

1 SAMUEL 2023
The Temporary King
1 Samuel 31

Have you ever played “King of the Hill?” This is a game in which several children try to “capture” the top of a mound of dirt and keep everyone off of it. It is a silly, fairly violent game. The winner has to push and shove and turn around and around to fend off anyone who might try to push them off of the hill. The one who wins this battle is called “The King of the Hill.” It is a marvelous moment. **But it is just a moment.** Once it is over, the king of the hill is forgotten. **No one can hold the hill forever!**

King Saul is the king of the hill for a time in Israel. He was proclaimed King by the prophet Samuel when he was just 30 years old. **It was an unexpected role given to him when he KNEW that he did not deserve it. 1 Samuel 9:20b-21 NIV**

And to whom is all the desire of Israel turned, if not to you and your whole family line?" 21 Saul answered, **"But am I not a Benjamite, from the smallest tribe of Israel, and is not my clan the least of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin? Why do you say such a thing to me?"**

Saul knew that he was not worthy of this honor! So much so that when the time came for Samuel to anoint him as king before all of the people, he HID himself behind the baggage so that they could not find him. But God promised to be WITH him and to EQUIP him for the role that he was to fill. **1 Samuel 10:6-7 NIV**

6 The Spirit of the LORD will come powerfully upon you, and you will prophesy with them; and you will be changed into a different person. 7 Once these signs are fulfilled, do whatever your hand finds to do, for God is with you.

This was a period of HOPE and PROMISE that COULD HAVE BEEN amazing for Saul, for his family, and for the entire nation of Israel. Things actually started off rather well with Saul. His first challenge as a king was to face off against a ruthless Ammonite King named Nahash (which means SERPENT!) who was threatening the Benjamite city of Jabesh Gilead. Saul leads the Israelites successfully against him and delivers the city. When celebrating his victory, some wanted to PUNISH those that had mocked Saul's appointment as king. **1 Samuel 11:12-15 NIV**

12 The people then said to Samuel, "Who was it that asked, 'Shall Saul reign over us?' Turn these men over to us so that we may put them to death." 13 But Saul said, "No one will be put to death today, for this day the LORD has rescued Israel." 14 Then Samuel said to the people, "Come, let us go to Gilgal and there renew the kingship." 15 So all the people went to Gilgal and made Saul king in the presence of the LORD. There they sacrificed fellowship offerings before the LORD, and Saul and all the Israelites held a great celebration.

***He PROCLAIMS that the victory is the LORD'S.**
This single sentence is the greatest statement of FAITH that Saul utters in his entire career. It is without ambivalence or hesitancy. He steps back from the limelight and declares that it was GOD ALONE that won the victory for them that day. He did not

refer to his brilliant plan, or to his kingly confidence, or to his bold demand for everyone to step up. He just openly acknowledges that it was GOD that won the victory for them that day. What a high moment for Saul and for the new Kingdom!

***He REFUSES to take VENGEANCE on his detractors.**

***He WINS the hearts of the people through HUMILITY.**

After this victory and his gracious response to cries for vengeance, the people FULLY ACCEPT him as their king! Samuel himself calls them all to REAFFIRM Saul as their rightful king, and they have a marvelous FEAST where they worshipped God together. Oh, how we wish that this would have been how Saul conducted himself for the rest of his reign. But alas, he did not.

Saul had a great MENTOR - Samuel [Samuel MOURNED God's rejection of Saul as king.]. Saul had great SERVANTS - Jonathan and David. Saul had ALMIGHTY GOD!

CONTRAST THIS WITH SAUL'S LATER YEARS:

***He DISOBEYS God and PROMOTES his own PRAISE. 1 Samuel 15:12 NIV**

12 Early in the morning Samuel got up and went to meet Saul, but he was told, "Saul has gone to Carmel. There he has set up a monument in his own honor and has turned and gone on down to Gilgal."

It did not take very long for Saul to become obsessed with himself. It is only a few years later when he wins a key battle, disobeys God, and then goes to set up a monument for himself and "his" victory. See how far he has fallen? We must constantly be on guard against our own pride. It creeps in unnoticed and takes over our hearts. We must pay attention to how we respond to our OWN VICTORIES! Do you give all glory and credit to God when you get that promotion, or when you buy that new house? This is no small matter. We are called to glorify God in every aspect of our lives. The Apostle Paul instructed us, "Whatever you do; whether you eat or drink, do it all to the glory of God!" If I do such menial things as eating and drinking to the glory of God, then I can certainly glorify him in the meaningful victories of my life!

***He becomes INSANELY JEALOUS of David. 1 Samuel 18:6-9 NIV**

6 When the men were returning home after David had killed the Philistine, the women came out from all the towns of Israel to meet King Saul with singing and dancing, with joyful songs and with timbrels and lyres. 7 As they danced, they sang: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands." 8 Saul was very angry; this refrain displeased him greatly. "They have credited David with tens of thousands," he thought, "but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?" 9 And from that time on Saul kept a close eye on David.

If you know the story of Saul at all, then you know that he becomes obsessed with the idea that David is his worst enemy, and one that will betray him and steal the kingdom from him. He becomes jealous of David on the very same day that David wins a great battle against Goliath. His private thoughts expose his wrong thinking! This leads to MASS murder and ultimately to practical INSANITY.

-He wrongly thinks the KINGDOM belongs to him!

King Saul did not get this kingdom by his own efforts, but at some point, he begins to believe that it is HIS and that he can somehow keep it for himself. PROMOTION comes from the Lord, and so does ongoing PROTECTION. But Saul spent all of his time and energy simply FIGHTING to keep his title from everyone around him. *The truth is that Saul's later years simply were the CULMINATION of a HEART that was HARDENED by moment after moment of DISOBEDIENCE and PRIDE.*

*He NEVER REPENTED of any of his SINS.

*He was DRIVEN by FEAR his whole life.

*He was only concerned about APPEARANCES and EXTERNAL religion!

His final day was one of TRAGEDY and SORROW. Here is how it is described.

1 Samuel 31:1-13 NIV

1 Now the Philistines fought against Israel; the Israelites fled before them, and many fell dead on Mount Gilboa. 2 The Philistines were in hot pursuit of Saul and his sons, and they killed his sons Jonathan, Abinadab and Malki-Shua. 3 The fighting grew fierce around Saul, and when the archers overtook him, they wounded him critically. 4 Saul said to his armor-bearer, "Draw your sword and run me through, or these uncircumcised fellows will come and run me through and abuse me." But his armor-bearer was terrified and would not do it; so Saul took his own sword and fell on it. 5 When the armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he too fell on his sword and died with him. 6 **So Saul and his three sons and his armor-bearer and all his men died together that same day.** 7 When the Israelites along the valley and those across the Jordan saw that the Israelite army had fled and that Saul and his sons had died, they abandoned their towns and fled. And the Philistines came and occupied them. 8 The next day, when the Philistines came to strip the dead, they found Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa. 9 They cut off his head and stripped off his armor, and they sent messengers throughout the land of the Philistines to proclaim the news in the temple of their idols and among their people. 10 They put his armor in the temple of the Ashtoreths and fastened his body to the wall of Beth Shan. 11 When the people of Jabesh Gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, 12 all their valiant men marched through the night to Beth Shan. They took down the bodies of Saul and his sons from the wall of Beth Shan and went to Jabesh, where they burned them. 13 Then they took their bones and buried them under a tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and they fasted seven days.

Every inch of ground that Saul had gained during his reign was eventually lost. There had been some good in him, but it was lost over time. **He left no lasting legacy.** He even lost all of his children in the end. It did not have to end this way. It never does. Here is the message of King Saul's life. **YOU ARE NOT WORTHY TO BE KING.**

The king of Israel was never meant to be a SOVEREIGN KING. He was meant to serve UNDER the Lord God, the TRUE KING of Israel. When Saul demonstrated (over and over) that he was not willing to OBEY the Lord God, the Lord God took Saul's right to be king away from him. But even then, Saul had a choice. *His own son, Jonathan, clearly showed him how to HUMBLE himself and accept God's chosen one as his king. Saul could have done the same thing. Clearly, he did not.*

Saul was about 60 years old when he began chasing David because he suspected that he was going to take over the kingship in Israel. God had proclaimed it through Samuel, and God's hand of blessing was clearly on David. But Saul would not accept it, and he resented and hated anyone who did! **In Saul's mind, he could only think of David as the King in one way, "OVER MY DEAD BODY!"** So be it.

I have noticed a TREND in human history that seems to be consistent. Kings never willingly hand over their titles to their successors, and they NEVER SURRENDER their role to someone else unless that person simply OVERPOWERS and KILLS them to take that place. **We will fight to the death to be the KING in our lives.** But we do not have to die this way. **We could LAY DOWN our RIGHT to be the king in our own lives, and let Jesus reign there instead!** He has already taken your sin and shame upon himself, and he has already died in your place.

In the end, Saul's life was taken by his enemies. His body was mutilated, and his naked corpse was hung on a wall for everyone to see. His life ended in SHAME and DISGRACE. He was lifted up and MOCKED as a FAILED KING who lost his kingdom and all those that he loved in it. Does this sound FAMILIAR? Pastor J.D. Greear paints the picture of King David and King Saul this way in [Christ-Centered Exposition – 1 & 2 Samuel](#):

David's ascension to the throne teaches us how a later king, God's ultimate King, would take the throne. Jesus, like David, would assume His throne only after the faithless one had stirred up shame and rejected God. **The part of Saul would be played by us,** humans who refused to fully trust and delight in God. And like Saul we would be condemned to die the death of the sinner.

The twist in Jesus' kingship, however, is that He would go to the place of death in our place. He would die a shameful death, fastened to a tree, and put on display for all to see. The enemies of God would triumph at His death—not ours—as they stripped Him of His armor and mocked Him. "Was this not the King of the Jews? He could not even save Himself!" Yet through that shameful death, salvation came to us all. Just as salvation could only come to Israel through Saul's death, so eternal salvation could only come to humanity through Jesus' death. Jesus was killed like Saul so He could reign like David.

You may not be the king of a great nation or even a tiny village. **But you do have to decide who will rule in the kingdom of your own life.** The very definition of SIN is that of. SELF-RULE; the determination that your life is your own, and no one else has the right to tell you what to do and how to live. **You want to be your own boss; your own king. How is that working for you?** There is a better way. Instead, you and I simply have to accept his death as our payment, and give him the throne of our lives. **Surrender the Kingdom of You!** Jesus is the rightful King, and he alone can give us the ability and power to reign with him forever and forever in his eternal kingdom.

Will you surrender your crown to Jesus today?

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Start talking

Have several people share a time when they were “King of the Hill” in some sport or endeavor. How good are they at that skill today?

Start thinking.

Name one or two chief lessons you have learned from our study in 1 Samuel.

Start sharing.

[Read 1 Samuel 10:6-7; 11:12-15.](#) How did God set Saul up for success? What good do you see in Saul early in his reign?

[Read 1 Samuel 15:12; 18:6-9.](#) How was pride instrumental in Saul’s failure as king? Why do you think that Saul never considered turning the kingship over to David even though he knew David was to be his successor?

How did Saul fail to let God rule over him as king? Why is self-rule so deadly? How does Saul’s failure to ever repent of his sin serve as a warning to us all?

[Read 1 Samuel 31.](#) How does Saul’s death picture what Christ endured for us in his own death? Talk about how you turned the throne of your life over to Christ.

Start praying.

Pray for any people you know that are religious but that have no relationship with Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Start doing.

Write down the most important lessons you have learned from 1 Samuel.