

The Book of Samuel

LESSON
TWO

SAMUEL AND SAUL



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Lesson Two

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INTRODUCTION

The story is told of a guide who led a group of men on a long journey. By the end of the first day, one of the young men complained. “This is taking so long,” he said. “Maybe we went in the wrong direction.” But the guide remained confident. He grabbed his map and showed the entire group where they had been that day. You see, he assured them, “We’ve definitely taken the right path.”

In many ways, the author of Samuel did much the same when he wrote his book. In his day, many in Israel wondered if their ancestors had gone in the wrong direction when David became their king. Over the years, the house of David had brought a great many troubles to Israel. But the author of Samuel remained confident. He reminded those who first received his book that they had definitely taken the right path. He wrote to assure them that the path that had led to David’s kingship was a path down which God himself had led them.

This is the second lesson in our series on *The Book of Samuel*, and we’ve entitled it “Samuel and Saul.” In this lesson, we’ll see how the first two major divisions of our book teach that God led Israel in the right direction during the lives of both Samuel and Saul. We’ll also see how these chapters apply to our lives as followers of Christ today.

You’ll recall from our previous lesson that Samuel, Saul and David take center stage in the three major divisions of our book. First, we read of Samuel’s prelude to kingship in 1 Samuel 1–7. Then we find Saul’s failed kingship in 1 Samuel 8–2 Samuel 1. And finally, we learn of David’s enduring kingship in 2 Samuel 2–24.

The author of Samuel wrote his book when Israel faced serious trials, either during the period of the divided monarchy or during the Babylonian exile. And he had many things to say to those who first received his book in these troubled times. In our previous lesson we summarized his overarching purpose in this way:

The author of Samuel explained how Israel’s transition to kingship culminated in God’s covenant with David so that Israel would put their hopes for the kingdom of God in the righteous rule of David’s house.

On the one side, the author of Samuel wanted his original audience to look at the past in terms of the dynamics of God’s covenants. More specifically, he wanted them to see how Israel’s transition to kingship culminated in God’s covenant with David. And on the other side, he focused on God’s kingdom by calling his audience to put their hopes for the future of the kingdom of God in the righteous rule of David’s house. In this lesson, we’ll see how this twofold purpose moves to the foreground in our book’s record of Samuel and Saul.

Our exploration of the lives of Samuel and Saul will divide into two main parts. First, we’ll look at Samuel’s prelude to kingship in 1 Samuel 1–7. Then we’ll turn to

Saul's failed kingship in 1 Samuel 8–2 Samuel 1. Both of these divisions were vital to advancing our author's overarching purpose. Let's begin with Samuel's prelude to kingship in 1 Samuel 1–7.

SAMUEL'S PRELUDE TO KINGSHIP

The final chapters of the book of Judges report that unfaithful Levites in the northern tribal territories led Israel in rebellion against God. The author of Judges explained that this occurred for one main reason. As he put it four times toward the end of his book, "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes." In the light of this background, it's not surprising that our book starts with the birth of Samuel. Samuel was a Levite from the northern regions of Israel who would lead Israel into the age of kingship.

We'll explore Samuel's prelude to kingship in two main ways. First, we'll focus on the original meaning of this portion of our book by exploring its structure and content. And then, we'll offer some reflections on the Christian application of these chapters. Let's start with the structure and content of this first division of Samuel.

STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

Before we go any further, it will help to introduce the main themes we're about to see in these chapters. First, our author focused on God's kingdom. Both the author of Samuel and his original audience knew that Samuel had anointed David as king and had set the stage for David's house to lead God's kingdom in Israel. But, as we mentioned earlier, by the time our book was written, many in Israel questioned whether they had gone in the right direction. Over the years, the house of David had caused countless problems for God's people. So, to assure his audience that they were on the right path, our author showed how God himself had raised Samuel up for the very purpose of anointing David king.

To confirm this reality further, he drew attention to a second major theme: the dynamics of God's covenant with Moses. In Samuel's day, Israel was bound to God by the dynamics of God's covenant at Mount Sinai. The author of Samuel pointed out how God had shown Israel great benevolence during Samuel's lifetime. He also concentrated on God's requirement of grateful human loyalty, especially in connection with Moses' laws for worship. Time and again, he illustrated how the practice of worship had shaped their destiny at this stage in history. And more than this, he highlighted how God had poured out curses for disobedience and blessings for obedience to Moses' regulations for worship. By focusing on God's covenant with Moses in these ways, our author called his original audience to accept the outcomes of Samuel's prelude to kingship. The people of Israel were right to have followed the path Samuel began because God himself had established it.

On a large scale, the structure and content of Samuel's prelude to kingship amounts to two main steps. It begins with Samuel's earlier years in 1 Samuel 1:1–2:11. It then moves to the transition in Levitical leadership from Eli and his sons to Samuel in 2:12–7:17. During Samuel's earlier years, our author revealed that, with Samuel's arrival, God began a new day for Israel.

Samuel's Earlier Years (1 Samuel 1:1–2:11)

The account of Samuel's earlier years focuses on Samuel's birth and his dedication to the worship of God at the Tabernacle in Shiloh. This single narrative appears in 1 Samuel 1:1-28 with a short conclusion in 2:11. Embedded within this narrative is a lengthy rendition of Hannah's song of praise in 2:1-10.

Birth and Dedication (1 Samuel 1:1-28; 2:11). As we discussed in our previous lesson, the story of Samuel's birth and dedication begins with a woman named Hannah. You'll recall that Hannah's husband, Elkanah, had two wives. Peninnah had several children, but Hannah was barren. Their family regularly attended annual feasts at the Tabernacle in Shiloh. At these feasts, Peninnah would cruelly ridicule Hannah for being childless. Moreover, Elkanah couldn't understand Hannah's distress and would complain that he himself should be enough for her.

At one of these feasts, Hannah was so overwhelmed with sorrow that she withdrew and cried out to the Lord. She promised God that if he would give her a son, then she would give him to the Lord's service for all the days of his life. In 1:11, she said, "No razor shall touch his head," meaning that she would follow the Nazarite vow of special dedication to God's service from Numbers 6:1-21. The priest Eli noticed Hannah's great grief as she prayed and assumed she was drunk. But Hannah protested her innocence. And, after hearing her story, Eli assured her that God would honor her with a child.

Not long after this episode, Hannah conceived and bore a son. She named him Samuel, *Shemuel* (שְׁמוּאֵל) in Hebrew. This name probably meant "the name is El," indicating that she had called on God's name for him. When Samuel was weaned, Hannah kept her vow and gave him to the Lord's service as Eli's personal servant at the Tabernacle.

Taken by itself, the story of Samuel's earlier years is an account of a humble Levitical woman who received a miraculous answer to prayer and responded with devotion to God. But Hannah's experience had significance that went far beyond her personal life. Our author disclosed this larger significance by placing within his narrative of Samuel's birth and dedication, a record of Hannah's praise to God.

Hannah's Praise (1 Samuel 2:1-10). Hannah's praise gives special attention to how the curses and blessings of God's covenant reversed the conditions of the wicked and the humble. In particular, Hannah praised God for what he had done through the birth and dedication of her son. God's reversing power plays such an important role throughout our

book that Hannah's song actually provides a rough table of contents for the entire book of Samuel.

The song of Hannah that we find in chapter 2 of 1 Samuel is really significant in the sense that it sets the stage for what takes place in the rest of the book. Many of the key themes of the books of Samuel are found here. It's also interesting to compare her song with Mary's song in the New Testament, where in both cases the point is being made that there is only one God; Yahweh is the only one. And he's the only one, then, who can save. The other theme that appears in Hannah's song is the idea of God using the unlikely, using the poor, using the broken, the downcast. And that, of course, is a theme that runs right through the Bible. God's strength is displayed in our weakness. And so, as she praises God for having, in fact, used her to bring about the deliverance of the nation, we see that idea flowing through the book as a whole.

— Dr. John Oswalt

We can divide the record of Hannah's praise in 2:1-10 into three parts. Much like we see in the early chapters of Samuel, Hannah's song begins with what God did in her personal experience. As she said in verse 1, "My heart exults in the Lord ... My mouth derides my enemies." Hannah had seen with her own eyes how God had reversed her circumstances. He'd cursed Peninnah with shame because of her insincere worship at Shiloh. And he'd blessed Hannah with the joy of a child because of her faithful worship.

Following this, and similar to the next several chapters of our book, Hannah's song expands beyond her personal experience to the nation of Israel in general. In verses 2-8, Hannah expressed confidence that God would reverse the circumstances of many people as he poured out curses and blessings on a wider scale. Listen to Hannah's words in 1 Samuel 2:7-8:

The Lord makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor (1 Samuel 2:7-8).

This broader pattern of God's reversing providence anticipated the coming transitions in Israel's leadership. As we'll see in this lesson, God cursed Eli's family and blessed Samuel. And later, God cursed Saul and his house and blessed David and his dynasty.

Finally, much like the last major division of our book focuses on David's enduring kingship, Hannah's closing praise looks forward to God's glorious kingdom and king. In verses 9-10, Hannah revealed her certainty that God's reversing curses and blessings would one day lead to a king in Israel who would overcome all of God's enemies. Listen to the way she put it in verse 10:

The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces; against them he will thunder in heaven. The Lord will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed (1 Samuel 2:10).

In Hannah's day, Israel had suffered defeat at the hands of their enemies for decades. But here, Hannah boldly declared that God's curses would come upon "The adversaries of the Lord." They "shall be broken to pieces," and "The Lord will judge the ends of the earth." Hannah was convinced that God was moving history toward the day when he would inflict everlasting curses on all of his adversaries throughout the world.

But notice that Hannah's final words reveal that God's judgment will come about through his blessings on the *king* of Israel. As she put it at the end of verse 10, "The Lord ... will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed" one. Hannah affirmed that God would judge the ends of the earth by blessing a future king of Israel with strength and victory.

Unfortunately, many interpreters underestimate the importance of Hannah's closing words. Everyone familiar with the book of Samuel knows that, later on, in 1 Samuel 8, Israel asked God for a king to rule over them. And God responded by telling Samuel, in verse 7, "They have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them." All too often, these words are taken to mean that God never wanted Israel to have a human king of any sort, under any circumstances. But this wasn't the case at all. The problem wasn't Israel's desire for a human king. Rather, verse 20 tells us that Israel only wanted a king at this time so they could "be like all the [pagan] nations" around them. Their disloyalty and refusal to wait for God's timing prompted God's response, not their request for a king. In fact, Hannah's enthusiasm for a future king — one who would serve God's purposes for the kingdom of Israel — actually reflected the consistent teachings of earlier revelations from God to his people.

To mention just a few examples, in Genesis 17:6, God blessed Abraham with the promise that "kings shall come from you." And in Genesis 35:11, God promised Jacob that "kings shall come from your own body." More than this, in Genesis 49:10, Jacob predicted that the royal "scepter shall not depart from Judah." We should add that in Deuteronomy 17:14-20, God anticipated the establishment of kings in Israel by providing regulations for kingship. In addition, Judges 21:25, and several other passages, note that the troubles of the period of the Judges resulted because "there was no king in Israel." And Hannah wasn't the only one in the book of Samuel to confirm her hope in Israel's king. In 1 Samuel 2:35, a prophet in Israel announced to Eli that God would raise up a priest who "shall go in and out before [God's] anointed [king] forever."

In the light of these passages, we can see that Samuel's miraculous birth renewed Hannah's confidence in an ancient tenet of Israel's faith. She knew that, one day, God would extend his kingdom to the whole world through a great king of Israel. And with Samuel's birth, Hannah became convinced that God was moving Israel closer to that day.

Having looked at the structure and content of Samuel's earlier years, let's turn to the second portion of Samuel's prelude to kingship: the transition in Israel's Levitical leadership in 2:12–7:17.

Transition in Leadership (1 Samuel 2:12–7:17)

When Hannah dedicated Samuel to the worship of God at Shiloh, Eli and his sons were Israel's most powerful Levitical authorities. But over the years, something quite unexpected happened. Humble Samuel *replaced* Eli and his sons. This transition was vital to the establishment of kingship in Israel. It was so vital, in fact, that our author felt the need to explain that God himself brought these events about by implementing the curses and blessings of his covenant with Moses. Eli and his sons fell under God's curses because they flagrantly violated Moses' regulations for worship. And Samuel received God's blessings because he faithfully upheld the directives for worship in the law of Moses.

The author of Samuel explained this transition in leadership with a series of four contrasts between Eli's family and Samuel. First, he contrasted divine evaluations of Eli's sons' worship and Samuel's worship in 1 Samuel 2:12-21. Second, he contrasted both divine and public evaluations of Eli's family and Samuel in 1 Samuel 2:22-26. Third, he contrasted God's responses to Eli with his responses to Samuel in 2:27–4:1a. And fourth, we see a contrast between Eli's family and Samuel in regard to Israel's conflicts with the Philistines, beginning 4:1b–7:17.

Divine Evaluations (1 Samuel 2:12-21). The comparison of divine evaluations turns first to Eli's sons in verses 12-17 and begins with an abrupt, categorical condemnation. As we read in verse 12, "The sons of Eli were worthless men. They did not know the Lord." Our author then illustrated why he arrived at this outlook. Rather than taking their portion of sacrificial meat in the way established by Moses' law, Eli's sons selected the best meat for themselves ahead of time. If anyone objected, they threatened to take the best portions by force. The author of Samuel then revealed God's evaluation of these worship violations. In verse 17 he wrote, "The sin of the young men was very great in the sight of the Lord, for the men treated the offering of the Lord with contempt."

But immediately following this account, our author turned to God's strikingly different evaluation of Samuel in 2:18-21. He first reported how Hannah showed her devotion to God by returning year after year to bring Samuel a new ephod, a humble article of clothing. And God continued to bless Hannah, giving her three more sons and two daughters. Then, 2:21 closes this section with these words:

The boy Samuel grew in the presence of the Lord (1 Samuel 2:21).

God's ongoing approval of Samuel was just the opposite of his severe condemnation of Eli's sons.

Divine and Public Evaluations (1 Samuel 2:22-26). Next, our author contrasted both divine and public evaluations of Eli's family and Samuel in 1 Samuel 2:22-26. On the one side, in verses 22-25, we learn that Eli's sons, influenced by Canaanite fertility rituals, were having sexual relations with the women who served at the Tabernacle entrance. And verse 24 notes that faithful Israelites, whom Eli called "the people of the Lord," were complaining about his sons. Eli sternly warned his sons that if they

continued, no one could help them. But they ignored their father's rebuke. And verse 25 tells us why: "[Eli's sons] would not listen to the voice of their father, for it was the will of the Lord to put them to death."

After reporting these negative divine and public assessments of Eli's sons, we find a brief note contrasting Samuel's service. Our author expanded his earlier positive comment on Samuel from verse 21 by noting how both God and the people of Israel reacted to Samuel. In 1 Samuel 2:26 we read this:

Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the Lord and also with man (1 Samuel 2:26).

As this verse tells us, both God and the faithful people of Israel approved of Samuel's Levitical service.

God's Responses (1 Samuel 2:27–4:1a). Following these differing evaluations, our author contrasted God's responses to Eli and his family's unfaithful service with his response to Samuel's faithful service in 2:27–4:1a.

On the one side, our author dealt with Eli in 2:27-36. He explained that God sent an unnamed prophet, "a man of God," who pointed out how Eli and his sons had corrupted Israel's worship. Through this prophet, God threatened curses against Eli's family, saying in verse 31, "I will cut off your strength and the strength of your father's house." God had rejected Eli's family and was removing them from his service.

On the other side, our author reported God's contrasting response to Samuel in 3:1–4:1a. He first noted that the Lord rarely spoke through his prophets at this time to indicate how remarkable it was that God was about to speak directly to Samuel. Then, after waking Samuel several times in the night, God revealed in verse 11 that he was about to do something so shocking that the "ears of everyone who hears it will tingle." He told Samuel that he would no longer tolerate the sins of Eli's house but would punish them forever for their wickedness. In the morning, Samuel told Eli about God's threat of curses against his family. Ironically, Eli himself conceded that God was in charge and would do what was right. Our author then closed out this contrast, in 1 Samuel 3:19-20, with these words:

Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established as a prophet of the Lord (1 Samuel 3:19-20).

Notice here that our author expanded on his approval of Samuel from 2:21, 26. As Samuel grew even more, "the Lord was with him." And because Samuel served God faithfully at the Tabernacle, God blessed him and raised him up as his prophet in the eyes of all Israel.

Conflicts with Philistines (1 Samuel 4:1–7:17). The contrasts between Eli's family and Samuel end in a lengthy narrative concerning conflicts that Israel had with the Philistines in 4:1–7:17. This final section breaks down into three episodes that draw

attention to how God's curses on Eli's family led to Israel's defeat before the Philistines. And by contrast, God's blessings on Samuel led to Israel's victory over the Philistines.

The first episode of this narrative starts in 4:1-22. Here we find that the sins of Eli's family led to Israel's defeat in battle with the Philistines. Eli's sons feigned piety by taking the ark of God into battle, but they regarded the ark only as a talisman for victory. In addition, their sins over the years had grown so great that the Philistines not only routed Israel, but also took possession of the ark. Both of Eli's sons died in battle, and Eli himself died after receiving news of their deaths and of the ark's capture. But more than this, the sins of Eli's family brought God's curse upon the entire nation of Israel. In 4:21, Eli's widowed daughter-in-law named her newborn son, "Ichabod," (אִי־כָבוֹד) in Hebrew, meaning, "There is no glory," or "Where is the glory?" As she went on to explain in verse 22, "The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured." The sins of Eli and his sons brought this horrible curse on the nation.

Following this episode, we read of God's intervention in 5:1-7:2. The Philistines celebrated their victory over Israel by placing the ark of God before the idol of their false god Dagon within his temple in Ashdod. But the Lord supernaturally intervened. After the first night, the Philistines discovered the idol of Dagon face downward on the ground before the ark of the Lord. After the second night, the Philistines found Dagon face downward again. But this time, much like ancient human armies often removed the heads and hands of their defeated enemies, Dagon's head and hands had been cut off. The Lord also afflicted the people of Ashdod with tumors and possibly with bubonic plague spread by rodents. He did the same when the Philistines moved the ark of God to the cities of Gath and Ekron. After seven months, the Philistines consulted their priests and diviners. They advised them to return the ark on a cart pulled by cows — symbolic of their fertility religion. And, as guilt offerings to the Lord, they recommended sending five golden tumors and five golden mice on behalf of the five cities of the Philistines.

As the Philistines see the ark come out, they're actually petrified. They say, "Oh, this is the ark of the Lord who brought all those plagues against Egypt and delivered them out of Egypt." And, in fact, the Philistines are exactly right. But the Philistines say, "Well nonetheless, let's go up and try to fight them." So the Philistines were right to fear that this was the ark of the God who brought about the great exodus. But what we know as readers is that the God who brought about the exodus isn't happy with his own people. So, the Philistines are able to defeat the Israelites and capture the ark... Maybe that ark of the covenant really isn't connected to this great big God who could bring about the exodus." But, in fact, we see it's the opposite. Yes, God has allowed the ark to be captured. But, as soon as this ark gets into Philistine territory, guess what happens? The Philistines start experiencing the plagues that the Egyptians experienced. So what we find then is that this capturing of the ark by the Philistines is reminiscent of the way God had acted in the book of Exodus.

— Andrew Abernethy, Ph.D.

The cows brought the ark to the Israelites in Beth-shemesh, a Levitical city. But sadly, the Levites in Beth-shemesh also violated God's regulations of worship. Contrary to the law of Moses, they kept the Philistine's golden tumors and mice in the presence of the ark. And rather than reverently covering the ark, they looked at it, or possibly *into* it. As a result, God struck down 70 men in Beth-shemesh, and the people mourned. Then the Israelites took the ark to Kiriath-jearim for safe-keeping. Even though the ark had returned, 7:2 stresses the fact that the entire nation of Israel continued to suffer under God's curses at this time. We read:

A long time passed, some twenty years, and all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord (1 Samuel 7:2).

In the next episode, we learn of Israel's victory over the Philistines in 7:3-17. As we should expect, our author highlighted Samuel's faithful service as the reason for this victory. Samuel first implored the Israelites to return to the Lord by putting away their foreign gods. He announced that if they directed their hearts to the Lord and served him only, God would deliver them from the Philistines. The Israelites humbled themselves before God and repented of their violations of Moses' regulations of worship. So, Samuel prayed to the Lord on their behalf. When the Philistines gathered for war, the people cried out to Samuel. Samuel offered sacrifices in accordance with Moses' law, and God gave the nation of Israel victory over the Philistines. In 7:13 we read, "The hand of the Lord was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel." And Samuel's faithful worship continued to bring Israel blessings when he returned to his hometown of Ramah, where he built an altar to the Lord.

This final segment of Israel's transition in Levitical leadership settled any question about the transition of Levitical authority from Eli's family to Samuel. God's curses on Eli's family for their contempt for the worship of God had led the entire nation of Israel into defeat. But God's blessings on Samuel for his faithful service in worship before the Lord had led Israel into victory. God himself had raised up Samuel, who introduced Israel to kingship and, more specifically, to David as king.

Having looked at the structure and content of Samuel's prelude to kingship, we should turn for a moment to the Christian application of this portion of our book. How should these chapters impact the lives of Christ's followers?

CHRISTIAN APPLICATION

All too often, well-meaning Christians simply read this portion of the book of Samuel haphazardly until they come upon some theological or moral principle that fits easily with their personal Christian experiences. Now, the first division of our book touches on countless topics. So, there's nothing inherently wrong with approaching these chapters in this way. But to ensure that we don't mishandle these chapters, at some point

we need to align our Christian applications with the themes that the author of Samuel emphasized.

Simply put, Christian applications of Samuel's prelude to kingship should align with our author's emphases on God's covenants and God's kingdom. Both of these themes provide crucial orientations toward the relevance of these chapters for our lives. Let's look first at how this is true of our author's emphasis on God's covenants.

God's Covenants

As we mentioned in our previous lesson, the author of Samuel was aware of six major divine covenants: God's covenants with all people in Adam and Noah; his covenants with the nation of Israel in Abraham, Moses and David; and a new covenant, predicted by Jeremiah and other prophets, that God would make with Israel and Judah when they returned from exile.

Now, in this lesson, we've seen that the events of Samuel's prelude to kingship took place when God's covenant with Moses was in full effect. But we must keep in mind that when the book of Samuel was written, God had also established his covenant with David. For this reason, our author expected his original audience to apply what he wrote in these chapters in the light of David and his house.

But when Christ's followers apply Samuel's prelude to kingship, we must go one step further. We live after God has established the new covenant in Christ. And this new covenant realigns the dynamics of God's earlier covenants made with Moses and David. This realignment is so critical that we need a reliable guide. To apply every divine benevolence, every requirement of human loyalty, and every curse and blessing recorded in Samuel's prelude to kingship, we need the Holy Spirit's infallible revelation in the New Testament.

In the first place, the New Testament teaches us that every divine benevolence in the first division of Samuel is superseded by God's benevolence in Christ. God mercifully raised up Samuel to deliver Israel from their suffering during the period of the Judges. But God demonstrated even greater benevolence when he sent Christ. In his life, death and resurrection, Christ delivered God's people from centuries of suffering. And Christ will continue to deliver his people, even to the end of the age. In addition, God's merciful intervention in Samuel's day flowed into the lives of every Israelite in a variety of specific mercies. And, as Christ's followers, we can see the many ways God is kind to us every day as we explore his benevolence in the days of Samuel.

In the second place, God's requirement of human loyalty in Samuel's prelude to kingship applies to the new covenant age. We're directed first to the perfect obedience of Christ himself. The failures of Peninnah, Eli's sons, and the Israelites under the influence of Eli's sons, stand in sharp contrast with Christ's true and faithful worship. And the faithful worship offered by Hannah, Samuel, and the people of Israel under Samuel's influence reveals Christ's even greater and more perfect worship of God. Still, much like the original audience of Samuel was to apply Moses' standard of loyal worship to their lives, we're called upon to apply the New Testament's standard of worship to our lives. God expects Christ's church to express grateful human loyalty through true and faithful

worship. As Jesus said in John 4:23, “The true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.”

In the third place, God’s curses for disobedience and blessings for obedience in these chapters must also be viewed through the lens of the New Testament. God’s curses in this division warned the original audience against violating the worship of God. And they point to Christ who, although he was without sin, suffered God’s eternal curses on behalf of everyone who comes to saving faith in him. Today, God still pours out temporary curses to discipline his church and to draw us to himself. In the same way, the temporary blessings that appear in this part of Samuel encouraged every Israelite to faithful worship. These blessings direct us to the greater, eternal blessings that Christ himself receives from God. But at the same time, we must not overlook the implications of God’s blessings in this part of Samuel for our daily lives. As God blessed Hannah, Samuel and all Israel for their faithful obedience, the New Testament teaches that Christ delivers temporary blessings to reward his church. And these temporary blessings offer Christ’s faithful followers a taste of the eternal blessings we’ll receive in the world to come.

As we’ve just seen, it’s important to orient our Christian applications of Samuel’s prelude to kingship toward God’s covenants. But we must also keep in view our author’s goal of furthering God’s kingdom.

God’s Kingdom

This first division of Samuel demonstrates that God himself directed Samuel’s birth and exalted Samuel as the leader of Israel to further God’s kingdom. As we know, Samuel later anointed David as king. And it was the righteous rule of David’s house that would one day lead to the glorious victory of God’s reign over the entire world.

The New Testament teaches that Jesus, the perfectly righteous son of David, fulfills this glorious victory of God’s kingdom. Yet, he fulfills this hope in unexpected ways. As we learned in our previous lesson, Jesus brings God’s kingdom to earth in three stages: the inauguration of his kingdom during his first advent, the continuation of his kingdom throughout church history, and the consummation of his kingdom when he returns in glory. This threefold outlook on God’s kingdom in Christ is critical to New Testament faith. For this reason, every Christian application of the first division of our book must take into account all three phases of Christ’s kingdom.

To begin with, we can see in the inauguration of Christ’s kingdom, how Jesus began to fulfill Samuel’s prelude to kingship. In the days of Samuel, God moved his kingdom forward through Samuel’s leadership. And, during Jesus’ first advent, he dramatically advanced God’s kingdom further through Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. In his death on the cross, Jesus decisively broke the hold that evil had on Israel and the nations. And when he was raised from the dead, he was given authority over the entire creation. In Matthew 28:18, just before his ascension, Jesus assured his disciples saying, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” In this sense, what God accomplished for his kingdom in the first division of Samuel should turn us toward the greater things Christ accomplished when he first took David’s throne.

Beyond this, in the continuation of his kingdom throughout church history, Christ fulfills Samuel's prelude to kingship more and more. As we've seen, Samuel's birth renewed Hannah's hope that God's kingdom would begin to spread to the ends of the earth. And for millennia, Christ has directed and empowered his church to expand God's kingdom throughout more and more of the world. As Jesus told his disciples in Matthew 28:19, 20, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." So, when we apply Samuel's prelude to kingship, we must set our eyes on how Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, continues to extend God's kingdom through his church day by day.

Throughout the gospel of Matthew, we find Jesus preaching the kingdom of heaven, the reign of God — It was another Jewish way of saying the reign of God. And yet, Jesus is demonstrating his authority or his reign on earth in various ways: healing the sick, driving out demons, stilling storms, and so forth... But when you come to the climax of Matthew's gospel at the very end, Jesus then says, after he's been raised, and he's about to ascend into heaven, Jesus says, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth." And so, the difference is that now that Jesus has risen, he's the ruler of the cosmos. One text that he cited is in Psalm 110:1 where — "The Lord [said] to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet'" — where Jesus is now at the right hand of the Father, and he's reigning, and he says that that will continue until all of his enemies are put under his feet.

— Dr. Craig S. Keener

And of course, Samuel's prelude to kingship calls us to look forward to what Christ will do at the consummation of his kingdom. These chapters of Samuel called the original audience to look to the day when David's house would destroy all of God's adversaries and bring endless blessings to God's people throughout the world. When Christ returns, he'll have final victory over Satan, his demons, and every human being who has joined them in rebellion against God. And more than this, Christ will pour out the eternal blessings of his victory to his people as they receive their inheritance in the new heavens and new earth. As Jesus said to encourage his disciples in Matthew 28:20b, "[B]ehold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." So, as we apply Samuel's prelude to kingship, we too should keep our eyes on the future of God's kingdom as we look forward to Christ's glorious return.

Now that we've looked at Samuel's prelude to kingship, we should turn to the second division of the book of Samuel, Saul's failed kingship in 1 Samuel 8–2 Samuel 1.

SAUL'S FAILED KINGSHIP

As the author of Samuel continued to recount how God had directed events before David came to be king, he faced a difficult challenge. What should he do with Saul? If the righteous rule of David's house was the hope of God's kingdom, then why did Samuel first anoint Saul as the king of Israel? Now, our author handled these matters with great care. He admitted that God had initially approved of Saul as Israel's king. But he also explained at length why God permanently rejected Saul and his house and replaced them with David.

We'll explore Saul's failed kingship in the same way we assessed the first division of our book. We'll start with this division's structure and content. And then, we'll comment on its Christian applications. Let's turn to the structure and content of Saul's failed kingship.

STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

The account of Saul's reign is so complex that it's easy to lose sight of the main themes that tie it all together — the themes of God's kingdom and God's covenant. First, in many respects, these chapters are devoted to explaining why David's house should lead God's kingdom in Israel. Now, our author made it clear that Saul advanced God's kingdom in Israel in many ways. He united the tribes under his authority and led Israel to a number of victories over God's enemies. But at the same time, while God was patient with Saul, Saul's rebellion against God was so great that God disqualified Saul and his sons for kingship. By God's own decree, David, rather than Saul, would lead Israel toward the glorious future of God's kingdom.

Second, our author explained how all of this happened in terms of the dynamics of God's covenant with Moses. He repeatedly pointed out how God continued to show Israel benevolence during Saul's reign. But he also focused on God's requirement of grateful human loyalty. In particular, he focused on two main requirements: Moses' laws concerning worship and Moses' laws concerning kingship. And he demonstrated time and again how Saul's violations of Moses' laws led to severe curses from God. He also revealed how David's obedience to these laws led to God's blessings. By the end of this division, the author of Samuel left no room for doubt that *God himself* had rejected Saul and his family in favor of David and his house.

The structure and content of Saul's failed kingship roughly parallels the first division of our book. Our author turned first to Saul's earlier years in 1 Samuel 8:1–15:35. Then he focused on the transition in Israel's leadership from Saul to David in 1 Samuel 16:1–2 Samuel 1:27. We'll look at both of these main parts, beginning with Saul's earlier years.

Saul's Earlier Years (1 Samuel 8:1–15:35)

Apparently, the author of Samuel found nothing remarkable about Saul's birth and childhood. His record of Saul's earlier years begins with Saul as a young adult and deals with God's establishment of Saul as king in 1 Samuel 8:1–12:25. Then, his narrative moves directly to God's rejection of Saul as king, in 1 Samuel 13:1–15:35.

Establishment of Saul (1 Samuel 8:1–12:25). The establishment of Saul as king consists of a number of episodes that fall into four symmetrical steps. The first step appears in 8:1-22 with Samuel's initial warning about kingship and God's commission for Samuel to find Israel a king.

This opening episode begins with a critical problem facing Israel. Samuel had grown old and his sons were greedy, dishonest and unjust. Unlike Samuel, his sons would not be able to lead God's people into victory over their enemies. So the elders of Israel went to Samuel in Ramah and asked for a king to rule over them. In response to this request, in 1 Samuel 8:9, God said to Samuel:

Obey their voice; only you shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them (1 Samuel 8:9).

So, Samuel issued a lengthy warning about kingship in 8:11-17. In this passage, Samuel drew from Deuteronomy 17:14-20 where Moses severely limited the authority of Israel's future kings. Samuel warned that kings would be prone to violate these regulations. Kings would oppress the people of Israel by sending their sons into battle, by forcing them to plow and harvest royal lands, by compelling the people to make weapons and implements of war, by conscripting their daughters as cooks and perfumers, by stealing their lands, by requiring a tenth of all they earned, and by taking their servants, young men, donkeys and flocks for themselves. In the end, Samuel warned that a human king would make all of God's people his slaves. And Samuel closed with this final warning in 8:18:

In that day you will cry out because of your king ... but the Lord will not answer you (1 Samuel 8:18).

In the Bible, when God created man, man was meant to be under the reign of God, to submit to his kingly authority. But in Samuel's time, the Israelites saw that all the other nations around them had kings, and so they wanted a king for themselves. And when God saw that Samuel was distressed by their request ... he asked him not to be upset. He told Samuel, "Give in to the people. And after respecting their voice ... tell them that choosing a king means there will be taxation and warring with other nations. Kings chosen by men will bring about all kinds of burdens. They must understand this... And remind the king that he must hold fast to God's law, meaning that the king would have boundaries to limit him. Thus, God shows us that human authorities need restraint from God ... respect for God, and

love for the people. This is why, after Saul was elected king, God rejected him — because he did not respect God.

— Rev. Dr. Stephen Tong, translation

Now, you'll recall that the author of Samuel stressed Moses' regulations for worship in his record of Samuel's prelude to kingship. And we'll see that he repeated this emphasis on worship in this second division of his book as well. But by focusing on Samuel's warnings to Israel at the beginning of his record of Saul's reign, our author brought a second facet of Moses' law to the foreground: God's commands for the kings of Israel. This facet of Moses' law played a vital role in his record of Saul's failed kingship.

Although our author warned Israel that their king would mistreat them, the second step of this section displays God's benevolence. In 9:1–10:16, our author reported Samuel's acknowledgment and God's confirmation of Saul as king. God led Samuel to Saul and commanded him to anoint Saul in a private ceremony. As we read in 10:1, Samuel said to Saul, "Has not the Lord anointed you to be prince over his people Israel?" And more than this, God also confirmed Saul's anointing with a number of miraculous signs.

The third step of the establishment of Saul displays God's benevolence even further. Chapter 10:17–11:13 reports the national acknowledgment of Saul as king and God's confirmation. Some groups in Israel doubted that Saul should be king. But God enabled Saul to unite all the tribes of Israel and to lead them in a victory over the Ammonites. And everyone in Israel gave Saul their full support.

Still, despite the great kindness God showed to Saul and Israel at this time, the fourth step of this section echoes Samuel's initial warnings. In 11:14–12:25, our author closed this section with Samuel's final warnings about kingship and his fulfillment of God's commission. Samuel called on Israel to acknowledge God's benevolence toward them. But he also warned them to respond to God's kindness with grateful loyalty to God. As he put it in 12:24, 25, "Consider what great things [God] has done for you. But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king."

Rejection of Saul (1 Samuel 13:1–15:35). Samuel's ominous warning at the end of the establishment of Saul as king, sets the stage for what follows. In 13:1–15:35, we read of God's rejection of Saul as king. Throughout these chapters, the author of Samuel repeatedly noted how Saul violated God's regulations for worship and his commands for Israel's kings. And, as a result, God poured out the curses of his covenant and rejected Saul and his descendants from the throne of Israel.

Our author's record of Saul's rejection consists of a number of episodes that fall into two main groups: Saul's earlier rejection, in 1 Samuel 13:1–14:52 and Saul's final rejection in 15:1–35. In Saul's earlier rejection we see a series of battles between Saul and the Philistines. These battles begin with Israel's initial attack against the Philistines in 13:1–4. We immediately have a glimpse into Saul's heart and his mistreatment of God's people because he sent them into battle while he himself remained at a safe distance. And more than this, when Saul's son Jonathan led a victory over the Philistines, Saul claimed the victory for himself.

After Israel's initial attack, the account turns to Israel's preparations for a Philistine counter-attack in 13:5-15. Saul called the people to stand ready for battle, but the people were filled with fear and hid in caves and among the rocks. When the army began to scatter, Saul panicked and presented burnt and peace offerings to God in direct defiance of Samuel's directives. Samuel had ordered Saul to wait for his arrival to offer sacrifices before battle. But Saul chose to make the sacrifices himself, rather than leading his army to fear God and rely on God for protection. When Samuel finally arrived, he announced God's words of judgment because Saul had violated the worship of God. In 13:14, Samuel said this to Saul:

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 (1 Samuel 13:14).

Our author's account of Saul's earlier rejection continues with Israel's ensuing battle with the Philistines in 13:16–14:46. To begin with, we learn yet another way that Saul abused his royal authority. Recklessly, he neglected to provide his army with iron swords and spears. Rather, he only provided them for himself and his son Jonathan.

Our author also pointed out that Saul stayed away from the battle at first. It was only after Jonathan sprang into action with great faith in God, and the Philistines went into a panic, that Saul engaged the battle. But even then, Saul violated the worship of God. Saul called for Ahijah the priest to bring the ark of God to him so that they could prepare for battle. But when the Philistines' attack seemed imminent, Saul stopped the priest and rushed into battle without proper preparation.

Saul went on to abuse his army even more. Saul was so eager to pursue the Philistines that he declared a curse on any soldier who stopped to eat. Ironically, Jonathan — not knowing about this threat — ate a bit of honey. And when Saul's soldiers rebuked him, Jonathan noted how foolish his father had been. In 14:29, 30, Jonathan said, "My father has troubled the land... How much better if the people had eaten freely today ... For now the defeat among the Philistines has not been great."

After the battle, Saul's insistence that his soldiers not eat led to another serious violation of worship. Saul's men were so hungry that they hastily slaughtered and devoured the animals from the spoil, including the blood — a practice strictly forbidden in Leviticus 17:10. It was only after Saul was reminded that this practice violated God's law that he built an altar for his men to slaughter their animals as God had commanded. And our author minimized Saul's efforts further by commenting in 14:35, "It was the first altar that he built to the Lord."

At that point, Saul finally inquired of God for guidance, but according to 14:37, "[God] did not answer him that day." Now, with the help of the priests, Saul learned that God did not answer him because Jonathan had violated the foolish oath Saul had required of his army. And once again Saul revealed his oppressive rule by ordering that Jonathan — who had led the battle — must die. It was only because the soldiers paid a ransom for Jonathan that Saul did not execute him.

Finally, in 14:47-52, the author of Samuel closed his record of Saul's earlier rejection with a summary of the battles during Saul's reign and the officers who led his army. But he added this ominous note in verse 52: "There was hard fighting against the

Philistines all the days of Saul.” In contrast with the victories God had given Samuel, God had so rejected Saul that he never decisively defeated the Philistines. And more than this, we also read in verse 52, “And when Saul saw any strong man, or any valiant man, he attached him to himself.” Just as Samuel had warned, Saul continued to oppress God’s people by conscripting as many as he could into his endless wars.

After reporting God’s earlier rejection of Saul, our author turned to Saul’s final rejection, in 15:1-35, where he reported on Saul’s battle with the Amalekites. According to Exodus 17:14-16 and Numbers 24:20, God had commanded the total annihilation of the Amalekites because they had troubled Israel so much in the days of Moses. And before sending Saul into battle, Samuel explicitly reminded him of this divine decree, codified in the law of Moses.

But after winning a great victory over the Amalekites, Saul didn’t follow God’s command. According to 15:9, Saul and his men weren’t willing to destroy the best of the spoil. Instead, “All that was despised and worthless they devoted to destruction.” As we explain in other series, the phrase “devoted to destruction” translates the Hebrew verb *charam* (חָרַם). This terminology indicated that whatever God required for destruction in Israel’s wars was a worshipful sacrifice of praise to God. But Saul had turned so far from the worship of God at this point in his life that, not only did he withhold the best of the spoil from God, but in verse 12 we learn that he set up a monument to himself. And, when Samuel confronted Saul, Saul falsely blamed his army. So, in 15:28, just as the Lord had instructed, Samuel delivered these fateful words to Saul:

The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you (1 Samuel 15:28).

And Samuel added in verse 29 that God’s judgment was irreversible:

The Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret (1 Samuel 15:29).

Saul failed as a king, and his kingdom failed because he didn’t have the required spiritual characteristics and qualifications. He had some external qualifications in regard to skills and abilities. Yet, he didn’t submit his heart to the Lord, and he didn’t obey the words of the Lord. For example, there’s a significant and critical incident when the Lord sent him to fight the Amalekites and told him to devote Amalek to destruction. And it was understood at that time what it meant to devote Amalek to destruction. Saul didn’t do that. Instead, he spared the king and the best of the sheep. When Samuel came to him and asked him about it, Saul justified his disobedience with weak excuses that made no sense. So, God said, “He has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments.” These were the words of the Lord. It’s like God was saying, “I have rejected him because he rejected me.” Saul was a rebellious person, and Samuel

was very clear about rebellion. He said, “For rebellion is as the sin of divination.” Saul was a rebellious and arrogant person. He didn’t submit to God’s commands and didn’t fulfill God’s will, so God rejected him from being king.

— Rev. Dr. Emad A. Mikhail, translation

Although Saul feigned repentance and sought forgiveness, God’s rejection of him was final. After Samuel put the king of the Amalekites to the sword, he left Saul and never saw him again. God had shown Saul benevolence for many years, but Saul had been so disloyal to God that he would no longer be king.

We’ve seen how God established and rejected Saul as king in the earlier years of his reign. Now, let’s turn to the transition in royal leadership from Saul to David in 1 Samuel 16:1–2 Samuel 1:27.

Transition in Leadership (1 Samuel 16:1–2 Samuel 1:27)

Much like the transition from Eli’s family to Samuel in the first division of our book, these chapters present a number of contrasts between Saul and David that explain why David became king in Saul’s place.

To understand the emphases of these chapters, we must remember that it was quite common in the ancient world for younger, successful warriors to lead rebellions against their kings. So, it was only natural for many in Israel to assume that David had led a rebellion against Saul. But in these chapters our author set the record straight. David had not rebelled against Saul. On the contrary, David remained Saul’s humble servant, even as Saul grew hostile toward him. How then did David come to replace Saul as Israel’s king? Our author explained that God was at work. God himself reversed the conditions of these men by pouring out curses on Saul for his rebellion and blessings on David for his humble service.

Our author’s account of God’s reversing curses and blessings during this transition in leadership divides into four main steps: the background of Saul’s hostility toward David in 16:1–23; the escalation of Saul’s hostility against David in 17:1–23:28; the de-escalation of Saul’s hostility in 23:29–27:12; and the aftermath of Saul’s hostility in 1 Samuel 28:1–2 Samuel 1:27.

Background of Hostility (1 Samuel 16:1–23). The first step — the background of Saul’s hostility — reveals the spiritual forces at work behind everything that occurs in these chapters. In the first of two episodes, 16:1–13 deals with David and God’s Spirit. In this episode, God called Samuel to travel from his hometown in Ramah to Bethlehem where he started the process of making David the new king of Israel.

God blessed David by commanding Samuel to anoint him as king in a private ceremony. And when David was anointed, another remarkable blessing fell on him. In 16:13 we read that “the Spirit of the Lord” — *ruach Yahweh* (רוּחַ יְהוָה) in Hebrew — “rushed upon David from that day forward.” The author of Samuel made it clear that

God's Spirit was the source of the many good things David did "from that day forward." Our author reinforced this outlook explicitly by highlighting the fact that the Lord was with David at certain crucial moments in 16:18 and 18:12, 14 and 28.

The second episode dealing with the background of Saul's hostility sets up a striking contrast by reporting on Saul and an evil spirit in 16:14-23. These verses focus on the time when David came to serve Saul on a regular basis in Gibeah, Saul's capital city. We can't be sure precisely when these events occurred because Saul didn't recognize David in the episode that follows.

The opening, in 16:14, tells us two curses from God that fell on Saul at this time: "The Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and a harmful spirit from the Lord" — or as the Hebrew may be translated, "evil spirit" — "tormented him." Later in these chapters, our author explicitly mentioned the effects of these curses. The departure of the Holy Spirit made Saul fearful in 18:12 and the evil spirit drove Saul to madness in 18:10 and 19:9. As the author of Samuel also mentioned, Saul's men brought David to Saul to help when the evil spirit tormented him. Saul's men described David as a skillful musician, a brave warrior, and a prudent orator. But most importantly, they said that, unlike Saul, the Lord was *with* David. Our author confirmed this contrast between Saul and David at the end of this episode where he reported that the evil spirit tormenting Saul would leave when David played the lyre.

Escalation of Saul's Hostility (1 Samuel 17:1–23:28). The second step of the transition from Saul to David focuses on God's blessings and curses during the escalation of Saul's hostility against David in 17:1–23:28. These chapters begin with an account explaining Saul's initial hostility in 17:1–18:9. Here, we find the longest single narrative in the entire book of Samuel, commonly known as the story of David and Goliath. Our author reported that Saul and his army left Gibeah and drew up battle lines with the Philistines near Azekah and Socoh. It was there that the great warrior Goliath challenged Israel to fight him. In all likelihood, this episode took place prior to David's service in Saul's court because, in 17:58, Saul asked David who he was.

A number of striking contrasts between Saul and David appear in this well-known story. For instance, in 17:11, Saul and his army "were dismayed and greatly afraid" when they heard Goliath's threats. But the Spirit of God blessed David, a young, simple shepherd boy, with courage and faith. In 17:45-47, David responded to Goliath saying, "I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel ... For the battle is the Lord's." David's victory over Goliath also brought the blessing of support from others. To begin with, Jonathan, Saul's son, loved David deeply. Moreover, when Saul and David returned to Gibeah after battle, the women sang a song that extolled David's great success. But all of this support for David infuriated Saul. As 18:8, 9 tells us, "Saul was very angry, and [the song of praise for David] displeased him... And Saul eyed David from that day on."

So often the David and Goliath story is usually told as a David victory story, but really it's a Saul defeat story. And when we find out why the people of Israel picked Saul to be the king, there's a big deal made about his stature. He is at least a head taller than anybody else. So, when this huge Philistine comes out in the Valley of Elah and opposes

the armies of God, the natural, logical person who should go fight him is Saul because he is bigger than everybody else. And so Saul refuses to do this. And so here comes David. Saul even allows, attempts to have David use his armor, but David puts it on and he finds out that it's too big, and so Saul probably was not being a nice, generous guy offering him his armor. He was trying to show, "Okay, if you wear my armor and go out and fight Goliath, people will think perhaps that I'm the one doing it." But David sort of sheds that identity, if you will. Clothing throughout the books of Samuel is a huge deal. It's always tied to identity. So David refuses not only Saul's armor but his identity as such, having just the tools of a shepherd. So, the tools of a shepherd, with God, is superior for an Israel[ite] king than a tall, strong, armored king to oppose this uncircumcised Philistine who is blaspheming God. So, the significance of that story really is God's preference for a king who fully relies upon him rather than one from the eyes of the world might look like he has all the credentials to be a good leader.

— Prof. Jeffrey A. Volkmer

The intensity of the drama rises as we move from Saul's initial hostility to his indirect hostility in 18:10–19:17. All of the action in these episodes occurs primarily in the city of Gibeah where Saul tried to have others kill David. These verses divide into four straightforward episodes. First, in 18:10-16, Saul sought David's death through sending David on raids. Clearly, Saul hoped that David would die in these attacks. We also learn that during this same time, Saul hurled his spear at David. But despite Saul's attempts to have David killed, God blessed David. Chapter 18:14 tells us, "David had success in all his undertakings, for the Lord was with him." And because of David's successes, Saul fell under the curse of jealousy and fear. But God blessed David with growing admiration from the people.

In the second episode, in 18:17-30, Saul sought David's death through the Philistines. While in Gibeah, Saul enticed David into becoming more aggressive against the Philistines by promising his daughter Merab in marriage. Saul expected the Philistines to kill David. So, when David successfully returned from battle, Saul had given Merab to another man. Saul then tried again. He promised to give David his younger daughter Michal in marriage if David returned from battle with one hundred Philistine foreskins. David was so successful that he brought back 200 Philistine foreskins. As we might expect, God cursed Saul once again with fear, and his dread of David intensified. Saul saw that Michal loved David. And in verse 30 our author added, "David had more success than all the servants of Saul, so that his name was highly esteemed."

In the third episode, in 19:1-8, Saul openly ordered David's murder through Jonathan and the servants of his court. But God blessed David when Jonathan refused. In fact, Jonathan even rebuked his father by declaring David's innocence and pointing out how everything David did benefited Saul. Saul acknowledged his wrongdoing and swore

falsely not to harm David. And in 19:8, our author noted that “David went out and fought with the Philistines and struck them with a great blow, so that they fled before him.”

In the fourth and final episode of Saul’s indirect hostility toward David, in 19:9-17, Saul sought David’s life through messengers or assassins. Verse 9 tells us that God’s curse fell on Saul again as “a harmful spirit from the Lord came upon Saul,” and again, Saul tried to kill David with his spear. But David fled to his home. Saul sent messengers to David’s house to kill him. But God blessed David once again, and Michal — now David’s wife — helped him escape during the night.

After focusing on Saul’s attempts to have others kill David, our author turned to the escalation that occurred through Saul’s direct hostility against David in 19:18–23:28. These chapters trace God’s blessings on David and curses on Saul while Saul pursued David in a variety of places.

First, Saul came against David and Samuel in Ramah in 19:18-24. After escaping Saul’s assassins in Gibeah, David fled to Samuel’s hometown in Ramah where Samuel lived with a company of prophets under his direction. David told Samuel what had happened, and they both sought refuge nearby in Naioth. As before, Saul sent messengers to kill David, but the Spirit of God dramatically blessed David with protection. Three times Saul sent messengers, but each time the Spirit so overwhelmed them that they could not fulfill their mission. So, out of frustration, Saul went to Naioth in Ramah himself. But the Holy Spirit cursed Saul by bringing shame upon him. Overwhelmed by God’s Spirit, Saul stripped off his clothes and prophesied rather than killing David.

Second, we see Saul’s direct hostility against David and Jonathan in Gibeah in 20:1-42. David left Samuel in Ramah and returned to Gibeah where he humbly protested his innocence to Jonathan. And God blessed David with Jonathan’s support once again. Together, they devised a way to determine if Saul was still intent on killing David. When Saul cruelly berated Jonathan for his loyalty to David, Jonathan knew that his father still wanted David dead. So, Jonathan sent David away with the blessing of his enduring support saying in verse 42, “The Lord shall be between me and you, and between my offspring and your offspring, forever.”

Third, several episodes focus on Saul’s aggression against David and the priests at the Tabernacle in 21:1–23:13. This segment begins with David travelling from Gibeah to Nob, where the Tabernacle and its priests were located. Through various twists and turns, David also travelled briefly to Gath of the Philistines, to the cave of Adullam, and to Mizpeh of Moab. In the end, he remained for a while with God’s high priest in the town of Keilah in Judah.

When David arrived at the Tabernacle in Nob, he asked the high priest Ahimelech for bread for his men and himself. Ahimelech explained that there was no bread except the holy bread set before the Lord in the Tabernacle. David’s response to Ahimelech explained God’s blessing on David at this time. As David put it in verse 5, “The vessels of the young men are holy even when it is an ordinary journey. How much more today will their vessels be holy?” Ahimelech gave David the holy bread left over for that day. And what’s more, when David asked for a weapon, Ahimelech gave him Goliath’s sword, an apt symbol of God’s approval of David.

Throughout these stories, we have to be careful to see how the author of Samuel often gave subtle clues to lead his audience in their evaluation of what David did. On the surface, David’s eating of the holy bread raised questions because Leviticus 24:5-9

commands the sons of Aaron to eat the holy bread. So, it was no small matter that the author mentioned the men's holiness and David's receipt of Goliath's sword. These details highlighted David's loyalty to God, in contrast to Saul's disloyalty, and validated God's approval of David at this time. It's no wonder, then, that Jesus referred to this event in Luke 6:3 as he defended his disciples against the false charge that they had broken the Sabbath by gathering grain. Subtle clues like these appear throughout these chapters to help the original audience understand how they were to evaluate David's actions.

Now, there was an Edomite named Doeg who was the chief of Saul's herdsmen in Nob at the time. Recognizing that Doeg was likely to report David's whereabouts to Saul, David fled. He went briefly to the Philistine city of Gath where God gave him the wisdom to deceive the king — and protect himself — by acting like a madman. Then he went to the cave at Adullam where God blessed him with a group of about 400 fighting men. But, unlike Saul who conscripted every man he could, David did not conscript these fighters. They all came to him voluntarily. David also demonstrated the blessing of God's Spirit by taking his mother and father to safety in Mizpeh of Moab. He remained there until the prophet Gad told him to go to Judah, and he humbly complied with God's command.

During all of this, the curse of the evil spirit on Saul was evident. In Gibeah, Saul raged against his men for not supporting him. So, Doeg the Edomite told Saul that David was in Nob. But when Saul learned that David had already left, and Ahimelech had helped him, he became furious and commanded Doeg to kill all the priests. As we read in 22:18, "Doeg the Edomite turned and struck down the priests, and he killed on that day eighty-five persons who wore the linen ephod." Saul then destroyed every person and animal in Nob, including woman and children. Only the priest Abiathar, one of Ahimelech's sons, escaped, and he joined David and his men.

David and Abiathar travelled together within Judah until David received word that the Philistines were troubling the people of Keilah. In contrast with Saul, David asked the Lord what he should do. God responded that he should defend Keilah from the Philistines. And God blessed David with victory. Meanwhile, God also blessed David by revealing to Abiathar that Saul was coming to Keilah. So, David called on the priest and prayed once again for guidance. God revealed that David should leave, and Saul and his army turned back.

The fourth and last segment of Saul's direct hostility involves several interconnected aggressions against David in the wilderness, in 23:14-28. After leaving Keilah, David travelled to the wilderness of Ziph, and later to the more southern region of the wilderness of Maon, where Saul pursued him again.

The opening of this segment notes both the curse of the evil spirit on Saul and God's blessing on David. We're told that Saul relentlessly pursued David, but God never allowed him to capture David. And according to 23:17, Jonathan came to David and reassured him saying, "Do not fear, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel."

Meanwhile some men from the wilderness of Ziph offered to lead Saul to David. So, David and his men went southward to the wilderness of Maon. Saul came close to capturing David, but as Saul closed in on David, God blessed David once again. Saul

received word that the Philistines were attacking Israel elsewhere, and Saul was forced to turn from his pursuit and fight against them.

De-escalation of Hostility (23:29–27:12). Having seen the beginning and escalation of Saul’s hostility toward David, we should touch on the de-escalation of Saul’s hostility in 23:29–27:12. These materials highlight how David’s integrity led Saul to let David live in peace.

The first segment is the well-known episode of David at Engedi in 23:29–24:22. After Saul left to fight the Philistines, David moved eastward to the place known as Engedi. But when Saul’s battle was over, he went after David once again. Along the way, Saul stopped to relieve himself in a cave. And in God’s providence, David was hiding within that very cave. David could have killed Saul easily, but instead, he only cut off a corner of Saul’s robe. And to highlight how sensitive David’s conscience was to sin, our author pointed out that David felt guilty about even this small act against the Lord’s anointed king. So, the next morning, David called out to Saul from a distance. He made it clear that he had spared Saul’s life, and that he would not harm him. And then, in a brief moment of remarkable clarity, Saul told David in 24:17, “You are more righteous than I, for you have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil.” And in 24:20 Saul himself confessed, “And now, behold, I know that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand.”

In the second segment, our author described what happened to David and Abigail in the wilderness of Paran in 25:1-44. Saul isn’t mentioned in this episode, but our author began with the notice that Samuel died and that all Israel mourned for him. More than likely, he mentioned this to indicate that both David and Saul were present at Samuel’s burial under terms of a temporary truce. This fact in itself reveals how Saul’s hostility was subsiding. But David took no chances and immediately fled from Saul far into the desert regions of southern Judah, to the wilderness of Paran. There, David’s actions confirmed his innocence once again.

We learn of a beautiful and intelligent woman named Abigail and her cruel and wicked husband Nabal, whose name means “fool.” After David’s men treated Nabal’s shepherds well and protected them in the wilderness, David asked Nabal for a gift of sustenance for his men. But when Nabal foolishly rejected David’s request and insulted his messengers, David prepared his men to attack Nabal’s household. Abigail intervened on behalf of her husband, offering David a gift and begging forgiveness for her husband. She also humbly acknowledged David’s goodness. And David praised God that he had been restrained from taking revenge. About ten days later, the Lord himself struck and killed Nabal. When David received word of Nabal’s death, he replied in verse 39, “Blessed be the Lord who . . . has kept back his servant from wrongdoing.” And soon after, God blessed David further when Abigail became his wife.

Now, David did a lot of good for the house of Nabal, who happened to be Abigail’s husband. And David was expecting Nabal to reciprocate his generosity to him in terms of giving food to David and his army. However, when David sent messengers to Nabal, Nabal refused to give food to David, and so David decided to go and take vengeance . . . and destroy Nabal and some members of his household. Now, to some

extent, Abigail got to know that this is what has happened, and she quickly arranged to meet David with some food items. Now, when Abigail met David, who was on a mission — I would say, a vengeance mission — Abigail was able, with humility, she was able to convince David not to take vengeance. And at that moment David listened to her, and as a result David accepted a gift that she brought and Abigail returned... So a few days later God struck Nabal and Nabal died. When David heard that Abigail is now a widow, he sent messengers to Abigail to marry him, and Abigail accepted to marry David. So that is how David married Abigail. And I think, for me, the lesson over there for me is that vengeance is not for us... Vengeance belongs to the Lord.

— Rev. Dr. Humphrey Akogyeram

Our author then turned to David in the wilderness of Ziph for a second time in 26:1-25. Saul pursued David once again. But David remained innocent of wrongdoing. One night David entered Saul's camp and found Saul asleep with his spear near his head. As before, David refused to harm Saul, but he took Saul's spear and jar of water. The next day, God blessed David for his restraint. When David and Saul spoke from afar, Saul admitted David's innocence and pronounced a blessing on David in verse 25, saying, "Blessed be you, my son David! You will do many things and will succeed in them."

The last segment of Saul's de-escalating hostility deals with David in Philistia in 1 Samuel 27:1-12. David fled from Saul once again, this time to the land of the Philistines. God's blessing on David's decision is evident because, after learning that David had fled to the city of Gath, Saul stopped pursuing him. God blessed David in other ways as well. Achish, the Philistine king, gave David the town of Ziklag for his residence. David lived in Ziklag for a year and four months and led several successful raids from there. Now, our author was careful to point out that David never harmed any of God's people. Rather, he only helped the Philistines attack God's enemies. Still, Achish trusted David, supposing that the Israelites hated him and that David would have no other choice but to remain faithful to him for the rest of his life.

Aftermath of Hostility (1 Samuel 28:1–2 Samuel 1:27). After dealing with the background, escalation, and de-escalation of Saul's aggression against David, the author of Samuel turned to the aftermath of Saul's hostility in 1 Samuel 28:1–2 Samuel 1:27. In these chapters, the Philistines made war against Israel, and our author focused on how God blessed David and brought curses against Saul during this time.

The first segment of the aftermath of Saul's hostility focuses on preparations for battle with the Philistines in 28:1–31:13. Departing from his usual pattern, the author of Samuel interlaced two episodes involving David and Saul to indicate that these events took place at the same time.

First, we find a brief episode of David's preparations for battle in 28:1, 2. These events took place in the Philistine city of Gath. The Philistine king told David that he and his men would have to join the Philistine army in the battle against Israel. David deceived

Achish by giving him the impression that he agreed with the plan. Delighted, Achish told David he would be the king's bodyguard for life. The author of Samuel waited to resolve the tension over David's participation with the Philistines until a later episode.

Second, our author turned to Saul's preparations for battle in 28:3-25. In the days of Samuel, Saul had removed all the mediums and necromancers from Israel. But the sight of the Philistine army overwhelmed Saul with fear. He inquired of God, but God didn't answer him. So, Saul did the unthinkable. He consulted with a medium. Now, Leviticus 20:27 indicates that necromancy — consulting the dead — was a capital crime in the law of Moses. But Saul commanded the medium of Endor to summon Samuel. Whether the spirit that appeared was actually Samuel or a demonic deception, the spirit told Saul the last thing he wanted to hear. In verse 17, the spirit repeated Samuel's earlier words saying, "The Lord has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor, David." And in verse 19, the spirit continued, saying, "Moreover, the Lord will give Israel also with you into the hand of the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your sons shall be with me." God condemned Saul and his sons to death in battle with the Philistines.

The next segment of this section focuses on David and Saul's engagements in battle with the Philistines, in 29:1–31:13. The narrative in 29:1–30:31 presents David's victories. You'll recall that in 28:1, the Philistine king Achish had insisted that David accompany him into battle with Israel. But in these chapters, the commanders of the Philistines refused to let David join them. So, David turned back to Ziklag and never went to war against Saul. When David returned to Ziklag, he learned that the Amalekites had burned the city and taken his wives captive. David attacked the Amalekites and destroyed every one of them — something Saul had refused to do. And acting as an honorable leader of God's people, David shared the plunder of the battle with all those who followed him.

By contrast, our author turned to Saul's death in the battle with the Philistines in 31:1-13. At Mount Gilboa, God poured out the curses that he'd warned were coming. Three of Saul's sons died in the battle, including Jonathan. Then, after an archer's arrow critically wounded Saul, we read in verse 4 that "Saul took his own sword and fell upon it." The Philistines disgraced the bodies of Saul and his sons by fastening them to the wall of Beth-shan. But courageous men from Jabesh-gilead went at night, took the bodies, burned them and buried their bones.

The author of Samuel then closed his account of the aftermath of Saul's hostility by turning to David's reaction after battle in 2 Samuel 1:1-27. This segment focuses on David's righteous response to the deaths of Saul and his sons after he returned to his home in Ziklag.

First, in 1:1-16, David executed an Amalekite messenger who claimed to have killed Saul, rather than rewarding him. Then, in 1:17-27, David lamented publically over the deaths of Jonathan and Saul. As he cried out in verse 19, "Your glory, O Israel, [the king of Israel] is slain on your high places!" And in verses 19, 25 and 27, he honored Saul and Jonathan by repeating the well-known refrain, "How the mighty have fallen!" Despite the fact that Saul had persecuted him without just cause, David maintained his integrity as Saul's humble servant right up to the end.

Now that we've considered the structure and content of Saul's failed kingship, we're in a position to ask about its relevance for our lives. How are we to make Christian applications of this division of the book of Samuel?

CHRISTIAN APPLICATION

Many facets of the second division of Samuel seem disconnected from our lives as followers of Christ. We're not fighting battles with Philistines and other ancient peoples. We're not involved in the struggle between Saul and David. What do these events have to do with us? To be sure, most of us can spot a few relevant theological and moral principles here and there. But it's much more fruitful to align our Christian applications with the author of Samuel's main purposes when he first wrote about Saul's failed kingship.

There are many ways to explore the Christian application of Saul's failed kingship. But for our purposes here, we'll look once again at the themes of God's covenants and God's kingdom. Let's begin with how God's covenants give us a crucial orientation toward this division of the book of Samuel.

God's Covenants

The events of Saul's failed kingship took place when Israel's interactions with God were governed primarily by God's covenant with Moses. The law of Moses governed what the author of Samuel wrote about God's benevolences, the standards for grateful loyalty — especially in regard to God's laws for worship and kingship — and the consequences of curses and blessings. But as we've seen in this lesson, the book of Samuel was written after God had established his covenant with David. So, the original audience was expected to apply these chapters to their lives in the light of all that God had revealed about the centrality of David's house.

In much the same way, as followers of Christ, we must apply the narrative of Saul's failed kingship in the light of our own day. We live after God has established a new covenant in Christ. And this new covenant realigns the dynamics of God's earlier covenants toward the centrality of Jesus as the great son of David. For this reason, we must rely on God's revelation in the New Testament to guide us as we apply these chapters.

Reading Scripture, it's important to realize that Scripture doesn't come to us all at once. It's a progressive revelation. God has chosen to reveal his plan to us over time through the biblical covenants, culminating in our Lord Jesus Christ. With that in mind, we have to realize that as we apply the Scripture to our lives, not all aspects of Scripture come over to us in application, especially now as Christians, in exactly the same way as it did, say, under the old covenant or in the Old Testament era. As we then think of what applies to us, we have to

see how the Old Testament specifically comes to fulfillment in Jesus Christ. He is the lens and grid by which we then say, “This applies and this doesn't apply.” ... It all reaches its fulfillment in Christ. It applies to us in and through him. And that's the basic principle that we have to follow as we read any portion of Scripture, placing that portion in its place in redemptive history, seeing how it is brought over to fulfillment in Jesus Christ, and then how it comes over to us as the people of God living in light of what Jesus has done.

— Dr. Stephen J. Wellum

In the first place, just as in the previous division, when this division of Samuel draws attention to divine benevolence, we recognize God's greater benevolence in Christ. We see divine benevolence as God granted Saul his kingship, and then even more benevolence as God replaced Saul with David. But the New Testament teaches that God showed far greater benevolence in Christ. Today, we have opportunities to acknowledge this extraordinary benevolence — not only the benevolence God showed Christ himself, but also the benevolence he shows to all who follow Christ day by day.

In the second place, much the same is true as we consider human loyalty in the days of Saul. These chapters expose Saul's failure to be loyal to God. He repeatedly neglected and corrupted the worship of God. And time and again he violated Moses' regulations for royal authority. Saul's failures contrast sharply with Jesus' flawless devotion to the worship of God, and to his unblemished rule as David's perfect son. They also point to our responsibility to worship God in Spirit and in truth, and to emulate Jesus' perfectly righteous rule in our own lives.

But this division of our book also draws attention to David's faithful worship. As Christians, we're reminded that the worship Jesus offers the Father far exceeds David's worship. And our worship in Christ is to exceed David's worship as well. In addition, every time our author pointed to David's honorable exercise of royal authority, we delight in Jesus' perfect kingship and learn how we are to follow his example.

We see ... in the book of Samuel, how the Lord took the throne from the arrogant Saul, who was feeling that he was a great king, and gave it to David, whom he took him from shepherding sheep to being the king. Although 1 Samuel focuses on David's kingship, greatness and obedience to God, in 2 Samuel we see that David was not an ideal king. We see his sins and weaknesses. This tells us that the people of Israel still need the true Savior who would completely remove our shame, and this person is Jesus Christ.

— Mr. Sherif Atef Fahim, translation

In the third place, these chapters draw attention to the consequences of curses and blessings. The curses that resulted from Saul's disobedience draw us toward Christ who bore the eternal curses for all who trust in him. And they also warn us that, even now, God disciplines his church with temporary curses when we turn from him. In the same

way, when we see the blessings that David received for his faithful service to God, we honor Christ who receives immeasurable blessings for his obedience to God. And we are encouraged to seek God's temporary blessings today and his eternal blessings in the world to come.

In addition to orienting our Christian applications of Saul's failed kingship toward the dynamics of God's covenants, we must also apply these chapters in the light of the unfolding of God's kingdom in Christ.

God's Kingdom

As we've seen, the author of Samuel wrote about Saul's failed kingship so that his original audience would abandon all hope for the house of Saul and place their hopes for God's kingdom in the righteous rule of David's house. And for this reason, we too must put our hopes exclusively in David's only perfectly righteous royal descendant, Jesus. Jesus alone fulfills the hopes for God's kingdom that our author pointed to in his narrative of Saul's failed kingship.

But, as we mentioned earlier, Jesus brings the kingdom in three stages. He began with the inauguration of his kingdom in his first advent. We live today in the continuation of his kingdom as it endures throughout church history. And we will see the consummation of his kingdom at the end of the age when he returns in glory.

In the first place, the original audience of Samuel learned from Saul's failures that hope could be found only in David's house. In a similar way, we look back at the inauguration of Christ's kingdom, where Jesus proved beyond doubt — through his miracles, his death, his resurrection and his ascension — that he is the only king who will bring God's glorious kingdom to earth.

In the second place, in the days of the original audience of Samuel, God sustained David's dynasty, despite its failures. And, we have the privilege of knowing that for more than 2,000 years, during the continuation of God's kingdom, God's promises have not failed. Christ — the righteous son of David — has proven again and again that God ordained him to extend the kingdom to the ends of the earth. Although many still follow other paths, Christ continues to defeat God's enemies and pour out God's blessings throughout the world by the power of his Spirit and the preaching of the gospel.

And in the third place, the author of Samuel called his original audience to keep their eyes on the future and the full restoration of David's throne. Similarly, our author's record of Saul's failed kingship calls on us to look forward to the consummation of our age when Christ returns. The New Testament assures us that, at that time, it will be evident to every creature that Christ is, in fact, the only one chosen to rule over creation. As Paul put it in Philippians 2:10, 11, on that day, "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

So, in the New Testament we see that the kingdom of God exists now through the reign of Christ over his people from every tribe, nation and language, scattered throughout the world, and not located in one

particular place, geographical place, but located in heaven, our spiritual home. But then the New Testament gives us a glimpse, too, of what the kingdom of God will be like when Jesus returns, and while that kingdom now is somewhat hidden in this world, it will be seen clearly when Christ returns — “Every knee shall bow ... every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” — and God will reign perfectly through his king, Christ, over his people who know him and call him Father in a heavenly New Jerusalem.

— Dr. Constantine Campbell

The author of Samuel carefully demonstrated that Israel had not taken a wrong turn as these events led to David’s reign. On the contrary, God himself directed every step along the way. And these chapters of the book of Samuel reassure us that God directed all of these events, not only to exalt David as the king of Israel, but to exalt Christ as the king of the world.

CONCLUSION

In this lesson on Samuel and Saul, we’ve seen how the author of Samuel traced a number of events that led to the establishment of David as the king of Israel. We’ve explored how he presented Samuel’s prelude to kingship in the first division of his book and how he presented Saul’s failed kingship in the second division of his book.

Much like those who first received the book of Samuel, we face troubles in this world. And those troubles often tempt us to lose hope for the victory of God’s kingdom in Christ. But when we humbly consider how God prepared the way for David’s reign through the lives of Samuel and Saul, his words encourage us to put our hopes for the future in the righteous reign of David’s house as well. Jesus, David’s righteous son, has come. And despite the trials we face today, we can be sure that he will grant all who believe in him an eternal inheritance of endless blessings in the fullness of God’s kingdom.

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