

Saul: From Hero to Monster

By David Feddes

One of the most heartbreaking things in life is when somebody you care about starts out well and then ends up very badly. You have a child who is so beautiful, and so full of potential and so energetic and so happy and so intelligent, and you have such high hopes. And then a few years later, that child seems to not care about anything, maybe is hooked on drugs, is very sullen and grumpy, and you wonder, “What happened?” Or you start out in marriage, and the person you married is so exciting, so charming, so full of energy, so lovable, and a few decades down the road, you can't stand each other anymore. Maybe that person who started out so romantic and charming has become somebody who now only knows how to sit in front of a TV and drink beer and look at pornography once in a while and be grumpy. And you wonder, how did that young, exciting, charming man turn into this?

Or there may come a time when a new person comes to power. And most people are excited about this new leader, and then several years later, that leader turns out to be a monster—somebody who does horrible things that ruin the country and destroy people—and you wonder how could a person so full of promise turn into such a horrible person? Well, when we read the Bible in the book of First Samuel, and we read the story of Saul, we ask that same kind of question: how could somebody start out so well and end up so badly? How could Saul go from a hero to a monster?

In this presentation, I want to focus first on Saul, the hero, and all the things that were wonderful about him early in life. And then we're going to think about Saul, the monster, and some of the glimpses the Bible gives us of the kind of person Saul became. And then after that, we're going to ask ourselves, how did that happen? What happened in between where Saul went from a hero to a monster? What made that happen in his life?

Heroic beginning

Let's begin then with Saul, the hero, and his great beginnings. The Bible introduces him as rich, tall, and handsome. “There was a man of Benjamin, whose name was Kish a man of wealth. And he had a son whose name was Saul, a handsome young man. There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he. From his shoulders upward, he was taller than any of the people” (1 Samuel 9:1–2). Let's face it—there are advantages to being good-looking and tall, and the kind of person who just has that bearing and that appearance that commands respect, and Saul had it. And he had a great family that he was from, one that was well regarded in Israel, and that was quite wealthy on top of all that.

One day Saul is out looking for donkeys, and he comes across the prophet Samuel. And Samuel takes him aside privately. “Then Samuel took a flask of oil and poured it on Saul's head and kissed him, saying, ‘Has not the Lord anointed you leader over his inheritance?’” (1 Samuel 10:1). And then Samuel, after telling him that this was God's anointing, tells him what's going to happen. He's going to meet some prophets, and “the Spirit of the Lord will come upon you in power, and you will prophesy with them; and you will be changed into a different person” (1 Samuel 10:6). So, he's anointed not just with oil, but he is anointed with the Holy Spirit, who

rushes on him and enables him to prophesy. And indeed, all of that happens. “As Saul turned to leave Samuel, God changed Saul’s heart, and all these signs were fulfilled that day” (1 Samuel 10:9). He was able to prophesy. He had this tremendous experience of the Holy Spirit coming upon him.

Not only was he then anointed privately and had God's Spirit come upon him in this remarkable way, but then his choice as king had to be made public. So Samuel gathers all of Israel and wants to have a public choosing of who is going to be king. “Samuel had all Israel come forward by tribes, and the tribe of Benjamin was taken by lot. Then he brought forward the tribe of Benjamin, clan by clan, and Matri’s clan was taken. Finally, Saul son of Kish was taken. But when they looked for him, he was not to be found. So they inquired further of the Lord, ‘Has the man come here yet?’ And the Lord said, ‘Yes, he has hidden himself among the baggage.’ They ran and brought him out, and as he stood among the people he was a head taller than any of the others” (1 Samuel 10:20–23).

So not only is he anointed to be king and has these advantages and is handsome, but he's humble too. He's not eager or overly ambitious to become the king. He's actually hiding until they come and get him. And then he's chosen not just by God, not just by Samuel, but by the people. “Samuel said to all the people, ‘Do you see the man the Lord has chosen? There is no one like him among all the people.’ Then the people shouted, ‘Long live the king!’” (1 Samuel 10:24).

Well, once you're chosen to be king in a nation that's never had a king before, it's not always clear what to do. “Samuel told the people the rights and duties of kingship. He wrote them down on a scroll and deposited it before the Lord. Then Samuel dismissed the people, each to his own home. Saul also went to his home in Gibeah, accompanied by valiant men whose hearts God had touched. But some troublemakers said, ‘How can this fellow save us?’ They despised him and brought him no gifts. But Saul kept silent” (1 Samuel 10:25–27).

Another great thing about him: he's got these naysayers, these people who talk against him, and he doesn't try to reply. He doesn't argue with them. He doesn't give any speeches. Time will tell whether these naysayers are right. So Saul is going to have to show by his actions that he deserves to be king. But in the meantime, he holds his peace. He's calm, he's wise.

Then comes the event where Saul really has to show what he's made of as king. An enemy king, Nahash the Ammonite, said to the town of Jabesh Gilead in Israel, “On this condition I will make a treaty with you: that I gouge out all your right eyes and thus bring disgrace on all Israel” (1 Samuel 11:2). There's this horrible enemy king. He says if they surrender to him, he's going to gouge out everybody's eye. And so they asked for some time. They don't want to surrender just yet, and Saul hears about it. “When Saul heard their words, the Spirit of God came upon him in power, and he burned with anger” (1 Samuel 11:6). “Then the terror of the Lord fell on the people, and they turned out as one man” (1 Samuel 11:7). Saul had taken some oxen and cut them in pieces and sent out the pieces to various tribes in Israel. He says, “This is what will be done to the oxen of anyone who does not follow Saul and Samuel” (1 Samuel 11:7). So of course, the people get this fear, and the Lord helps make it happen.

The people come together—300,000 from Israel and 30,000 from Judah, a total of 330,000 people that Saul has managed to mobilize. And when he does this, they get together and fight fiercely. Saul organizes them into companies and attacks Nahash and that enemy army and wins a great triumph. “They broke into the enemy camp during the last watch of the night and slaughtered them until the heat of the day. Those who survived were scattered, so that no two of them were left together” (1 Samuel 11:11).

Well, then the people remember those naysayers—the guys who didn’t want Saul to be king and spoke bad things about him. “The people then said to Samuel, ‘Who was it that asked, “Shall Saul reign over us?” Bring these men to us and we will put them to death.’ But Saul said, ‘No one shall be put to death today, for this day the Lord has rescued Israel’” (1 Samuel 11:12–13).

Saul wins a great victory over enemies, but he's not going to take vengeance on those of his own people who hadn't wanted him. He's going to forgive; he's going to show some grace. He's going to win this victory without vengeance, and part of the way he does it is he gives victory to the Lord. He doesn't say, “Oh, this is all my victory. Now I'm going to wipe out anybody who opposed me!” He says, “The Lord won victory today. He won it for all Israel. Let all Israel be together. And let's just forget about anything bad from the past.” So he's showing a very gracious and forgiving heart.

Even after Saul has made some of his first mistakes, the Bible summarizes his reign this way—it pictures him as a conquering hero. “When Saul had taken the kingship over Israel, he fought against all his enemies on every side. Wherever he turned, he routed them. And he did valiantly and struck the Amalekites and delivered Israel out of the hands of those who plundered them” (1 Samuel 14:47–48). This is a rescuing hero.

Here's the tremendous picture that we have of Saul thus far.

Heroic beginning

- Family: wealthy and well regarded
- Looks: tall and handsome
- Anointing: empowered by God's Spirit
- Humility: not eager to become king
- Acclaim: chosen by God and the people
- Wisdom: doesn't react to naysayers
- Bravery: dares to take on brutal invaders
- Mercy: forgives those who rejected him
- Victory: unites Israel and defeats enemies

Despite beginning so well, Saul became someone terrible.

Murderous monster

Here are some of the glimpses the Bible gives us of the kind of king and man that Saul became.

During one battle where his son Jonathan helped to win a great victory in the middle of the battle, “Saul laid an oath on the people, saying, ‘Cursed be the man who eats food until it is evening and I have avenged myself on my enemies!’ So none of the people had tasted food. Now Jonathan had not heard his father charge the people with the oath, so he put out the tip of the staff that was in his hand and dipped it in the honeycomb and put his hand to his mouth, and his eyes brightened” (1 Samuel 14:24, 27). Jonathan hadn't heard his father give that command or utter that curse, and the honey really helped him to get his strength back. Saul finds out about it, and he's ready to kill his own son, the crown prince. “Then Saul said, ‘God do so to me and more also; you shall surely die, Jonathan.’ Then the people said to Saul, ‘Shall Jonathan die, who has worked this great salvation in Israel? Far from it! As the Lord lives, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground, for he has worked with God this day.’ So the people ransomed Jonathan, so that he did not die” (1 Samuel 14:44–45). But Saul was willing to kill him just to keep a foolish oath that he had made.

Later on, David—the hero who had killed Goliath—is working with Saul when Saul was in his bad moods and had a bad spirit. And David plays music. He's a great poet, and it soothes and helps Saul most of the time. But suddenly Saul goes into a rage, and he grabs his spear and tries to kill David with it. And David eludes him twice and gets away (1 Samuel 18:10–11; 1 Samuel 19:9–10).

Later on, Saul is just obsessed with killing David, and he's using various members of his family to kill David. Back when Goliath was a menace to the people of Israel, Saul promised, “I will give my daughter Merab to anyone who can destroy Goliath” (implied from 1 Samuel 17:25). So Saul later says 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” (1 Samuel 18:17). So he keeps sending David out to various skirmishes and battles, promising David that he'll give his daughter Merab to him, and hoping all the while that David will get killed in one of those battles. And then later on, Saul gives Merab to another man, even though he had made these promises that whoever killed Goliath would get her, and promised David specifically that if he kept winning battles, he would get her (1 Samuel 18:19).

But he's using his own daughter the whole time to try to kill somebody who is one of his finest soldiers. Then he tries to use his daughter Michal to destroy David, even after David becomes her husband. “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’” (1 Samuel 18:20–21). Now, when your daughter falls in love with a handsome, brilliant, accomplished, amazing man, do you think to yourself, “Wow, I am glad that she has a superb husband waiting for her”? Saul thinks, “Boy, I am glad that he likes my daughter so I can use her to kill him.”

And so he keeps sending David on more missions to prove that he deserves to marry the girl, but David always wins and comes back. And finally, he marries Michal (1 Samuel 18:27). But later on, Saul still wants Michal—even after she's become David's wife—to help him kill David. We'll see a little bit more about that in a minute. But he's using one daughter, then another, to try to commit murder.

He tries to use his own son Jonathan to destroy Jonathan's best friend, David. “The soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul” (1 Samuel 18:1). Well, that's handy for Saul. He thinks that he can get Jonathan to kill David because Jonathan is close to David. “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” (1 Samuel 19:1). And Jonathan wouldn't do it. In fact, he talks with his father. He says, David is a great soldier. He helps you out all the time. He's faithful and loyal to you. He's your own son-in-law. You should take him back to the palace and treat him right (1 Samuel 19:4–5). And Saul decides to do that. But then he once again goes into one of his rages and hurls his spear at David and tries to kill him. And once again, David makes it out of the palace (1 Samuel 19:9–10). Saul was determined at that point to kill David. He's not just having fits anymore; his mind is set on killing him.

And he wants to use Michal to do it. But Michal finds out about the plot. “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.’” (1 Samuel 19:12–14). So that gives David a little more time to get away. And while David’s making his escape, they're thinking that David is still there sick. Then finally Saul says, “Bring him up to me in the bed, that I may kill him.” And when the messengers return, they uncover the image, and it’s not David. David has gotten away. Saul is furious. “Saul said to Michal, ‘Why have you deceived me thus and let my enemy go, so that he has escaped?’” (1 Samuel 19:17). It's all about me. If I don't like somebody, you're supposed to be against him too! And my enemy has got to be your enemy, or you're my enemy too.

And Michal is so scared. She's got to answer her father. She says, “He said to me, ‘Let me go. Why should I kill you?’” (1 Samuel 19:17). You know he said no such thing. But the only way she can avoid getting killed by her own father is to lie to him. So that's what Saul has become: somebody who uses his own daughters and his son to try to murder his son-in-law, and he will do almost anything. And the people around him are petrified and scared to death of him.

He explodes at his son Jonathan when David doesn't show up for a feast and Jonathan puts in a good word for David. “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?’” (1 Samuel 20:30). And then he tries to spear his own son, the crown prince Jonathan (1 Samuel 20:33). Things are not going well.

And then maybe the lowest point of all. David has fled. He's been helped out by some priests who didn't even know that Saul was against David, because up to now these are all private plots of Saul to murder David. It's not known throughout the country that Saul is out to kill him. And so the priest helps David, gives him Goliath’s sword and some bread and sends him on his way.

And that day, a man named Doeg the Edomite saw it. And he's there with Saul. And he says, "I saw the son of Jesse, David, come to Ahimelek son of Ahitub at Nob. Ahimelek inquired of the Lord for him; he also gave him provisions and the sword of Goliath the Philistine" (1 Samuel 22:9–10).

Then the king sent for the priest Ahimelek son of Ahitub and all the men of his family who were the priests at Nob. And they all came to the king. Saul said, "Listen now, son of Ahitub." "Yes, my lord," he answered. Saul said to him, "Why have you conspired against me, you and the son of Jesse, giving him bread and a sword and inquiring of God for him, so that he has rebelled against me and lies in wait for me, as he does today?" (1 Samuel 22:12–13).

Ahimelek answered the king, "Who of all your servants is as loyal as David, the king's son-in-law, captain of your bodyguard, highly respected in your household? Was that day the first time I inquired of God for him? Of course not! Let not the king accuse your servant or any of his father's family, for your servant knows nothing at all about this whole affair" (1 Samuel 22:14–15). The priest says, why wouldn't I help David? You know he is the top guy in the kingdom except for you, and everybody knows your son-in-law is best commander and I help him out all the time.

But Saul is just in a rage because he thinks David's out to get him. The king said, "You shall surely die, Ahimelek, you and your whole family" (1 Samuel 22:16). Then the king ordered the guards at his side, "Turn and kill the priests of the Lord, because they too have sided with David. They knew he was fleeing, yet they did not tell me." But the king's officials were unwilling to raise a hand to strike the priests of the Lord (1 Samuel 22:17a). Even Saul's closest officials won't touch God's priests. That's just going too far.

But old Doeg is there. He's a foreigner. He'd been in a little trouble and now he wants to get back on Saul's good side. The king then ordered Doeg, "You turn and strike down the priests." So Doeg the Edomite turned and struck them down. That day he killed eighty-five men who wore the linen ephod (1 Samuel 22:18). He also put to the sword Nob, the town of the priests, with its men and women, its children and infants, its cattle, donkeys, and sheep (1 Samuel 22:19). But one son of Ahimelek son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped and fled to join David (1 Samuel 22:20).

Here's the great rescuer of Israel who massacres all the priests and even their little babies. He's got Doeg murdering them all and killing the babies and destroying the people that even his closest officials wouldn't lay a hand on because they're God's priests—and Saul just orders them all slaughtered anyway. If you have watched the Star Wars films, there's that moment when Anakin Skywalker, who up to that point has been a great pilot and doing great things, suddenly turns and slaughters all the Jedi children and murders every last one of them. That's just fiction. But Saul literally does massacre all the priests and all of their little babies, except for one priest that gets away. How does such a man become like that?

Later on, near the end of his reign, Saul is desperate to know what's going to happen in a battle. And so Saul goes to a witch, to a medium who he believes can help him make contact with the dead. And he wants to hear from the prophet Samuel one last time. So he gets this witch—whom

formerly he had banned. He had said there can't be any of these witches and mediums and contact with the dead. He made a law and threatened with death anybody who did it (1 Samuel 28:3, 9). And now he goes and asks for one. And the spirit of Samuel—or at least what seems to be the spirit of Samuel—gives Saul a message: “You're dead. All your sons, you're going to lose the battle. You're all dead” (1 Samuel 28:19).

Saul is resorting to witchcraft and mediums and spirits of the dead. And then in the terrible battle, his men are routed. They're all fleeing. He's concerned about his own dignity and maybe being tortured or having his body mistreated. So he falls on his own sword and kills himself (1 Samuel 31:4).

That's what Saul became.

Murderous monster

- Used his daughters as bait for murder
- Tried to turn his son against best friend
- Twice wanted to kill his noble son
- Many times tried to kill heroic son-in-law
- Uttered horrid insults against his wife, the mother of his noble son
- Massacred God's priests and families
- Used witchcraft to consult the dead
- Committed suicide on his own sword

What a horrible, repulsive person Saul had become.

How did Saul become so bad?

How did he get from that tall movie star look, that humble guy, the Spirit-anointed and empowered guy, the one acclaimed by the people and chosen by God, the wise, calm man who doesn't worry when there's somebody speaking against him here or there, who dares to take on anybody, who forgives those who reject him, who's winning for Israel and defeating her enemies—how did that hero turn into the monster who massacres the priests and turns all of his own family members—or tries to—against each other, and is paranoid and murderous? That's the question.

It's an important question because it's not just a long-ago question about a guy who lived 3,000 years ago. You might think this is an interesting story and want to figure out what changed Saul. But the Bible doesn't just tell stories for our entertainment. The Bible tells us these things so that we can take them to heart. Because it is very possible—if you underestimate the deadly power of sin and the powers of darkness—to have all kinds of potential, to start well, to have great religious experiences even, to have God's Spirit do certain things in you and through you and maybe even to achieve some amazing things, to hold important positions, and yet crash and burn in terrible ways.

The Bible says, “If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!” (1 Corinthians 10:12). Sometimes, when I talk to somebody and warn them that something could lead to a horrible result, they might be offended and retort, “Do you have that low opinion of me? You think I’m bad? You think I’m wicked? You think I’m stupid?” Not necessarily. But I don’t care who you are—if you let the power of sin grab hold of you and grow, what you thought was minor can turn you into a mess. It certainly did in Saul’s case.

Let’s look at some of the particulars of how he got from that heroic beginning to that murderous monster. Really, the one major incident occurs in First Samuel 13, where Saul is going to be facing the Philistines in battle. But he’s been told by Samuel that Samuel is going to be there on the seventh day. And Samuel will offer the sacrifice, and then they can take on the Philistines.

Well, the days pass, and with each passing day, some of Saul’s men are getting more and more nervous, and some of them are leaving, and Saul gets worried. And on the seventh day at sunup, Samuel’s not there yet. And Saul thinks, “I got to do something, and I got to do it soon. And we got to get into battle. But we don’t really want to get into the battle without the Lord’s blessing. And so, I’m just going to get his blessing and get this thing going.” So Saul offers the burnt offering—something only the priest or the prophet of God is supposed to do, not the king. And he does it anyway.

And just as he’s got it going, who should show up but Samuel? It’s still the seventh day, just like he said, just wasn’t right at sunup. And Samuel says, “What have you done?” And Saul said, “When I saw that the men were scattering, and that you did not come at the set time, and that the Philistines were assembling at Mikmash, I thought, ‘Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the Lord’s favor.’ So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering” (1 Samuel 13:11–12). I did it my way. I did what I had to do.

And so, Saul’s impatience—he couldn’t wait any longer. He couldn’t wait for any more of that day to go by and for Samuel to show up. He didn’t believe that Samuel was coming. He didn’t believe that the word of God that had come to him through Samuel was true. So he just had to do what he had to do, and he’s still going to get God involved. He’s just not going to do it God’s way. He’s not going to believe in God’s way of doing it. And he’s not going to be patient.

Samuel said to Saul, “You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. But now your kingdom will not endure; the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people, because you have not kept the Lord’s command” (1 Samuel 13:13–14).

So Saul is still king. But Samuel said, “Because of this, your line is not going to continue to be king over Israel.” Now, where do you go with that? There are times when God announces the judgment. And the people who are truly people of God accept that judgment and then move on, in tune with what God has done.

Remember when Samuel was a little boy, and he announced a judgment against Eli because of the wickedness of Eli’s sons? And he said, “See, I am about to do something in Israel that will

make the ears of everyone who hears of it tingle” (1 Samuel 3:11), and “I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons made themselves contemptible, and he failed to restrain them” (1 Samuel 3:13). And what did Eli say? “He is the Lord; let him do what is good in his eyes” (1 Samuel 3:18).

And he takes in little Samuel and mentors him and helps turn Samuel into a great leader, even though he knew the judgment of God stood against his own line. When Samuel has a couple of boys who don’t turn out well, they turn out to be crooks who are trying to use power. And the Lord and the people don’t want those guys taking over from Samuel. And instead, Saul is anointed. What does Samuel do? He helps Saul. He advises him. He doesn’t go around resenting him all day or say, “Lord, it’s not fair! I should have my boys take over from me!”

And yet when Saul is told, “Because of this, you’re not going to have your family line continue as king, because you didn’t keep God’s command,” rather than just repent and accept God’s judgment and then move on in tune with God from there, Saul decides he is going to resent that and move forward, not accepting God’s Word and God’s judgment on his sin.

Then there’s a second time that comes when Saul is commanded to lead the people against the Amalekites and to wipe them out as God’s judgment against a very wicked and nasty people (1 Samuel 15:1–3). And Saul and his men go, and they kill a lot of Amalekites. They wipe out their families, they wipe out all the animals that aren’t much good. And then they keep the best of the animals. And Saul spares the king, because, hey, you know, we kings are kind of a special category of people (1 Samuel 15:8–9).

And so Samuel comes up and says, “Why did you not obey the Lord? Why did you pounce on the plunder and do evil in the eyes of the Lord?” (1 Samuel 15:19). And Saul is saying, “Oh man, I did exactly what the Lord commanded!” (1 Samuel 15:20). And then he makes excuses—we’ll see those in a minute. But what’s going on in this particular incident?

Well, after his battle with the Amalekites, the first thing that Samuel is told is, “Saul has set up a monument in his own honor” (1 Samuel 15:12). That’s a pretty telling sentence. There was a time when this guy would hide among the baggage and wasn’t eager to be king. Now, he’s putting up monuments in his own honor. And sometimes people who want to be admired—sometimes there are politicians who want their pictures everywhere, who want to be famous and acclaimed—are really pretty empty at the heart of things. He wants monuments in his own honor.

At the same time, he says, “I was afraid of the people and so I gave in to them” (1 Samuel 15:24). And they wanted to keep the best of the animals, and he says, who was I to say no to the people? And then after he finally has exhausted his excuses, he says, “I have sinned. But please honor me before the elders of my people and before Israel; come back with me, so that I may worship the Lord your God” (1 Samuel 15:30). God is against him for this, but he says, “I at least want to make a good impression on the people.”

Yet Jesus once said, “How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?” (John 5:44). You care what people

think about you, and sometimes even build monuments in your own honor. But what God thinks of you has taken second, third, or fourth place. And notice how Saul refers to God. He is the Lord your God. He's Samuel's God, not Saul's (1 Samuel 15:21, 30).

Saul has his pride, his reputation—that still matters to him after many other things have collapsed. When Saul explains why he kept these animals, he was just going to offer some nice burnt offerings to God, which wasn't really the case at all—we know that by now.

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. 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” (1 Samuel 15:22–23).

And the Lord regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel (1 Samuel 15:35), because there's this rebellion in Saul, this arrogance. He goes against God's command. And when you go against God's command, that's like using witchcraft to find out the future. It's like worshiping idols. When you're arrogant and proud and build monuments to yourself—hey, what's wrong with a little strutting here and there? What's wrong with a little bragging? What's wrong with wanting to look important or doing what you thought would make you more popular with other people? No harm done!

Yeah, maybe not. Except eventually, instead of carrying out God's command, you're massacring the priests of God. Little things turn into big things.

Running throughout the whole story, you see Saul's lies and excuses and blame. The first time when he offered the sacrifice, when Samuel didn't show up right when you expected him, he blamed Samuel and says, “You didn't come at the set time” (1 Samuel 13:11). Well, Samuel didn't say exactly when on the Sabbath day he would come. But you know, when the seventh day started and Samuel wasn't there, Saul figured, “Too late for him!” And he blames Samuel for doing what he knew he shouldn't do.

Later on, when Samuel shows up again, when all those animals are making all that noise, Saul says, “I have performed the commandment of the Lord.” And Samuel says, “Then how come I hear so many cattle and sheep making a racket?” (1 Samuel 15:13–14). And Saul says, “Well, they spared the best of the sheep and cattle. Oh, we did it for God. We did it for God.” Oh, what a worshiper of God. Well, he's totally destroyed the rest, and the Bible tells us they actually got rid of the stuff they didn't like anyway, and they were going to keep all the best for themselves (1 Samuel 15:15, 19).

So, he's got lies. It's been that way since Eden. Adam says, “This woman You gave me, she's the one that got me on the wrong track!” And Eve says, “That serpent, he slithered in, and he told me something” (Genesis 3:12–13). And God just cuts to the chase and says, “You disobeyed Me.” You know, if God has told you something, you don't have to listen to your wife. You don't have to listen to snakes. If God has told you something, you don't have to listen to people. You don't have to listen to your own self. You listen to God, and no excuses.

And then there's that terrible thing that goes on at the heart of all these passages, where the Spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him (1 Samuel 16:14). How does that work? Well, the Lord's in charge of everything. And if you want to be your own king, if you want to sit on your own throne, and if you want to set up your own monument, and if you want to follow your own orders instead of God's orders, here's a memo for you: that's not one of the options. "You've got to serve somebody. It may be the devil, it may be the Lord, but you've got to serve somebody." Bob Dylan understood that when he sang those words.

If you don't want to serve the Lord, the Lord doesn't just say, "Okay, Saul, have fun being king doing it your own way!" He says, "Okay, Saul. Now here is an evil spirit to run your life instead of Me." You even read in the New Testament, when people have sinned against the Lord, the phrase is used, "Hand this man over to Satan, so that he will be taught not to blaspheme" (1 Timothy 1:20). Well, Saul was handed over to an evil spirit.

But even those terrible incidents with the evil spirit, where he tries to spear David (1 Samuel 18:10–11; 1 Samuel 19:9–10), where he does all kinds of wicked and crazy things, he doesn't learn from them. And I don't know how to sort it all out. Still, in modern life, I don't always know how to sort out that line between sin and mental illness. Some forms of mental illness are not sin, and people have no responsibility for them. But there are others who make choices, and then more choices, and after a while, they're not making their own choices anymore. Something has taken over their mind and is corrupting their personality.

It certainly happens in relation to terrible things like enslavement to drugs or alcohol. The first few times you had a choice. Later on, it has taken over. It's an evil spirit. And it's got you, and the choice is becoming less and less yours. But we need to understand—if we understand anything from this story of Saul—the terrible power of sin, the awfulness of judgment, and the need to repent under such judgment, and the alternative of having domination from a spirit that's not even our own spirit anymore.

So Saul is grieved by this spirit. Sometimes he's taken over by it. His people can't cheer him up. He gets David to cheer him up—David the poet and the singer. God uses that music to cheer Saul back up again (1 Samuel 16:23). And David does all these things. He rescues Saul from his demon, at least for a time. He rescues Saul from the giant Goliath when Saul is no longer the man he used to be and doesn't dare to take on such an enemy. David steps out there. David uses his sling and his stone, and he kills the giant Goliath (1 Samuel 17:49–50).

He's helped Saul overcome his demon. He's removed Saul's greatest enemy. And how does Saul reward him? Well, something happens in the victory parades that come after David's victories—after Goliath and after defeating other enemy armies. The people love Saul, because after all, Saul is still the king. He is still the commander. And they also like the young hotshot. And so they're singing together, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands" (1 Samuel 18:7).

Saul didn't say, "That's cool! The people really like me. They take me as a great hero, and sure, they like the latest hero. You know, they really like him because he's done some great things

lately. But isn't it great that they like us both?" Saul was very angry. This refrain displeased him greatly. "They have credited David with tens of thousands," he thought, "but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?" And from that time on, Saul kept a close eye on David (1 Samuel 18:8–9).

The power of jealousy and anger. You just look at what happens in little kids in a family. "She got more than I did! Why did they get the last piece of chicken and not me?" It starts with just little things like that, where one is jealous because of another, or one thinks Mom and Dad favor this one over that one. Or you're in a group of friends, and you think that person is more popular than you are. And instead of being glad for them, you get jealous. You get mad, and you get madder. And it ends up eating at you and destroying you.

Don't underestimate the power of jealousy and the power of anger to just eat up and destroy life. It happens in marriages, where just anger that doesn't get addressed builds. And it builds. And after a while you're so mad, you can't stand being around that other person anymore. And what was once a heroic relationship can become a vicious and deadly one.

Day after day, Saul is watching David come back from these victories and from these battles. And he starts hunting David. There are the incidents where he tries to spear him (1 Samuel 18:11; 1 Samuel 19:10). But after a while, he mobilizes the whole nation and the army to try to hunt him down and kill him. It's not just a private vendetta anymore. He's using all the levers of government and all the power of the military to bring down David and kill him.

And at least two different times, David has Saul right where he could kill Saul (1 Samuel 24:3–7; 1 Samuel 26:7–11). And his men are egging him on, "Get him, get him, get him! God put him here so you can mow him down!" And David says, "Well, God put him here. But I know that I'm not allowed to kill the Lord's anointed. That's God's. If God wants to take him out, God can do that in a variety of ways. But that's not my thing to do."

And so, he lets Saul go. And he tells Saul a couple different times he lets him go and then lets Saul know that he could have killed him. And Saul says, "Is that your voice, David my son?" And he wept aloud (1 Samuel 24:16). And he gives a nice speech about how great David is and how he's going to be king (1 Samuel 24:20). And the next week, he's hunting him again.

And so again and again, that jealousy and that anger just take over against Saul's better judgment. And ultimately, you know, at the heart of it, he's fighting God's kingship. As I said before, God had announced to him that he was not going to be allowed and his family line was not going to continue as king because of what he'd done (1 Samuel 13:13–14; 1 Samuel 15:26–28). And rather than Saul going along with that and saying, "Well, at least my son-in-law might still be king, and he's a pretty great guy, and my son likes him anyway," you know, if Saul had done things differently and accepted God's judgment of David—David and Jonathan, Jonathan himself says, "Hey, David, I'd be delighted if you take over the kingship, and I'll be your right-hand man" (1 Samuel 23:17). And it all could have worked out. But it didn't work out that way.

Samuel had anointed David in the midst of his brothers, and the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon David from that day forward. And the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and a harmful spirit

from the Lord tormented him (1 Samuel 16:13–14). So, the Spirit of God is doing something different than what Saul wants. And Saul is determined that if that is so, he is going to fight against him. Maybe some of you have even seen the movie *Amadeus*, where Salieri is so jealous of Mozart's talent. And there's a scene where he just takes a crucifix, a cross, and throws it in the fire, and says, "If You're going to give him that talent, I will destroy Your creation."

And at first, Saul doesn't know that David's going to be the man. But later on, he's got a pretty good sense that David is the one after God's own heart, who's going to take over the kingship (1 Samuel 13:14; 1 Samuel 16:1, 12–13). And he says, "If that's the way it is, I am against You, God, and I am hunting that brat down and I'm killing him."

So, he's got this rage against David, this rage against the priests, but it's really a rage against God. It's his pride and his lust for power that lead him to resist the reign of the very God who appointed him and anointed him. That's a scary thing. And we need to see that too. Because not just in our own personal lives do we need to be aware of that terrible power of sin and the devil, but also, there are people, sadly, within churches even, who take the fact that they were once anointed by God, that they were once empowered by God, as a signal that, "I am always right. And if you oppose me, you're opposing God." There are even pastors who will say, "Touch not the Lord's anointed" (Psalm 105:15).

David didn't murder God's anointed. Did that mean that God's anointed was perfect? By the time you're talking about "touch not the Lord's anointed," the anointed had become a murderous monster from whom the Spirit had departed. And so it's important that when people just pull rank and say, "I am the Lord's anointed, and there was a time when I was put in this position, and the people acknowledged me, and God appointed me and anointed me, and I can do no wrong, and how dare you go against me?"—and that's happened a lot in various churches and religious groups—the Lord's anointed can go very, very far astray unless he's the Lord's anointed Christ. Anybody but the anointed Christ had better take heed. And so, when you're trying to pull rank as a religious leader, you might be fighting God's kingship.

Some of you have seen *The Lord of the Rings* movies. Denethor is a great man. He reminds me a lot of Saul. For years, he's fighting the evil enemies who are on the borders and keeping them back. And his efforts are keeping a lot of other people in the realms far beyond safe. And they don't even hardly know what he's doing or appreciate what he's doing. But what a great man he is, the steward of Gondor. And then he starts to fight this evil power using the tools of that evil power, and he gets corrupted himself. And when the one who has the true right to be king comes along, he is going to reject him. Denethor would rather kill himself and kill his son than have the true king on the throne.

That's the kind of madness that takes over Saul—this obsession with power. He's got to have the power. He's got to have that throne, even though he knows that somebody else belongs on it.

Honoring the fallen hero

After it's all done and Saul is dead, how should we remember such a man? Well, the book of Samuel remembers all of it—the good, the bad, the ugly, the horrible.

But after his death, some people still remembered the best about Saul. The people of Jabesh Gilead remembered what Saul did way back when they were all going to have all their right eyes put out by an evil enemy king named Nahash (1 Samuel 11:1–11). “And when the people of Jabesh Gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, they took their valiant men and went all night and took down the bodies of Saul and his sons from the wall of Beth Shan and went to Jabesh, where they burned them. Then they took their bones and buried them under a tamarisk tree in Jabesh, and they fasted seven days” (1 Samuel 31:11–13). Despite all that Saul had done that was so evil, they never quite forgot the hero.

When we look at a life that’s gone terribly wrong, it’s still okay to remember the hero, to remember the promise that was there once, to remember the good things that person did. Especially after their death, it is fitting to honor what God accomplished through them in spite of all their terrible flaws.

How did David himself react? He wept. "David took up this lament concerning Saul and his son Jonathan... 'How the mighty have fallen! ... Saul and Jonathan--in life they were loved and admired, and in death they were not parted. They were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. Daughters of Israel, weep for Saul, who clothed you in scarlet and finery... How the mighty have fallen in battle!'" (2 Samuel 1:19-27) As David grieves, he remembers a great and noble and heroic king, and with a gracious memory, he dismisses all the evils that Saul had brought against him.

Maybe you know somebody whose life fell apart—and you remember better times. Thank God for the better times, for what was once good in somebody, for worthwhile things they accomplished.

At the same time, learn from their downfall and from the dreadful downfall of Saul. Learn that sin is a terrible, terrible thing.

It took nothing less than the death of the Son of God to undo sin. Nothing else could do that. It takes nothing less than the Spirit of God—not just an experience of the Spirit now and then, or a shot of the Spirit’s power on this or that occasion, or a tremendous religious experience or an achievement—but it takes the abiding presence of the Spirit of God living in you, not departing from you, helping you day to day. Because if he departs even for a moment, you’re going to collapse. You’re going to be ruined.

As David prayed after one of his terrible sins, you can pray, “Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation” (Psalm 51:11–12). Because no matter who you are, no matter how noble, no matter how great your beginnings, the mighty can fall—and not just in battle. “How the mighty have fallen” is repeated again and again and again throughout history.

We must pray that the Lord will lift us up again when we have fallen, rather than just going on in determination to resist his judgments against our sin. We say, “Lord, I did sin. I blew it big time. And maybe there’s going to be lasting consequences in my life. But rather than become bitter

about it, rather than lash out at others about it, I'm going to pick up from here, with Your help and by Your grace." That's what Eli did. That's what Samuel did. That's what Saul didn't do.

We know a greater fullness of the Spirit's work. But if we don't avail ourselves of those things, then we are doomed to repeat what this great fallen hero did. So let us learn the terrible, sad lessons of Saul's life and pray that the Lord may bring us and those we love and those in our sphere of influence on a better path and to a better end.

Prayer

We pray, Lord, that You will indeed work Your way in us through your Word, this Word of truth, as we look at the life of an amazing and marvelous character, and yet one who became so distorted and ruined by sin. We pray, Lord, that You will not give us over to the consequences of our own sin and rebellion, but that You will have mercy on us, that You will help us to have a heart of repentance, of seeking again Your face without excuse, without lashing out or blaming others, but instead allowing You again to hold Your throne and to acknowledge that throne and Your great kingship and humble ourselves before You and live for You.

We thank You, Lord Jesus, that when we were totally lost, when all who were anointed turned out to be thieves and robbers and who had failed in so many desperate ways, You Yourself came and You came to give us life and life more abundant. And so, Lord, grant us grace to accept that abundant life on Your terms, to receive it by grace as a free gift, and then to live in obedience to Your commands on the path of righteousness and well-being and peace. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Saul: From Hero to Monster
By David Feddes
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Rich, tall, handsome

There was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish ... a man of wealth. And he had a son whose name was Saul, a handsome young man. There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he. From his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people. (1 Samuel 9:1-2)

Anointed by God

Samuel took a flask of oil and poured it on his head and kissed him. Samuel said, "Has not the Lord anointed you to be prince over his people Israel? And you shall reign over the people of the Lord and you will save them from the hand of their surrounding enemies... The Spirit of the Lord will rush upon you, and you will prophesy with them and be turned into another man." ... When he turned his back to leave Samuel, God gave him another heart. (1 Samuel 10:1-6, 9)

Chosen but humble

When Samuel had all Israel come forward by tribes, the tribe of Benjamin was taken by lot... Finally Saul son of Kish was taken. But when they looked for him, he was not to be found. So they inquired further of the Lord, "Has the man come here yet?" And the Lord said, "Yes, he has hidden himself among the supplies." They ran and brought him out, and as he stood among the people he was a head taller than any of the others. Samuel said, "Do you see him whom the Lord has chosen? There is none like him among all the people." And all the people shouted, "Long live the king!" (10:20-24)

Listening to God, ignoring naysayers

Then Samuel told the people the rights and duties of the kingship, and he wrote them in a book and laid it up before the Lord. Then Samuel sent all the people away, each one to his home. Saul also went to his home at Gibeah, and with him went men of valor whose hearts God had touched. But some worthless fellows said, "How can this man save us?" And they despised him and brought him no present. But he held his peace. (10:25-27)

Bold leadership

Nahash the Ammonite said to Jabesh-Gilead, "On this condition I will make a treaty with you, that I gouge out all your right eyes, and thus bring disgrace on all Israel."

...And the Spirit of God rushed upon Saul when he heard these words, and his anger was greatly kindled... Then the dread of the Lord fell upon the people, and they came out as one man... the people of Israel were three hundred thousand, and the men of Judah thirty thousand... Saul put the people in three companies. And they came into the midst of the camp in the morning watch and struck down the Ammonites... (11:1-11)

Victory without vengeance

Then the people said to Samuel, "Who is it that said, 'Shall Saul reign over us?' Bring the men, that we may put them to death." But Saul said, "Not a man shall be put to death this day, for today the Lord has worked salvation in Israel." (11:12-13)

Saul the rescuing hero

When Saul had taken the kingship over Israel, he fought against all his enemies on every side... Wherever he turned he routed them. And he did valiantly and struck the Amalekites and delivered Israel out of the hands of those who plundered them. (14:47-48)

Heroic beginning

- Family: wealthy and well regarded
- Looks: tall and handsome
- Anointing: empowered by God's Spirit
- Humility: not eager to become king
- Acclaim: chosen by God and the people
- Wisdom: doesn't react to naysayers
- Bravery: dares to take on brutal invaders
- Mercy: forgives those who rejected him
- Victory: unites Israel and defeats enemies

Despite beginning so well, Saul became someone terrible.

Foolish curse

Saul had laid an oath on the people, saying, "Cursed be the man who eats food until it is evening and I am avenged on my enemies." So none of the people had tasted food... But Jonathan had not heard his father charge the people with the oath, so he put out the tip of the staff that was in his hand and dipped it in the honeycomb and put his hand to his mouth, and his eyes became bright. (14:24,27)

Ready to kill his son

Saul said, "God do so to me and more also; you shall surely die, Jonathan." Then the people said to Saul, "Shall Jonathan die, who has worked this great salvation in Israel? Far from it! As the Lord lives, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground, for he has worked with God this day." So the people ransomed Jonathan, so that he did not die. (14:44-45)

Tried to kill David

Saul hurled the spear, for he thought, "I will pin David to the wall." But David evaded him twice. (18:11)

Tried to use daughter Merab to destroy David

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." (18:17)

Saul then gave Merab to another man, despite promising his daughter to anyone who could defeat Goliath.

Tried to use daughter Michal to destroy husband David

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." (18:20-21)

David won the battles and married Michal. But later Saul wanted for her, even as David's wife, to help kill David.

Tried to use son Jonathan to destroy best friend David

The soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. (18:1)

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. (19:1)

Tried to kill David again

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. (19:11)

Threatened Michal for rescuing her husband

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... 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?'" (19:17)

Tried to kill Jonathan

Saul exploded in anger at Jonathan: "You son of a slut! Shame on you and on the mother who birthed you!" ... Saul hurled his spear at him to strike him. (20:30,33)

Massacred God's priests and their families

Doeg the Edomite, who was standing with Saul's officials, said, "I saw the son of Jesse come to Ahimelek son of Ahitub at Nob. Ahimelek inquired of the Lord for him; he also gave him provisions and the sword of Goliath the Philistine."

Then the king sent for the priest Ahimelek son of Ahitub and all the men of his family, who were the priests at Nob, and they all came to the king.

Saul said, "Listen now, son of Ahitub."

"Yes, my lord," he answered.

Saul said to him, "Why have you conspired against me, you and the son of Jesse, giving him bread and a sword and inquiring of God for him, so that he has rebelled against me and lies in wait for me, as he does today?"

Ahimelek answered the king, "Who of all your servants is as loyal as David, the king's son-in-law, captain of your bodyguard and highly respected in your household? Was that day the first time I inquired of God for him? Of course not! Let not the king accuse your servant or any of his father's family, for your servant knows nothing at all about this whole affair."

But the king said, "You will surely die, Ahimelek, you and your whole family."

Then the king ordered the guards at his side: "Turn and kill the priests of the Lord, because they too have sided with David. They knew he was fleeing, yet they did not tell me."

But the king's officials were unwilling to raise a hand to strike the priests of the Lord.

The king then ordered Doeg, "You turn and strike down the priests." So Doeg the Edomite turned and struck them down. That day he killed eighty-five men who wore the linen ephod. He

also put to the sword Nob, the town of the priests, with its men and women, its children and infants, and its cattle, donkeys and sheep. But one son of Ahimelek son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped and fled to join David. (22:9-20)

Saul's massacre of the priests is like a scene in Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith. Jedi hero Anakin Skywalker becomes Sith monster Darth Vader and murders all the little Jedi.

Witchcraft and consulting dead spirits

Saul disguised himself and put on other garments and went, he and two men with him. And they came to the woman by night. And he said, "Divine for me by a spirit and bring up for me whomever I shall name to you...Bring up Samuel for me." ... And she said, "An old man is coming up, and he is wrapped in a robe." (28:8-14)

Despair and suicide

Saul took his own sword and fell upon it. (31:4)

Murderous monster

- Used his daughters as bait for murder
- Tried to turn his son against best friend
- Twice wanted to kill his noble son
- Many times tried to kill heroic son-in-law
- Uttered horrid insults against his wife, the mother of his noble son
- Massacred God's priests and families
- Used witchcraft to consult the dead
- Committed suicide on his own sword

Heroic beginning

- Family: wealthy and well regarded
- Looks: tall and handsome
- Anointing: empowered by God's Spirit
- Humility: not eager to become king
- Acclaim: chosen by God and the people
- Wisdom: doesn't react to naysayers
- Bravery: dares to take on brutal invaders
- Mercy: forgives those who rejected him
- Victory: unites Israel and defeats enemies

How did Saul go from humble hero to murderous monster?

Impatience and unbelief

Saul offered up the burnt offering. (13:19)

"I saw that the men were scattering, and that you did not come at the set time, and that the Philistines were assembling... I thought, '...I have not sought the Lord's favor.' So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering." (13:11-12)

King tries to do a priest's job.

Not keeping God's command

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." (13:13-14)

Disobeying God, keeping plunder

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.

The word of the Lord came to Samuel: "I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments."

... Samuel said to Saul, "Why did you not obey the Lord? Why did you pounce on the plunder and do evil in the eyes of the Lord?" (15:9-19)

Pride and reputation

"Saul has set up a monument in his own honor." (15:12)

"I feared the people and obeyed their voice." (15:24)

"I have sinned. But please honor me before the elders of my people and before Israel; come back with me, so that I may worship the Lord your God." (15:30)

Rebellion and arrogance

But Samuel replied: "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. 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." (15:22-23)

And the Lord regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel. (15:35)

Lies, excuses, blame

"You did not come at the set time." (13:12)

"I have performed the commandment of the Lord." (15:13)

"They spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the Lord your God, but we totally destroyed the rest." (15:15)

Grieving the Holy Spirit

Now the Spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him. (16:14)

Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God... Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. (Ephesians 4:30-31)

If we won't be led by God's Spirit, he may hand us over to a different spirit.

Jealousy and anger

David was so successful that Saul gave him a high rank in the army... The women sang, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands." Saul was very angry; this refrain displeased him greatly. "They have credited David with tens of thousands," he thought, "but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?" And from that time on Saul kept a close eye on David. (18:5-9)

Fighting God's kingship

Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed David in the midst of his brothers. And the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon David from that day forward... Now the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and a harmful spirit from the Lord tormented him. (16:13-14)

Saul's rage against David and the priests was rage against God. Saul's pride and lust for power resisted God's reign.

Honoring the fallen hero

When the people of Jabesh Gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, all their valiant men marched through the night to Beth Shan. They took down the bodies of Saul and his sons from the wall of Beth Shan and went to Jabesh, where they burned them. Then they took their bones and buried them under a tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and they fasted seven days. (1 Sam 31:11-13)

How the mighty have fallen!

David took up this lament concerning Saul and his son Jonathan... "How the mighty have fallen! ... Saul and Jonathan--in life they were loved and admired, and in death they were not parted. They were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. Daughters of Israel, weep for Saul, who clothed you in scarlet and finery... How the mighty have fallen in battle!" (2 Samuel 1:19-27)