliath, the Philistine champion whom David killed in hand-to-hand combat, was in the Tabernacle wrapped in a priestly robe. This was the very same sword David had used to cut off the giant’s head. David, having retrieved the sword and with his five loaves of ceremonial showbread, said his goodbyes to Ahimelech and began a long and difficult period of running, hiding, and learning to trust in God.

In the years that lay ahead, David would encounter a wide range of life lessons that would deepen his faith in God and strengthen his resolve to serve Him faithfully. The king that David eventually became was the byproduct of the trials and tribulations of this less-than-pleasant phase of his life. For David, the phrase “no pain, no gain” could have been the theme for his life. He would discover that persecution would precede his coronation. Years of suffering would come before his crowning. The daily experience of loss and pain would preface his eventual reign.

Years later, when David had finally experienced release from Saul’s dogged pursuit and had been crowned the king of Israel, he was able to write:

*I love you, O Lord, my strength.
The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer,
my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge,
my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.
I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised,
and I am saved from my enemies. – Psalm 18:1-3 ESV*

1 Samuel 21:10-15

Temporary Insanity

And David rose and fled that day from Saul and went to Achish the king of Gath. And the servants of Achish said to him, “Is not this David the king of the land? Did they not sing to one another of him in dances, ‘Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands’?”

And David took these words to heart and was much afraid of Achish the king of Gath. So he changed his behavior before them and pretended to be insane in their hands and made marks on the doors of the gate and let his spittle run down his beard. Then Achish said to his servants, “Behold, you see the man is mad. Why then have you brought him to me? Do I lack madmen, that you have brought this fellow to behave as a madman in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?” – 1 Samuel 21:10-15 ESV

The question that should immediately come into your mind when reading these verses is, “What was David thinking?” There seems to be nothing rational or logical in his behavior. Why in the world would David, the very man who killed Goliath, who was *from* Gath, choose to seek refuge *in* Gath. Not only that, what would possess David to waltz into Gath while carrying the sword that once belonged to Goliath? What kind of flawed logic did David use to think that he would be welcomed with open arms?

After all, it was David who, in an act of over-achievement, killed 200 Philistines to obtain the 200 foreskins Saul had demanded as a dowry for his daughter, Michal. It was David who had served as a commander in Saul’s forces and had won significant victories over the Philistines. So, why would he think they would offer him refuge? From what we know about David’s faithfulness to God and his hatred of the enemies of God, it seems pretty unlikely that David had gone to Gath to offer his services as a warrior to King Achish. David was not switching sides and choosing to fight against his own people. So why did he go? The text does not tell us. We can only conjecture that David was desperate to escape from Saul and any troops that might be pursuing him. He knew the last place Saul would look for him was in the land of the Philistines. However, David didn’t think his strategy through completely. Under duress, he made a rash decision, and now found himself in a very dangerous spot.

Unsurprisingly, the Philistines immediately recognized David, referring to him as “the king of the land” (1 Samuel 21:11 ESV). They had heard the songs sung about David, which celebrated his military exploits and lauded him as greater than Saul. It is doubtful that they had heard about David’s anointing, but they most likely viewed David as the true leader of the Israelites. At the affair in the Valley of Elah, Goliath had challenged Saul and his men to send a champion to face him in hand-to-hand combat, but no one would step forward. Day after day, he taunted them, but Saul remained in the background, afraid to take up the challenge and face Goliath. At that moment, the Philistines likely lost all respect for Saul as king, and when David went on to slay Goliath, they saw him as the true king of Israel. They knew that the man standing before them was an enemy and a threat.

The text matter-of-factly states, “And David took these words to heart and was much afraid of Achish the king of Gath” (1 Samuel 21:12 ESV). It was as if David woke up from a bad dream and realized the gravity of his situation. The stupidity of his decision to go to Gath suddenly dawned on him, and he was “much afraid.” He was petrified, terrified, and mortified that he had ever conceived this doomed plan in the first place. So, finding himself in a jam, David resorted to deceit. Here was the man who killed Goliath, defeated hundreds of Philistines in battle, slaughtered 200 Philistines just to pay the dowry for his wife, and who carried the sword of Goliath in his hand, and yet he chose to feign madness rather than trust God and fight his enemies.

David somehow forgot all about his anointing and the fact that God had been by his side during all the conflicts of his life. The young man who once shouted, “The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine” (1 Samuel 17:27 ESV), and then took the life of Goliath with nothing more than a sling and a stone, was now so fearful in the face of his enemies. He resorted to acting like a madman. *The Message* paraphrases verse 13 this way: “So right there, while they were looking at him, he pretended to go crazy, pounding his head on the city gate and foaming at the mouth, spit dripping from his beard.”

What a scene, and what a sad situation for the future king of Israel to find himself in. This is the same David who would later write:

*Blessed be the Lord, my rock,
who trains my hands for war,
and my fingers for battle;
he is my steadfast love and my fortress,
my stronghold and my deliverer,
my shield and he in whom I take refuge,
who subdues peoples under me. – Psalm 144:1-2 ESV*

*He trains my hands for war,
so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze. – Psalm 18:34 ESV*

God would use this ill-timed, poorly conceived plan of David to teach His young king-in-waiting an invaluable lesson in faith. In the future, David would learn to place his trust in God rather than his rash plans and flawed attempts at self-preservation. David would escape with his life, if not his dignity, and he would never forget that day. In fact, he ended up penning the words of Psalm 34 as a result of this encounter with King Achish.

*I prayed to the Lord, and he answered me.
He freed me from all my fears. – Psalm 34:4 NLT*

*In my desperation I prayed, and the Lord listened;
he saved me from all my troubles. – Psalm 34:6 NLT*

*The Lord hears his people when they call to him for help.
He rescues them from all their troubles. – Psalm 34:17 NLT*

*The righteous person faces many troubles,
but the Lord comes to the rescue each time.
For the Lord protects the bones of the righteous;
not one of them is broken! – Psalm 34:19-20 NLT*

It is interesting to read these statements in light of what happened that day. There is no indication that God intervened. David didn't take the sword of Goliath and slaughter King Achish and all his soldiers. No lightning bolt from heaven struck down the Philistines and allowed David to walk away safe and secure. There is no mention of any miraculous intervention on God's part. What happened was that David resorted to acting like a madman, complete with drool dripping from his beard. Faced with the prospect of death, David took matters into his own hands and escaped with his life because he was willing to throw away any sense of pride or dignity he had.

Yet, when looking back on that day, David saw his rescue as having come from God. Despite his actions, God had rescued him. While he had run from Israel to the land of the Philistines, God remained with him. Even at one of his worst moments, God did not abandon him. Regardless of how badly David's poor attempt at self-preservation turned out, God was the one who rescued David from himself. And that is what God does for His own. God had said David would be the next king of Israel, and he would be. Even David, at his worst moment, couldn't screw up God's plan. He could make things harder on himself, but nothing he did would make it too difficult for God to fulfill His divine plan for him. Even our bouts of temporary insanity cannot prevent the future fulfillment of God's plans for us.

1 Samuel 22:1-5

Off to a Great Start

David departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam. And when his brothers and all his father's house heard it, they went down there to him. And everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was bitter in soul, gathered to him. And he became commander over them. And there were with him about four hundred men.

And David went from there to Mizpeh of Moab. And he said to the king of Moab, "Please let my father and my mother stay with you, till I know what God will do for me." And he left them with the king of Moab, and they stayed with him all the time that David was in the stronghold. Then the prophet Gad said to David, "Do not remain in the stronghold; depart, and go into the land of Judah." So David departed and went into the forest of Hereth. – 1 Samuel 22:1-5 ESV

David left Gath in a hurry, the drool still clinging to his beard and the laughter of the Philistines ringing in his ears. He had managed to escape with his life, but had been forced to leave his dignity behind. He had put himself in a very dangerous predicament and had been forced to feign insanity when his plan fell apart. However, as a result of this painful predicament, David began to learn to trust in God rather than himself. It would prove to be a lifelong lesson, but with each passing circumstance, David would lean less on himself and more on God. This would not be the last time David found himself in a tight spot. In fact, he would later write in one of his psalms:

*But I am a worm and not a man.
I am scorned and despised by all!
Everyone who sees me mocks me.
They sneer and shake their heads, saying,
"Is this the one who relies on the Lord?
Then let the Lord save him!
If the Lord loves him so much,
let the Lord rescue him!" – Psalm 22:6-8 NLT*

David knew what it was like to be despised and dejected. He experienced many moments of doubt and despair. But through it all, he discovered the reality of God's presence and power, and what it means to trust Him.

After having escaped from Gath by the skin of his teeth, David headed to an area called Adullam, the former site of an ancient Canaanite city. Adullam was not far from the valley of Elah, where David killed Goliath. The area is pockmarked with caves, many of which are large enough to hold up to 400 men. It was in one of these caves that David sought refuge. But he would not be alone for long. Somehow, his father and brothers received word that David was there, and they made their way to him, along with their entire households. David's cave was filling up fast and it would soon be standing room only, because the text tells us that "all who

were down on their luck came around—losers and vagrants and misfits of all sorts” (1 Samuel 22:2 MSG). David suddenly found himself surrounded by people with financial problems, malcontents, and a diverse assortment of misfits. They were all individuals who shared one thing in common: A general dislike for King Saul. In one way or another, this man’s reign had impacted them negatively, and they were willing to risk all to throw in their lot with David, a man with a bounty on his head.

Just hours earlier, David had been surrounded by hostile Philistines. Now, he was surrounded by disgruntled and desperate Israelites, who were looking to him for leadership and direction. The text states that 400 men allied themselves with David and viewed him as their commander. David was no longer alone, but he now found himself responsible for the well-being and protection of hundreds of men and their families. How would he feed them all? How was he going to protect them from the professional soldiers Saul would send to hunt him down? Whether he liked it or not, David suddenly found himself as a leader of men. Yes, it was a motley crew of misfits, and they would put David’s leadership abilities to the test, but this was the crucible in which God had chosen to purify and perfect the man whom He had chosen to be the next king of Israel.

One of the first decisions David made was to send his father and mother to stay in the land of Moab. He arranged with the King of Moab to provide his parents with safe haven, “until I know what God is going to do for me” (1 Samuel 22:3 NLT). David’s great-grandmother, Ruth, had been a Moabitess, so there was a familial connection that explains David’s decision. His parents would remain in Moab until he had a better idea as to what God had in store for him. David was slowly learning to seek God’s will. His adventure in Gath had been a painful and memorable lesson. Taking matters into his own hands and trying to determine his fate apart from God was a dangerous game to play. He had no idea what the future held, but he was eager to know what God would do, and he wouldn’t have to wait long.

One day, a prophet appeared at the Cave of Adullam and gave David a word from God. He was to leave immediately and return to the land of Judah. This would not be the last time during David’s wilderness wanderings that God would speak to him through a prophet. God had not left David alone, and He would not leave him directionless.

We have to remember that David had been anointed by Samuel to be the next king of Israel. It is still not clear whether David was aware of this fact. Up until this point in the narrative, there is no indication that Samuel had ever explained the meaning behind David’s anointing. David has shown no signs that he knew he was the king-in-waiting. He had been content to be a commander in Saul’s army. He had shown no aspirations of being king or any expectations that God would remove Saul and put him in his place on the throne. And yet, we know that God was God’s plan all along. So, when we read this story, we can’t help but wonder why God chose to do things the way He did. Why did He allow Saul to persecute and pursue David? Why was David forced to run for his life and live like a fugitive? Why was God willing to let Saul, a man He had rejected as king, remain in power? None of it seems to make sense. It all appears illogical and unnecessary. But God’s ways are not our ways. His plans rarely make sense to us. His methods,

more often than not, come across as little more than madness to us. But the life of David is meant to reveal to us the sovereign, all-powerful, all-knowing will of God. David was receiving it one day at a time but we get to see the whole picture. We are given access to the entire story and know how it ends. And we can see that God was with David every step of the way.

David was going to experience many dark days. He would know what it means to despair and feel the loneliness that comes with leadership. There would be moments when all seemed lost. There would be days when he felt abandoned by God. He would later write:

*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?
O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer,
and by night, but I find no rest.*

*Yet you are holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.
In you our fathers trusted;
they trusted, and you delivered them.
To you they cried and were rescued;
in you they trusted and were not put to shame. – Psalm 22:1-5 NLT*

But through it all, David would discover the holiness and faithfulness of God. And this lesson, while painful, would be crucial in his transformation from shepherd of sheep to shepherd of the people of God.

1 Samuel 22:6-13

Self-Pity and Paranoia

Now Saul heard that David was discovered, and the men who were with him. Saul was sitting at Gibeah under the tamarisk tree on the height with his spear in his hand, and all his servants were standing about him. And Saul said to his servants who stood about him, "Hear now, people of Benjamin; will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards, will he make you all commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds, that all of you have conspired against me? No one discloses to me when my son makes a covenant with the son of Jesse. None of you is sorry for me or discloses to me that my son has stirred up my servant against me, to lie in wait, as at this day." Then answered Doeg the Edomite, who stood by the servants of Saul, "I saw the son of Jesse coming to Nob, to Ahimelech the son of Ahitub, and he inquired of the Lord for him and gave him provisions and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine."

Then the king sent to summon Ahimelech the priest, the son of Ahitub, and all his father's house, the priests who were at Nob, and all of them came to the king. And Saul said, "Hear now, son of Ahitub." And he answered, "Here I am, my lord." And Saul said to him, "Why have you conspired against me, you and the son of Jesse, in that you have given him bread and a sword and have inquired of God for him, so that he has risen against me, to lie in wait, as at this day?" – 1 Samuel 22:6-13 ESV

These verses present a stark contrast. David was in a cave surrounded by misfits and malcontents, while Saul was sitting under the shade of a tree surrounded by his servants. The contrast doesn't stop there. David provided protection for his family by sending them to the king of Moab for refuge. Yet Saul was busy accusing his own son of treason and of conspiring with David to kill him. David was surrounded by men who were willing to die for him. Saul was surrounded by men who feared him. Some had even abandoned him to join forces with David. However, the greatest contrast between these two men lies in their relationships with God. David received a prophetic word from God instructing him to leave the Cave of Adullam and return to Judah. But for Saul, God had gone silent. In fact, he had no relationship with God at all because God had removed His Spirit from him. Saul was on his own and was, by all accounts, God-less. The result was a growing paranoia. He truly believed everyone was against him. His daughter and son had turned on him. His servants were disloyal. No one could be trusted. And his paranoia led to a heavy dose of self-pity. He was all alone. His little speech to his servants reveals the extent of his self-pity.

*"Has that son of Jesse promised every one of you fields and vineyards? Has he promised to make you all generals and captains in his army? Is that why **you have conspired against me?**" – 1 Samuel 22:7-8 NLT*

*"You're not even **sorry for me.**" – 1 Samuel 22:8 NLT*

Saul even accused Ahimelech the priest of treason, seeing his actions to help David as a personal attack.

*“Why have you and the son of Jesse **conspired against me?**” – 1 Samuel 22:13 NLT*

Without God in his life, Saul was susceptible to all kinds of irrational and unrighteous thinking. His lack of God’s presence greatly hindered his capacity to process the circumstances of his life mentally. He had become a fool, lacking reason and the capacity for rational thought. He could not even process the fact that all of this was the outcome of the prophet’s warning. Samuel had clearly warned Saul that God was removing His hand from his life and giving his kingdom to another. Saul was in a state of denial and suffering from delusion, believing that he could somehow prevent the inevitable and stay the hand of God. But his unwillingness to accept the will of God would simply cause him to sin against God, committing greater and greater transgressions, all in a hopeless attempt at self-preservation.

Standing among Saul’s servants that day was Doeg the Edomite, who might be better known as Doeg the Snitch. He had hurried back from Nob, eager to share the news that David was there and had been given food and the sword of Goliath by Ahimelech the priest. When Saul heard this report, he immediately sent for Ahimelech, his family, and all his fellow priests who served alongside him. If Ahimelech had been scared when David showed up in Nob (1 Samuel 21:1), he must have been petrified at the news of a summons from the king, and any fears he had would prove to be justified.

Saul was a man possessed, both figuratively and literally. He was constantly beset by a “harmful spirit,” the result of God’s removal of the Holy Spirit from his life. Without the influence of God’s Spirit, Saul’s reasoning was impaired. He became self-absorbed and suspicious of everyone and everything. Over time, he would become obsessed with the idea of destroying David, unable to think of anything else. Essentially, he would no longer act as the king of Israel. His whole life would be focused on one thing: David’s death. His kingship, the very thing he was trying to protect, would get lost in his obsessive-compulsive quest to kill off the competition. Sadly, Saul would be unable to enjoy the benefits of a king because he lived in constant fear of no longer being king.

One of the sad realities of godlessness is that it always results in joylessness, discontentment, fear, jealousy, and anger. In fact, the apostle Paul outlines the characteristics or “deeds” of a godless or flesh-based life in his letter to the Galatians.

...sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. – Galatians 5:20-21 NLT

Saul was miserable, not because he was losing his kingdom, but because he had lost his faith in God. His unhappiness, paranoia, self-pity, and misguided attempts at self-preservation were driven by his lack of a relationship with Yahweh. His decision-making was totally flesh-based,

driven by his own sin nature, and devoid of godly wisdom. He had lost his capacity to see things from God's perspective. Everything had become all about him. He was no longer concerned about the good of Israel or the honor of God's name. His only thoughts were for himself.

The life of the godless is not a pretty picture. And the truly sad thing is that many who have a relationship with Christ can end up living godless lives, refusing to seek His will, listen to His Word, or heed His direction. Rather than living God-centered, God-directed lives, they become self-absorbed and susceptible to the flawed input of their own sinful natures. While the Spirit of God never leaves them, they quench and grieve the Spirit through disobedience and willful, unrepentant sin. Rather than enjoying the fruits of the Spirit and the joys of sanctification, they become obsessed with self-preservation and paranoid about protecting what they are afraid to lose.

Jesus said, "The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life" (John 10:10 NLT). Satan had deceived Saul into believing that joy could be found in pursuing and eliminating David. But nothing could have been further from the truth. And Satan is constantly attempting to deceive us into believing that our way is preferable to God's way. But the way of the flesh eventually robs us of joy, kills our capacity to love, and destroys any hope of having a rich and satisfying life. Satan offers what he cannot give. Jesus promises what He died to make possible. The God-less life is a paranoid, self-pitying, joyless life. But the godly life brings joy amid sorrow, peace in the middle of the storm, hope when all looks hopeless, contentment in the face of loss, and strength despite our own weakness.

