

The Life of David | Loving Our Enemies | 1 Samuel 31-2 Samuel 1

April 13, 2025 | Matthew McNutt

[Title slide] One of the underlying themes of 1st and 2nd Samuel is this question: Who will reign suitably as king of Israel?¹ The people believed it needed to be a man even though God had told them they didn't need a human king. Remember their demand?

1 Samuel 8:5b (NLT) "Give us a king to judge us like all the other nations have."

But Saul quickly proved the wisdom of God's warning. Likewise, David will start off strong, a man after God's heart, yet by the end of his life his family will be a mess, paving the way for his son Solomon to ultimately fail as king so spectacularly that after his death the nation fractured in two and has never regained the status they briefly had.

Who will reign suitably as king? Only God. Today is Palm Sunday, a day that remembers the arrival of the only suitable king in humanity's history, Jesus, who was, and is, the King of kings. But I'm getting too far ahead of the story, aren't I? Today is the day we look at the death of Saul.

But first, a little context. Since we last saw David he has made an odd decision. He and his 600 men joined the Philistines. Kind of. He apparently thought what better way to protect himself than to be with the sworn enemy of his enemy. He ended up living in the town of Ziklag for a year and four months. He spent that time raiding Amalekite and other villages – sworn enemies of the Israelites, each time killing everyone so there were no witnesses. Meanwhile, he told the Philistine king that he was raiding the Israelites, convincing the king that David had truly burned his bridges with Israel.

In 1st Samuel 29, there's a wild moment. The king is mobilizing the entire Philistine army to fight the Israelites and he brings in David and his men as well – which outraged the other Philistine commanders. They were like, 'this is insane, he's going to betray us! The Israelite women sing about this guy killing tens of thousands of us!' Which gets really awkward for the king since he's the one who invited David. He actually tells him,

1 Samuel 29:9 (NLT) "As far as I'm concerned, you're as perfect as an angel of God. But the Philistine commanders are afraid to have you with them in the battle."

And he sends David back to Ziklag where he discovers that in their absence, the Amalekites had raided them, took their women and children, and burned the village to the ground. Ultimately, David and his men are able to rescue everyone, but their time is filled with chasing down and wiping out the Amalekites.

¹ Bill T. Arnold, *1 and 2 Samuel (The NIV Application Commentary)* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), Kindle location 8434.

Why is 1st Samuel detailing all of David's whereabouts as the Philistines battle with the Israelites? To make it crystal clear that David was in no way linked with the death of Saul. David's ascent to the throne is purely of God, not David's manipulation or effort.

Which brings us back to Saul. While David is battling the Amalekites and rescuing the women and children from his community, the battle between the Philistines and Israel was waged. And it did not go well for Israel.

1 Samuel 31:2-6 (NLT) ² The Philistines closed in on Saul and his sons, and they killed three of his sons—Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malkishua. ³ The fighting grew very fierce around Saul, and the Philistine archers caught up with him and wounded him severely.

⁴ Saul groaned to his armor bearer, "Take your sword and kill me before these pagan Philistines come to run me through and taunt and torture me." But his armor bearer was afraid and would not do it.

Both of their reactions make sense. Saul in the end had fought alongside his men as a king should but his injuries were too severe to escape. He knew the tortures the Philistines would have in store for a captive king; it wouldn't just be brutal for him, it would be humiliating for Israel. At the same time, it makes sense that his armor bearer refused, perhaps out of respect for the Lord's anointed, perhaps out of fear for what would happen to him if he was the one to kill the king.

So Saul took his own sword and fell on it. ⁵ When his armor bearer realized that Saul was dead, he fell on his own sword and died beside the king. ⁶ So Saul, his three sons, his armor bearer, and his troops all died together that same day.

This was a devastating defeat for Israel. Keep in mind, we have far greater insight into Saul's failures – most in Israel would not know the depth of Saul's lack of favor with God. They would remember his many victories, his successes, his opulence. When a king was defeated in war, it was believed that the gods had defeated the king's God, and so the Israelites fled. The Philistines triumphed. And 1st Samuel concludes.

2 Samuel opens with David hearing of Saul's death. A man arrives claiming to have escaped from the Israelite camp with news of how the battle went, that the Israelites had fled, and Saul and Jonathan were among the dead. When David demanded to know how he could be sure of this,

2 Samuel 1:6-16 (NLT) ⁶ The man answered, "I happened to be on Mount Gilboa, and there was Saul leaning on his spear with the enemy chariots and charioteers closing in on him. ⁷ When he turned and saw me, he cried out for me to come to him. 'How can I help?' I asked him.

⁸ "He responded, 'Who are you?' "I am an Amalekite," I told him.

⁹ “Then he begged me, ‘Come over here and put me out of my misery, for I am in terrible pain and want to die.’ ¹⁰ “So I killed him,” the Amalekite told David, “for I knew he couldn’t live. Then I took his crown and his armband, and I have brought them here to you, my lord.”

By now, you should all be asking yourselves, wait, isn’t this story different than what we just heard? Yup. This guy is a liar and an opportunist. He found Saul’s body – maybe he even saw Saul ask his armor bearer to kill him, either way, he is trying to position himself as the king maker of Israel. He brings the crown to David with a story of how he helped facilitate David’s takeover.

The problem? He didn’t understand the heart of David. Unlike other kings, unlike Saul, David was not a manipulator, he wasn’t playing a ‘game of thrones.’ His response was not what the Amalekite expected:

¹¹ David and his men tore their clothes in sorrow when they heard the news. ¹² They mourned and wept and fasted all day for Saul and his son Jonathan, and for the Lord’s army and the nation of Israel, because they had died by the sword that day. ¹³ Then David said to the young man who had brought the news, “Where are you from?” And he replied, “I am a foreigner, an Amalekite, who lives in your land.” ¹⁴ “Why were you not afraid to kill the Lord’s anointed one?” David asked.

It was at this moment that the Amalekite knew he had made a mistake.

Remember, during Saul’s battle with the Philistines that David was chasing down the Amalekites. And now one stands before him claiming to have killed Saul.

¹⁵ Then David said to one of his men, “Kill him!” So the man thrust his sword into the Amalekite and killed him. ¹⁶ “You have condemned yourself,” David said, “for you yourself confessed that you killed the Lord’s anointed one.”

In this moment David both demonstrates his innocence in Saul’s death and his loyalty to Israel. **“David in this act has avenged Saul and has presented himself as the faithful caretaker of the royal office.”** - Walter Brueggemann²

And then something odd happens from our perspective, especially after so many weeks of reading all of the wrongs Saul committed against David. David composes a funeral song for Saul and Jonathan, and he goes on to command that it be taught to the Israelites.

2 Samuel 1:19-27 (NLT) ¹⁹ Your pride and joy, O Israel, lies dead on the hills! Oh, how the mighty heroes have fallen!

² Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel (Interpretation Commentary)* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 213.

²⁰ Don't announce the news in Gath, don't proclaim it in the streets of Ashkelon, or the daughters of the Philistines will rejoice and the pagans will laugh in triumph.

²¹ O mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew or rain upon you, nor fruitful fields producing offerings of grain. For there the shield of the mighty heroes was defiled; the shield of Saul will no longer be anointed with oil. ²² The bow of Jonathan was powerful, and the sword of Saul did its mighty work. They shed the blood of their enemies and pierced the bodies of mighty heroes.

²³ How beloved and gracious were Saul and Jonathan! They were together in life and in death. They were swifter than eagles, stronger than lions. ²⁴ O women of Israel, weep for Saul, for he dressed you in luxurious scarlet clothing, in garments decorated with gold.

²⁵ Oh, how the mighty heroes have fallen in battle! Jonathan lies dead on the hills.

²⁶ How I weep for you, my brother Jonathan! Oh, how much I loved you! And your love for me was deep, deeper than the love of women!

²⁷ Oh, how the mighty heroes have fallen! Stripped of their weapons, they lie dead.

David's heart grieved the nation's loss, he didn't rejoice at the death of Saul. The loss of Israelite life in this battle with the Philistines, the loss of God's anointed, the loss of his dear friend Jonathan. Regardless of Saul's behavior, David's admiration for God's will and God's anointing rules out any hints of accusations some may have had that David was subversive, that he was engineering Saul's death for his own rise to power.

David was able to see the bigger picture, to help the Israelites as a people put words to the grief they would have felt over losing their king and his primary heirs.

The real point, I believe, is something deeper: David believed in the sovereign power of God, God's ultimate authority and power over everything. God had anointed David to be king one day and David trusted God to make it happen – he didn't try to engineer its fulfillment; he waited on God's timing. And God's timing isn't like our timing.

Depending on which scholar you read, it was anywhere from 14 years to 22 years from when David was anointed until he became king. And those many years were hard ones, on the run, multiple attempts on his life, forced to flee, to hide in caves and the wilderness, to scramble for food.

But like Joseph who centuries before was able to still have love for his brothers after they sold him into slavery, where he then spent years in prison for a crime he didn't commit, David was able to have this same attitude that Joseph did in that Saul may have meant it for evil, but God used it for good, and in the end it's God's will, God's sovereignty, God's timing that matters. No matter what Saul tried to do he could never overpower, outwit, manipulate, or somehow disrupt God's will and God's plan.

What does all this mean for us today?

1. Even in hard times, God is with us

God's sovereignty means that even in hard times, God is still in control. David had this kind of heavenly perspective. Instead of giving up or focusing on the wrongness of how he had been treated, he continued to focus on God. And God was with him, guiding and supporting him. As hopeless as it may have seemed at times, God never left him, never left his side. God's love was steadfast, consistent, committed, it was faithful.

Romans 8:38-39 (NLT) ³⁸ I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. ³⁹ No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We see David's confidence in God's plan – that nothing could separate him from God's love - in how he responded to Saul. Why? Because he was serving God, not man. His best was for God, not Saul, not the crown. Because of his love for God he could still love Saul, the man who wanted him dead.

2. God's good may not feel good

Romans 8:28 (NLT) And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.

The apostle Paul writes that God causes everything to work together for our good, for His purposes. Which is such a beautiful and important passage, and we cling to it rightly, but Paul was also beheaded for his faith, which doesn't seem great, right? I think we sometimes confuse what we think is our good for what God considers our good.

Sometimes we aren't healed, we don't recover. We don't get the verdict we hope for. The relationship fractures. Those who wrong us seem to get away with it. The difficulties keep piling on. Sometimes God gives visions of incredible things ... and the next decade or more is spent waiting in pain or in hiding.

David waited for more than a decade – possibly two decades. Joseph waited 13 years, Abraham waited 25 years, Moses waited 40 years, Jesus waited 30 years before beginning His ministry. If God's timing is causing you to wait, don't worry, you are in good company.

God doesn't promise us an easy life, in fact, He promises us difficulties, challenges, heartbreak. We're promised suffering.

Why? Because God's focus is our eternity, not this temporary life. God's plan is to be our King. Like the Israelites thousands of years ago, we are very aware of the imperfections of our human leaders. We – hopefully – are aware of our own imperfections and failures.

Our focus needs to be on God's good, the things of eternity, the things that truly matter. Through the celebration of Easter we are reminded that the king 1st and 2nd Samuel so desperately wanted to find is actually God.

1 Chronicles 16:34 (NLT) Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good! His faithful love endures forever.

God's faithful love is at work in your life right now. You may be going through something awful in your life right now or you may be easily breezing through life. Wherever you find yourself today, and then tomorrow, and then the day after that, and most definitely when you face difficulties and challenges, some of which you may not understand, put your trust in God's power and believe that He will always walk alongside you and bring good out of each circumstance in your life. Live with the attitude that David had, that in spite of years of suffering, running, hiding, he could sing of God's power and God's wisdom. David didn't have the advantage we have today: we know the end of the story, both for his kingship and ultimately for our salvation through Christ's death and resurrection. If you're in a time of suffering, a time of waiting, tell someone. Let your small group demonstrate God's faithful love to you, let your fellow believers support you, put it on your connection card. Send a text to someone now. Together we can pursue God's good, experience His faithful love.

Let's close in prayer.