

Dr. Ted Hildebrandt, Old Testament Literature, Session 23, 1 Samuel: Conflict with Saul and David

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Wow, you weren't kidding when you said you had a lot of material on 1 Samuel. I'm excited to dive in today, focusing on a lecture from Dr. Ted Hildebrandt's class, On the Rise of David. It's a fascinating story for sure.

I think everyone at some point has thought about what it would be like to be king. Can you imagine being the first king of Israel? That has got to be a lot of pressure, and for Saul it leads to some, let's say, questionable choices. Yeah, what's interesting is that we see Saul's downfall unfold kind of gradually.

He doesn't just become a tyrant overnight, but we see this fear and his desire for control kind of chip away at his character until it leads to some pretty disastrous choices, like the incident at Gilgal, for example. Oh, yes, the Gilgal sacrifice. So, to understand what happens here, you have to think about Gilgal and what it represents.

It was the Israelites' first encampment after crossing the Jordan River into the Promised Land. It's a place of new beginnings and covenant renewal, and sacrifices played a vital role in reaffirming their commitment to God. But things go south quickly.

Saul is facing a full-blown Philistine invasion. They're deep into Israelite territory. That's right.

Everyone's looking to Saul for leadership. He's supposed to wait for Samuel to arrive and conduct the sacrifice, but the prophet's running late. And that delay, coupled with the immense pressure of the situation, pushes Saul to make a critical mistake.

Right. He decides to offer the sacrifice himself. Yeah.

A direct violation of religious law. Wow. Which reserved that role solely for the priests.

So he basically lets fear dictate his actions, even overriding established religious practices. Yeah. It's a classic case of how power, when not tempered by humility and obedience, can lead to a dangerous sense of entitlement.

So talk about bad timing, though. Samuel shows up right as Saul is finishing the sacrifice. Oh, yeah.

I can only imagine the tension in that moment. Oh, the text definitely emphasizes the weight of that encounter. Saul tries to justify himself, saying he acted for the good of the people.

Yeah. You know, a classic pious cover-up. Right.

But Samuel sees right through it and reminds him that obedience to God trumps any perceived good intentions. Yeah. And then he delivers this incredibly thought-provoking statement.

He tells Saul that if he had obeyed, God would have established his kingdom forever. That's huge. It suggests that there's some flexibility in God's plan, a willingness to work with human choices.

Yeah. It makes you wonder what Saul's reign and, indeed, the history of Israel could have looked like if he had chosen differently. Definitely.

And it makes you think about the impacts your choices might have within a larger divine plan. Right. And as we continue with Saul's story, we see another instance of disobedience.

Yeah. The incident with the Amalekites. Right.

God specifically commands Saul to wipe them out completely. Right. Because of their historical cruelty toward the Israelites.

Exactly. And what does Saul do? Well, he disobeys again. He spares the best livestock and even keeps the Amalekite king Agag alive, saying that he'll sacrifice them to God.

But talk about justifying a wrong action with seemingly good intentions. Right. Samuel isn't buying it.

Not at all. Yeah. He reminds Saul and all of us listening that true obedience to God goes beyond outward actions.

Okay. It's about aligning our hearts and motivations with God's will, no matter how difficult or inconvenient that may seem. It makes you think: how often do we try to dress up our disobedience in spiritual-sounding language? All the time.

But amidst all this drama with Saul, there's this ray of light: his son, Jonathan. Every single mention of Jonathan in the text is positive, painting him as a genuine hero. Yeah.

He's such a stark contrast to his father's downward spiral. Right. Jonathan is courageous, deeply devout, and fiercely loyal.

One of the most gripping stories in 1 Samuel is about him and his armor-bearer taking on a whole Philistine outpost. Wait, they went up against an entire outpost, just the two of them. Yeah.

What happened? They actually won. Wow. It's an incredible testament to their faith and courage.

They put complete trust in God's power, even when facing impossible odds. What? And there's this wild detail where Israelite mercenaries who were fighting for the Philistines end up switching sides during the battle. No way.

Adding to the chaos and ultimately contributing to Jonathan's victory. Talk about unpredictable twists and turns. That must have taken some serious guts.

But sadly, even Jonathan's heroism can't escape the consequences of Saul's recklessness. Unfortunately, that's true. And we see this play out tragically when Saul makes a rash vow before a battle.

Okay. Forbidding anyone from eating until they've achieved victory. Right.

Jonathan, unaware of this vow, eats some honey after a successful raid. Uh-oh. And Saul, blinded by his own twisted sense of justice and fueled by this escalating paranoia, decides to punish Jonathan with death.

That's horrifying. It's a decision that goes against every natural instinct of a parent to protect their child. It really reveals how deeply Saul's judgment has been compromised.

And the text emphasizes this further by contrasting it with Saul's decision to spare Agag the Amalekite king. Right. Directly defying God's command.

He values his own pronouncements over God's directives, even to the point of harming his own son. So with Saul clearly spiraling, God decides it's time for a new leader. Someone after his own heart.

Enter David. And what an entrance it is. God instructs Samuel to anoint David, the youngest son of Jesse from Bethlehem.

Okay. It's a deliberate choice that highlights God's focus on the heart, not outward appearances. Right.

Saul was initially chosen for his impressive physique. Exactly. But David is chosen for his inner qualities, those unseen depths of character.

And it makes you think: how often do we misjudge people based on first impressions? All the time. This story reminds us that God sees beyond the surface, straight to the heart. That's incredibly encouraging.

It means that even when we feel overlooked or underestimated, God sees our true potential. Absolutely. But David's anointing doesn't mean it's all smooth sailing from here on out.

Oh no. Things actually get pretty intense with Saul. He becomes tormented by what the text describes as an evil spirit from the Lord.

This passage is open to interpretation, but one compelling view is that it reflects a deep depression and psychological turmoil that grips Saul. And interestingly, it's music, specifically David's harp playing, that brings Saul moments of solace. That makes sense.

Music has this amazing power to soothe and heal. I know, I definitely turn to music when I'm feeling down. Me too.

Speaking of iconic moments, let's not forget the most famous story from 1 Samuel: David and Goliath. Ah, yes, the ultimate underdog story. Picture this: the Valley of Elah.

Philistines, with their chariots, are lined up on the plains while the Israelites are hiding in the mountains, terrified. And then out steps this young shepherd, David. Yeah, armed with just a sling and five stones, ready to face the giant Goliath.

You can practically feel the tension building as David approaches Goliath. And the giant mocks him, calling him a dog and threatening to feed his body to the birds and wild animals. But David's response is incredible.

It really is. He proclaims that he comes in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, the very God Goliath has defied. It's a bold declaration of faith and a powerful reminder that true strength comes from God, not human might or weaponry.

And then with one perfectly aimed stone to the forehead, David brings Goliath crashing down. He uses the giant's own sword to cut off his head, securing a shocking victory for Israel. Dr. Hildebrandt even mentions a fascinating archaeological discovery: a skull with a stone lodged in its forehead, suggesting that David's feat might have been more than just a story.

That's amazing how archaeology sometimes provides tangible evidence that supports these ancient accounts. It definitely adds another layer to the story. But as we'll see, David's triumph has unforeseen consequences.

It ignites a firestorm of jealousy in Saul's heart. Oh boy, here we go. Jealousy is such a powerful emotion.

It is. It's something we've all probably experienced at some point. But for Saul, it takes a dark and destructive turn.

That's right. Saul, hearing the songs praising David's victory, becomes consumed by envy and suspicion. Oh no.

He starts to see David not as a loyal subject, but as a threat to his throne. This deep dive is getting intense. We've already covered so much ground.

I know. But there's still much more to uncover. Oh yeah.

What happens next in this saga of power, jealousy, and faith? Well, in part two, we'll explore Saul's increasingly desperate attempts to get rid of David and the impact it has on their relationship. Okay. We'll also explore the remarkable loyalty of Jonathan as we delve deeper into the complexities of human nature and the choices that shape destiny.

I can't wait. So last time we left off with Saul spiraling deeper into this jealousy and paranoia, convinced that David was a threat to his throne. And what follows is a series of increasingly elaborate and dangerous schemes to try and get rid of him.

It sounds like a psychological thriller. What are we talking about here? Well, first he tries to use his own daughter, Mashal, as bait. Oh wow.

Knowing she's in love with David, he offers her his hand in marriage. Okay. Hoping she'll become a way to trap and control him.

That's so manipulative. Using your own child as a pawn in this deadly game. Exactly.

And it gets worse. As a dowry, he demands a hundred Philistine foreskins. He's essentially sending David on a suicide mission, hoping he'll be killed in battle.

Wow. That's just cold. But knowing David, I have a feeling he found a way to survive.

He does. Not only does he survive, but he comes back with 200 Philistine foreskins. He doubled it.

Doubling what Saul had demanded. Wow. It's a testament to both his skill as a warrior and his sheer determination to survive.

He's resourceful. That's for sure. But it seems like Saul is relentless in his pursuit.

How does David manage to stay one step ahead? It's a combination of things. Okay. He relies on his cunning, his bravery, and his deep faith in God.

Okay. But he also has a crucial ally in his corner. Oh, right.

Jonathan. Right. Their friendship is one of the most compelling aspects of this whole story.

Right. Jonathan recognizes the darkness that has consumed his father, and he risks everything to protect David. Their bond is incredible; it withstands all this pressure and danger.

Absolutely. Jonathan even confronts Saul directly. Really? Pleading with him to spare David's life.

Wow. But Saul's jealousy has become this all-consuming force. Right.

And he even tries to attack Jonathan in a fit of rage. Ah, that's awful. Imagine being caught between your loyalty to your friend and the wrath of your own father.

It must have been terrifying for Jonathan. Yeah. So what happens next? Knowing that David is no longer safe in Saul's court, Jonathan warns him and helps him escape.

Okay. There's this really poignant scene where they weep together and swear an oath of friendship. Wow.

A covenant that extends to their descendants. That's beautiful. It's a powerful testament to the enduring nature of true friendship, even in the face of all this adversity.

It must have been so hard for them to say goodbye, knowing they might never see each other again. Yeah. So David's a fugitive now.

He is. Where does he go? So David's years on the run take him to various places, each presenting unique challenges and revealing new dimensions of his character. Dr. Hildebrandt focuses on four key locations: Nob, Gath, Keilah, and Carmel in the Judean desert.

So let's start with Nob. What happens there? In Nob, David seeks help from the priests, who provide him with food and even give him Goliath's sword. Wow.

It's a gesture of compassion and support. Okay. But, tragically, this act of kindness has devastating consequences.

What happens? Saul finds out about the priests' assistance, and in a chilling act of ruthlessness, orders the execution of 85 priests, along with all the women and children in the city. It's hard to believe that he would resort to such extreme measures. It seems like his pursuit of David is turning him into the very tyrant that he fears David will become.

That's a good point. And driven by fear and desperation, David then makes a rather risky decision. What's that? He seeks refuge in Gath.

Gath? That doesn't seem like the safest choice. That's Goliath's hometown. Right, the one he killed.

What was he thinking? It's a move born out of desperation, but it also reveals David's quick wit and his ability to think on his feet. When he realizes that his life is in danger, he pretends to be insane. He feigned insanity.

That's pretty clever. How did that work out for him? Well, the Philistines, superstitious and wary of dealing with a madman, let him go. Wow.

It's a somewhat humorous anecdote that highlights David's ability to use unconventional tactics to escape these dangerous situations. I guess sometimes you have to play crazy to outsmart your enemies. But his journey doesn't end there, right? No, it doesn't.

His next stop is Kila, a city under Philistine attack. David and his men successfully defend the city. But then things get really interesting.

God reveals to David that Saul is on his way to Kila, and that the people of Kila will hand David over to Saul. But David, armed with this knowledge, decides to flee. So they never even got there.

And ultimately those events never happened. So God revealed a possible future that didn't actually come to pass. That's fascinating.

Does this suggest that God's knowledge of the future might include multiple possibilities, and that our choices can actually influence the course of events? It's a thought-provoking concept. Yeah. It challenges the notion of a fixed, predetermined destiny.

And suggests that we have a role to play in shaping the future. Even in the face of divine knowledge, it makes you wonder what other possibilities might exist that we're not even

aware of. And how do our choices interact with God's plans? OK, I need a minute to process that.

But we were talking about these locations. David flees too. What about Carmel? Carmel is where we meet this fascinating couple, Nabal, whose name literally means fool.

And his wife Abigail, who is described as intelligent and beautiful. David and his men have been protecting Nabal's flocks. But when they request provisions, Nabal insults David and refuses to help.

So much for gratitude. I can imagine David was not too happy about that. David, enraged by Nabal's ungratefulness, sets out to punish him.

But Abigail, sensing the danger, takes matters into her own hands. She gathers an abundance of food and drink, and intercepts David, appealing to his better nature. She's quick on her feet.

It takes a lot of courage to stand up to someone like David, especially when he's in a vengeful mood. She's definitely a force to be reckoned with. What happens? Abigail not only prevents bloodshed but also demonstrates incredible wisdom and diplomacy.

She takes the blame for her husband's foolishness, offering herself as a scapegoat and saving her household from destruction. What a word. And David, deeply impressed by her actions, accepts her offering and spares Nabal.

She sounds amazing. What happens to Nabal after this encounter? Well, it's fate, would you say. Yeah.

And some might say divine intervention. Nabal dies shortly after this incident. Oh, wow.

That's quite a turn of events. And I'm guessing this opens up a new chapter in David's life. It does indeed.

David, recognizing Abigail's wisdom and strength, marries her. Wow. Talk about a whirlwind romance.

It's a match born out of extraordinary circumstances, and their relationship adds another layer of intrigue to this already captivating story. It seems like every step of David's journey is filled with these unexpected twists and turns. So we've seen David's resourcefulness, his courage, and his ability to escape from these dangerous situations.

But how long can this game of cat and mouse with Saul continue? Well, in part three, we'll explore the final encounters between David and Saul, including a tense moment in a cave and a chilling visit to a witch. Oh, boy. We'll also delve into the lasting consequences of Saul's choices and the ultimate fulfillment of God's plan.

Stay tuned. David's journey is just amazing; he's had to navigate all this danger from Saul and still stay true to himself. It's really inspiring how even when facing all this persecution, he never loses sight of his faith.

Right. And in this final part of our deep dive, we really see how David's character shines through even when he has the chance to take revenge. Yeah.

There's this incredible story where David could have killed Saul, but chooses mercy instead. Right. In a cave, no less.

That's such a powerful image. Talk about a tense setting. So what exactly happens? Saul is pursuing David relentlessly as usual, and he enters this cave to, well, relieve himself.

Okay. He has no idea that David and his men are hiding deeper within the same cave. Oh, wow.

And David's men see this as like a divine opportunity to finally strike down Saul and end this pursuit once and for all. Yeah. Can you imagine being David in that moment? The pressure must have been immense.

But instead of taking the advice of his men, he shows mercy. David just cuts off a piece of Saul's robe as proof that he could have killed him, but chose not to. It's a powerful gesture.

Yeah. Showing mercy and respect for the authority that God had placed on Saul. He's basically saying, look, I'm not playing your game of vengeance.

I trust God to handle this. Exactly. And when Saul realizes what has happened, he's overcome with remorse, at least for a moment.

Okay. He weeps. He calls David his son and promises to stop hunting him.

It seems like he has these glimpses of clarity, but the darkness always pulls him back in. Yeah. Saul's emotions are definitely fickle, and it's not long before he reverts back to his old patterns.

So sad. So this isn't their last encounter, though, right? Right. There's another incident where David sneaks into Saul's camp at night and steals his spear and water jug.

Wait, really? It's almost comical. The king is sleeping, and the man he's trying to kill is right there beside him. Yeah.

It's like David is trying to send a message. Right. Like, he could easily end Saul's life, but chooses not to.

Exactly. He's demonstrating this incredible self-control and obedience to God that Saul seems to lack. It's a good reminder that true strength isn't about brute force, but about surrendering to God's will, even when it means showing mercy to your enemies.

I agree. But the story takes an even darker turn as we approach the climax. Okay, that's where the Witch of Endor comes in, right? This part always gives me chills.

What leads Saul to seek her out? So Saul's facing this massive Philistine invasion, and he's desperate for guidance. He's tried everything: prayer, dreams, the Urim and Thummim, but God is silent. So in his desperation, he turns to a practice he himself outlawed.

Necromancy, the act of communicating with the dead. Wow. It's a sign of how far Saul has fallen from his original calling.

He's willing to resort to forbidden practices, going against everything he once believed in, just to get some insight into his future. So he seeks out this woman known as the Witch of Endor. Mm-hmm.

A medium who can supposedly conjure spirits from the realm of the dead. And he asks her to summon the spirit of Samuel the prophet, who anointed him as king. Yeah.

So did it work? Well, the text describes this really chilling scene where Samuel's spirit actually appears. Wow. Much to the shock of the witch herself.

I bet. Samuel is not pleased about being disturbed. I can imagine.

He asks Saul, why have you disturbed me by bringing me up? It makes you think about the afterlife and whether it's possible to communicate with those who have passed on. It's a question that has intrigued people for centuries. But for Saul, this encounter is less about theological exploration and more about a terrifying confirmation of his fate.

Right. Samuel tells him that he and his sons will be with him the next day. In other words, they will all die in battle.

Yes. Saul goes into battle knowing he's doomed. What a tragic end to a reign that started with so much promise.

It's a reminder that even those chosen by God can stumble and fall. It also highlights how power, when it's not checked by humility and obedience, can really corrupt. And the devastating consequences of jealousy and pride.

But David's story gives me hope. Me too. Despite facing all this persecution, he remains faithful and ultimately fulfills his destiny.

Throughout this whole narrative, we see the power of choices. Saul repeatedly chooses disobedience and fear, and it leads to his downfall. Yeah.

David chooses to trust God, even when facing impossible odds. It challenges us to examine our own choices. Are we letting fear, pride, or jealousy dictate our actions, or are we choosing to walk in obedience to God's will, even when it's difficult? That's a great takeaway.

I think the book of 1 Samuel doesn't give us easy answers, but it does make us think about these questions and helps us discover the power of living a life in line with God's purpose. Well said. Thanks for joining us for this deep dive into 1 Samuel.