

The Life of David

Week 1: Introduction

1 Samuel 15; Psalm 78:70-72

Dr. Matt Cassidy ---- August 20, 2023

His name is David—King David. There's more written about this man, with the exception of Jesus Christ, than anyone in all of the Bible, and it's not even close. There are sixty-six chapters in the Old Testament where he is mentioned, and there are fifty-nine references in the New Testament.

He is the original Renaissance man. He's a poet, author, musician; he's a warrior, a commander, a king, a giant-killer. He is somehow able to be both tender-hearted, a good shepherd, and a warrior. There's nothing like David.

The capital city, Jerusalem, is called the City of David. His hometown of Bethlehem is the birthplace of the Messiah. He is in the line of the Messiah. And the Messiah will come like King David.

But the greatest accolade he receives from God himself, is when God says that David is a man after God's own heart.

This semester we're going to look together at one of the very few hinges of world history. You can't know human history without knowing about the nation of Israel. And the nation of Israel becomes a united monarchy in this hinge of history, and David is the pin of that hinge.

Preceding David: Era of Judges and King Saul's Reign

Today I'd like to give you a quick survey of the context of this story and get us to David's life, where we'll start next week in 1 and 2 Samuel. But something precedes that. Forty years before David is inaugurated there is a book called Judges. It is about hundreds of years of Israel, the nation of God, descending into the heart of darkness. It is a series of grotesque stories of immorality and excessive violence. You do not want to read Judges to your little children at bedtime.

And in the context of those hundreds of years, is there hope? Wait ... there is. There's a bright light in a man named Samuel, because he can hear God's voice and he obeys. He's the last

judge. And as he's aging out we find that his sons are thugs, taking advantage of their power. And the people demand something else. And we see in 1 Samuel 8:5—these are the people speaking to Samuel—"Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint for us a king to judge over us like all the other nations."

They say they want a king like all the other nations, and the very point and purpose of Israel's existence is to not be like other nations. And that's what they want. They want to be a fulton nation where they're good for nothing.

This demand upon Samuel grieves him. He goes to the Lord in prayer. And God says this: *We're going to give them what they want, because* "they have not rejected you; they have rejected me as their king." *And so, let's give them what they want. If lust and hate is what they want, let's just give them what they want.*

And the Lord gives them a king like all the other nations. His name is King Saul. And it says in 1 Samuel 9 that Saul is handsome like no one else in all of Israel. And not only that, he's a head taller than everyone else. *Long live our king!*

In chapter 11, God in His mercy gives Saul his first big military victory. It's like giving him a push start. It's the hardest part, to get that inertia going. He wins. And from that point on you see that his career is like watching someone fall down a flight of stairs in slow motion. And he's bringing Israel with him.

You'll see in the life of Saul that there's not a single mention of Saul's love for God or his love for His commands. What you will see—and this is going to be our lesson for today—is that Saul has a proud heart. He is selfish and arrogant. It leads to paranoia, insanity, and acts of violence.

He's a king just like all the other kings. And what do all the other kings do with power and authority? They use it for their own promotion and for their own game.

I'd like to draw attention to chapter 15 because this is the story, the final event, that has God, Yahweh God, looking for a new king. And I want you to listen to how Saul's arrogance completely twists his view of reality. And he will be the definer of obedience. He will become the absolute authority on what obedience is in this story. Listen for that.

The story is about raging a war against the Amalekites. And the Amalekites were like the rabid hyenas of the Middle East. When we're introduced to the Amalekites, they are so vile that when Israel is just a baby nation wandering in the wilderness with Moses, they get to be the first

group of people to try genocide upon this fledgling nation of Israel. They're the first ones to try to absolutely exterminate all the people of God. And God is saying, *It's time to make this right. And if we don't stop them now, they'll come back and try it again.* And they do. That's the Book of Esther.

So, this is the command from God through Samuel to Saul. In [1 Samuel 15:1](#) it says, "Samuel said to Saul, 'So you listen now to this message from Yahweh. This is what Yahweh Almighty says: "I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt. Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy all that belongs to them. Do not spare anything or anyone.'""

It's even more clear—we don't have time, but this is what Saul does. "Saul took Agag, the king of the Amalekites alive, and the best of the sheep and the cattle—the fat calves, the fat lambs ... everything that was good. These were unwilling to destroy completely, but everything that was despised and weak they totally destroyed."

Everything rank they killed. Everything precious they kept. But know this—it was all about Saul. He keeps the king of the Amalekites as his personal trophy. (There are things they do to foreign kings—conquered kings.) And then saving the good cows and sheep, the fat ones—he allowed that to happen so that his troops would like him more. It was all about Saul.

And if that weren't bad enough, at the end of this battle with the Amalekites Saul takes a detour to Mount Carmel to build a monument in his own image.

Here's the confrontation between Samuel and Saul after this takes place. And I want you to listen to the power of the pride that is in Saul, his soul. He's going to redefine God's standards. He's going to justify his disobedience. He's going to blame other people—the troops—for his decisions. And finally, if that weren't bad enough, he's going to wrap the whole thing in church talk and saying that they're disobeying for religious purposes. (Boy, that sounds familiar.)

Anyway, Samuel meets with Saul, and here are the first words. As Samuel walks up to King Saul, Saul says this: "Samuel, may the Lord bless you, for I have been completely obedient to the commands of God. I have destroyed everything of the Amalekites."

While he's saying that, you can hear "Maaa ... Moo" And so, Samuel responds, "I can't hear you over the cattle and all these sheep."

And Saul says, “Oh, yeah ... so that ... the troops saved the good meat for a sacrifice to your God.” And he honestly believes that, because he says again, a second time, “But I have completely obeyed the Lord. The men took that meat for sacrifice to the Lord. It was an offering.” He believes this. This is the power of pride and how it dements us. It twists reality around so that we can make sure that we’re right. And we’re just going to redefine what right and wrong is so that we don’t have to admit that we’re wrong. And we’ll even use church words, Jesus words, so that we can say, *Well, we’re doing it for the Lord.*

1 Samuel 15:22-23

But Samuel replied: “Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. ²³ For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has rejected you as king.”

And here’s the lesson for everyone who is a follower of Yahweh through Jesus Christ. Listen, because this is what is right and real and true. Here’s the lesson, in chapter 15, verses 22 and 23: “But Samuel replied: ‘Does Yahweh delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of Yahweh? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination’—witchcraft—“and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has rejected you as king.’”

Application: To Obey Is Better than Sacrifice

Here’s the application: to obey is better than sacrifice. And the purpose of this story is for all of us. And the purpose is this: fear pride. And fear the power of pride. This arrogance--and this claim, statement, absolute truth from Samuel from the mouth of God is that arrogance is like idolatry. Why? Because you worship yourself. And when you give into pride and you surrender to the Saul within us—yeah, this is the lesson—Saul is within us. Every one of us has this, just waiting to be fed. And when we become that kind of proud, we think we can fool God. We

honestly think we can pull one over on Him by saying, *Oh, it's for the Lord*. It's church talk, Jesus speak.

And his point is that you can go to church and you can memorize verses and know all the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes by heart. But it's about obedience. It's not about your vocabulary or your ability to try and pull one over. That's what obedience means.

I remember when our children were growing up—I guess everyone has a moment when you're trying to define what obedience is in a household—but our phrase was “Obey all the way, right away.” Because it wasn't all the way and it wasn't right away. Obedience is all the way, right away. That's what it means.

Partial obedience—there's a word for that, Samuel tells us. Partial obedience is disobedience. *I'm almost faithful to my mate. I'm almost honest*. We have words for those, and it has nothing to do with obedience.

This is what the Lord says: “To obey is better than sacrifice.” I'll say this again. This is the point. Saul is in your heart. He lives within us. He lives within me.

And we see this a lot around us—when you see a politician or some media person look right into the camera and boldfaced lie and they know it—they don't blink—their eyes don't even twitch—how can that even happen? This is how it happens. And it happens because there are moments in time when you have a chance to fear the Saul within us, this pride. And we can repent early and often, and in that we can maintain our innocence. Or we can lose it. We can lose it in that moment when our conscience that is tied to the Spirit of God says, *Look, we need to get this right. We need to take responsibility for that*. And then the ego says, *Shh ... no, no, come on! Let's not overreact*. And the next thing you know, you're getting used to sin. And then you start redefining what sin is. Then it's blaming others or circumstances. *Well, you know, I mean, I'm different. I'm coming off this event and so therefore I get to ...*

And sometimes we find ourselves justifying acts of obedience using church words. *It was for the Lord*. And we have a heart of stone. We find ourselves with a heart of stone. If you can involve yourself in a premeditated sin and sleep well at night, you're on a highway—Saul's highway. And it's the road to destruction, and it's all downhill. It just keeps getting easier to get in the habit of sin. And the choices ultimately become a destiny.

If you look at Saul and his pride, which is in us as well, you can see that he is completely untethered from reality. He's seeing the world through his egotistical eyes where he is never

wrong and always right. And he thinks he can negotiate this with God. He is a kite unencumbered by a string. And he thinks that's a great way to live. And when we continue to read about him, he's going to have this perpetual descent, because the road that Saul is on, the highway, is all downhill. And he will literally participate in witchcraft. His actions are going to lead him to attempt the murder of two men who deeply love him and are committed to him: David, and his own son Jonathan. He will try to kill them. His ultimate end will be a violent death in a war, and he will have his three sons with him to experience this violent death. And these four from the family of Saul—Saul and his three sons—their dismembered corpses will hang from the walls of the enemies of God. And they'll be like a billboard for you and for me. Pride comes before a fall.

Final Judgment

This is supposed to be a startling and graphic lesson for all of us to fear pride and fear the power of pride. This is punctuated—there's this exclamation point that Samuel's going to bring to this storyline for us by showing that obedience is all the way, right away. Here's what he does. After this conversation with Saul, Samuel says, "Okay, bring me Agag the king of the Amalekites." And Agag is fetched and he's brought to the presence of King Saul. And then Samuel pronounces these words: "Agag, as your sword has made women childless, it will make your mother childless." And then the passage says, "And then Samuel hacked Agag the Amalekite into pieces."

Now there's one movie I've seen about the life of David, and particularly this storyline, that showed how the lesson was meant to be experienced. Saul is sitting on a throne thinking he's living a pretty good life after making a monument in his own image and just enjoying the victory over the Amalekites, thinking he was completely obedient to the Lord. And in this scene when Samuel's hacking Agag into pieces, Saul is getting blood-splattered with it. And then finally, the last thing that happens (sorry, kids) is he takes the head of Agag and throws in into the lap of Saul. And Saul's trying to get away from it. Message delivered.

People who fear the wrong things usually regret it too late. And people who fear the right things don't live with regret.

Application: Fear Pride and Fear the Power of Pride

And this lesson about Saul is to fear this: that we have Saul within us, and when we hear the voice of God, usually telling us to do something that we don't want to do, it's going to end up in some expression of our humiliation. And that voice of Saul says, *Shhh ... it's okay. You don't need to do that.* And then you're on that road. Fear pride. Fear the power of pride.

Just stop right here. That's it. That's the lesson. Think about your own life and how this might apply, and what it takes to be tender-hearted towards the Lord: innocence and this constant submission of this demon/dragon called "ego." "To obey is better than sacrifice."

David Is Chosen by God to Be King

The curtain closes after this, and God is grieving and Samuel is mourning, and it looks like Israel is back in the time of Judges all over again. Is there any hope for us? What can be done? Look at all the potential—there's that word—look at all the potential. What of God's chosen people?

And then God says, "Now let me pick a king—not like all the other nations." And He says this, in an event where Samuel is speaking to Saul: "But now your kingdom shall not endure. The Lord has sought out for himself a man after His own heart, and the Lord has appointed him as ruler over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you to do."

A man after God's own heart—it means he's in harmony with God. This person is going to grieve when God grieves, he's going to rejoice with the things that God rejoices in. And when it comes to obedience, his definition of obedience will be "all the way, right away."

A man after God's own heart ... this phrase that's being used here, that God has already picked out a man after His own heart, is like a reference to [2 Chronicles 16](#). Many of you know this passage. It's a beautiful visual of the way God lives in day to day life. And it says, "The eyes of the Lord roam to and fro throughout all the earth so that He might find and strengthen the heart that is totally dedicated to Him." Isn't that a beautiful picture of what the Lord is up to? His eyes are roaming to and from throughout all the earth so that He might strongly support those who hearts are completely His.

Psalm 78:70-72

He also chose David His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds; ⁷¹ from the care of the ewes with suckling lambs He brought him, to shepherd Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance. ⁷² So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them with his skillful hands.

He found that in a boy named David—just a shepherd, a person who’s easy to forget and overlook. And in Psalm 78 there’s a history of all God’s work. And its section on David reads like this: “He also chose David His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds; from the care of the ewes with suckling lambs He brought him, to shepherd Jacob’s people, and Israel His inheritance. So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them with his skillful hands.”

“Integrity of his heart” in Hebrew means “complete,” it means “innocent,” it means “wholeness.” Hey, those words sound familiar. In the New Testament it would be defined as “mature, complete, lacking in nothing.” Here at Grace Covenant Church, what do we say? Become like Christ in all of life. And “the eyes of the Lord are looking to and fro throughout all the earth so that, for the purpose that He might strongly strengthen those whose hearts are completely His.” We want to be that heart that He stops and strongly strengthens. And that’s what we’re up to.

And that’s what I’d like to do. Let’s go through this series together, looking at the life of David, and grow. Let’s do this for this very purpose: that in God’s roaming and searching, He’d stop here at our church, your heart, because that’s your desire—to be completely devoted to Him.

Why David’s Life Is Relevant to Us Today

Now when we look at David, know this. I taught this before when I was younger, and I didn’t teach David completely. David is especially relevant to us today, and let me tell you two reasons why.

One is that in the longest narrative in the entire Old Testament, there is much talk about calling upon the Lord. But there’s only one supernatural miracle—you know, Red Sea parting

type miracle. And I think that was interesting, in that that's how we're living (for the most part) in the United States today. God is working powerfully, but quietly. We have to look for His fingerprints left behind because He's not making a big presentation of His sovereignty. That's how David works. In 1 and 2 Samuel he's quietly and powerfully working.

And the other reason I think it's particularly relevant today—and in my reference to how I wish I would have taught it differently in the past—is because of the fullness of the life of David. The way it's written violates, for the most part, in contrast, to many ways of writing of the Old Testament saints that are somewhat simplistic. There are so many words spent on describing David in the fullness of the complexity of his persona and his temperament.

Here are two or three quotes that try to explain this.

This is a Jewish scholar: “David is the first person in history whose tale is complete and vital, laced with passions, savagery, hesitation, betrayal, charisma, faith, family—the rich canvas of a large life. He is capable of great acts, expressions of lasting piety, and of startling cruelty. David's failings are not slight or endearing.” Wow.

Many scholars don't know what to do with David. Some scholars will write that David is fiend. Others will say that he's a hero. And they have ample evidence for both of their conclusions.

Here's another good quote: “Commentators and scholars on David could compile these contrasting perspectives, opposing views. One portrays him as a paragon of faith with this one small sin, and another as a Machiavellian villain who connives and rises to rule.” And each of them has adequate evidence to prove their point.

It's the inconsistencies of David, I think, that I can identify with. And as I've gotten much older and I have looked at saints that try to get to the finish line without tripping, I've become more compassionate towards those who have, because of the life of David and the difficulties of life. It's a life we can identify with and it's a life we can live from.

One historical scholar said that this is the first human being written about in the literary world. It's all about his life. It's all about his humanity. It's the fullness of that.

In the fullness of David in our culture, it's funny that people outside the Church and synagogue know of David. It's part of our vocabulary. You hear a story about a sexual scandal involving a person in power, and people will say on the streets, “That's a David and Bathsheba story.” Any time there's an against-all-odds expression of a contest, whether it's on an athletic

field or a political event, or whatever it might be, what do we say? “David and Goliath.” One of the best-selling management books is called *David and Goliath*.

In my field, in my business, we’ll have a phrase for when you see some conniving but charming mutiny take place in a church. We’ll say, “He’s an Absalom.” Someone will call and give a reference: “Yeah, he’s really good, but he’s an Absalom.” Enough said.

The point is that there’s just no tiring of the compounding and the multitude of lessons we can learn from David. And so, even today, Jews will regularly sing, “David, King of Israel! David, King of Israel! Alive, alive, eternal!” That’s a song they sing a lot.

So, let’s do this together. Let’s study the life of David and learn lessons about the nature of our own souls and the nature of God, so that we might become like Christ in all of life.

But this is the last fact that you need to know as you read through. What I’d like us to do, is that, as we study together—you could catch up between now and next week—read 1 Samuel chapters 1 through 16. If you want to get connected at Grace Covenant Church or want to study more, starting next week we’re going to have at the 11:00 hour in the auditorium, two couples who love the Lord and are opening up a discussion group. You could take the lesson from the teaching time and go right in there at 11 o’clock and find some new friends and learn how to apply it to your life.

But as we read it together, I want you to be watching this: that David, a man after God’s own heart, still faces consequences of his choices; that we live with our choices. And you’ll see in David’s life, that if you sow an act, you reap a habit. And when you sow a habit, you reap a lifestyle. And when you sow a lifestyle, you reap a destiny. It happens with Saul. It happens with David. It happens in every life, because we are the consequences of our choices.

So, let’s go on this little adventure together. Let’s see what we can learn from David: what we can learn from his success and his love for the Lord; what we can learn about ourselves and why and how he failed. Is he becoming like Christ in all of life? We’ll find that Goliath is the smallest giant he’ll ever have to slay. He’ll run towards that giant. But he’ll run from his own son, because he chose not to surrender all of his life. We’ll see that even next week.

So, let’s do this together. Ready, Grace? Let’s go.

Lord Jesus, let me just stop and pause. The lesson today is to fear pride and fear the power of pride in our lives---its ability to completely manipulate our ability to see reality for

what it is—our ability to see right and wrong. It has the power to cause us to redefine everything around us so that we can't be, won't be, wrong. And that is an offense to You. It keeps us from even knowing You and hearing Your voice.

So, Lord God, when we hear that ego, shush us from Your Spirit leading us to repentance. God, give us the courage and the wisdom to know it's not from You; it's from Saul. And we quench that pride for Your glory, so that we might become like Christ in all of life and be known for being humble servants.

Lord, I'd ask that You would stop at this address when Your eyes are roaming to and fro throughout all the world, seeking to strongly strengthen those who are completely devoted to You; that You would stop here and see those hearts that are completely devoted to You.

And Lord, finally I'd ask that if we have unfinished business of taking responsibility for our sin and we have redefined it, made excuses for it, blamed others for it, or even threw church lingo on top of it to justify it, that now we would take responsibility and call it for what it is and make things right with our fellow man and with Your holiness. We'll start there.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.