

## 1 Samuel by Rick Stark

1 - In building tall buildings, a construction company will use a smaller crane to build a larger crane that then builds the big tower crane. Maybe this illustrates what begins here (1, *"there was a certain man"*): from barren Hannah to Prophet Samuel to King David to the Lord *Christ* and His Kingdom! God does that. And like the screeching and groaning of steel and sweat on the construction site, God often uses difficulty, pain and suffering (3-8) to do His best work (2 Cor.4:7-12; James 1:2-4). But note that it's not in a vacuum, but rather in the context of worship of God who hears (9-12), God of suffering, God who is able to pull off the grand reversals for His glory. And it's not without "means" (17, 19). Isn't that what the Westminster Confession of Faith 5.3 teaches? *"God, in his ordinary providence, maketh use of means, yet is free to work without, above, and against them, at his pleasure."* God does that (20). And so it goes, one life given over to the Lord (Hannah, 15-18) and one Lord given over to Hannah (20); and finally, one son given over to the Lord. Hannah reciprocates, directed by a heart of vision and hope (22, 25-28), bringing her young son Samuel to the House of the Lord (23-24).

2- The mystery of worship – that is how ch.1 ends and ch.2 begins – and this is how the story of the prophet Samuel is shaped. But it's a much bigger story than Hannah maybe knew, for her song of praise in response to God's gift (1-10) is a song of salvation, and prophetic in that it is also on the lips of Mary, the mother of Jesus (Lk.1:46-55). The song sees in and thru God's micro-work: the anointed King and His Kingdom-rule. Consider, too, how Samuel as *prophet* (3:20) is but a type, a shadow of *"The Prophet"* to come (Deut.18; Jn.6:14; 7:40). And as an aside, note how seamless worship (ch.1-2) is literarily bracketed by a seamless *"certain man"* (1:1): leading his wife (1:3, 21), patient with her pain before God (1:8, 12 -18; 2:1-10); and leading her back home again (11). I want to be like that! But what happened with the priest Eli and his sons (12-17, 22-25)? One expects such from God's enemies, but not in the church. *"Judgment begins at the household of God"* (27-34; 1 Pet.4:7), and this is a better mark of spiritual revival than any other. But in the midst of the morass, note the hints of God's secret work, His faithfulness, in the tidbits of subtle contrast in His prophet Samuel (11, 18-21, 26; 3:1). So don't miss, as Ralph Davis says, *"the merciful meddling of God's Word... God has a sort of saving stubbornness that will not turn aside from his people"* (27-36)!

3 - *Post tenebras lux* ("after darkness, light) was the motto of reformed Geneva – but it had indeed become dark and the absence of the Word of God was a sign of the judgment of God (1). Now into the void comes the grace of God, and not without His means: His prophet and His Word (*vision*; 2-3). God does that! That's Good News! Could this be instructive to the contemporary church in terms of prayer? The number "3" in the scriptures has particular importance, and here the writer seems to underscoring the readers' assurance of God's perfect plan and gift, remembering that God repeated His call to Samuel "3" times (4, 6, 8). What might the way of Samuel's call tell us about God Himself? (*"the kindness of the prophet's God,"* Davis) And what might this "call" mean for the prophet (pastor) himself? *"Tingle"* (11) is about tension, burden, pressure: the ministry of God's Word will cut in many ways. Maybe this, too, is instructive on how to pray for your pastor, for when is God's Word and true spiritual leadership more needed but in times of confusion and conflict (15-21)? But don't miss the truth and hope of (21) – it is always God's move first, His work, His Word.

4 - One would have high expectations, God on the move via His new prophet. Battle? Bring it on! However, note how this narrative ends: "*Ichabod*" – "*the glory has departed from Israel*" (21-22). Defeat? Impossible! But that's just what happened (2, 10). What went wrong? "*Why has the Lord defeated us...*" (3). Exactly – you got the first part right – it was "*the Lord*" – but missed badly on the second part ("*Let us bring the ark of the covenant... that it may save us...*"). One theologian calls this "*Rabbit Foot Theology*," and giving this some thought it's easy to discern why (superstition over faith). Further, how is it that we, too, play the "*God card*" thinking we can force or manipulate God's hand? Note how jealous God is, that He would allow Israel (you) to be badly disappointed with Him if it would provoke them to the sort of God He really is. See also how the covenant cuts both ways in the fulfillment of His judgment against Hophni and Phinehas (11, the Covenant of His love is white hot against all that opposes or feigns Him). Lastly, don't fly by in cursory fashion, but genuinely pause, feel the tragedy of Eli's daughter-in-law, Phinehas' pregnant wife (19-22). More theology here in her death than in her husband's entire life. God is jealous love and He will do whatever that we might seek Him rightly.

5 - The *ark of the covenant*, not Samuel, has taken the spotlight: that sacred, gold-covered, portable box containing the 10 Commandments conveying God's righteousness, but which on its "*mercy seat*" (Lev.16) communicated God's forgiveness. Law and Gospel, the holy presence of God, now in a strange place and almost strange *da-gon humor* (1-5). In all seriousness, however, we should be asking ourselves, "*What are my dagons?*" God never shares allegiances; incomparable supremacy; "*every knee will bow and every tongue confess...*" (Phil.2:10-11). Unredeemed and unbelieving man (Philistines, 6-12) scoffs at standing accountable and/or is offended at standing in need of mercy, but in a pinch of pain will attempt to beg, borrow or steal God for self-serving purposes. In this case, they (we) learn not only the supremacy of God (and that utterly independent of His people) but also the severity of God. He is not "*safe*" nor tame (recalling Lucy's conversation with Mrs. Beaver about Aslan, C.S. Lewis *Chronicles of Narnia*). *Tumors and terror* (6, 11-12); "*it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God,*" Heb. 10:31. Note that their "*cry went up to heaven*" (12). Maybe that's simply an expression of the volume or gut-depth of anguish; but maybe it's that all really know in themselves, for God put it there (Rom.1:18-21).

6 - "*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God,*" Heb. 10:31. They assumed the ark had fallen into their hands; actually, they had fallen into God's hand. So as in ch.5, the severity of God (*Arkeology*, Davis) continues (1). As for their salvation? For a moment the Philistines were on the right track, recalling the lesson of Egypt (6); but attempting to "*buy-off*" God, or conjure the divine (3-5)? Well maybe this is all just "*coincidence*" (7-9). Sound familiar? In the words of theologian Forest Gump: "*stupid is as stupid does,*" but God in mercy gives them the "*low down*" on the matter (10-12), and for that we ought to be encouraged: God's revelation of judgment and mercy to those "*far off*" (Eph.2:13). How will they respond? And you – a sigh of relief or sincere repentance and faith? So now the ark of the covenant returns to Israel. Some will receive it with great joy and some with great grief (13, 19-20); the revelation of God's holiness never allows for indifference. The men of Beth-shemsh first ask the right question ("*Who is able to stand before the Lord?*" 20) and they take a horrible left turn ("*No one is safe... get it out of here!*"). No self-reflection, no searching of the heart, no godly fear; the presence and power of God must go (21). Sound familiar? (Mk.5:1-20)

7 - Chapters 4 – 6 taught us of the severity of God; now the Lord shows up in new mercies. How? In the preaching of Samuel (3), who as prophet and prayer warrior seeks to restore Israel in repentance (3-17). Tears (2)? Too easy and in no way indicative of the heart of repentance. How would you describe Samuel's definition of repentance? It begins with grief and consciousness of one's sin, naming it (6), but doesn't stop there. Godly counsel is looked to and leaned upon (8), and public expressions, corporate expressions in the context of worship are needed (9). *"True repentance will meet Yahweh's demand for exclusive allegiance with whatever it takes to obey it,"* (Davis). God's people, then and now, learn that true repentance is different than what we imagine and often it is difficult. But it is always in the midst of repentance, we discover and experience the mercies of God (7-10). In parallel yet contradistinction, recall how ch. 4 ends to how ch. 7 ends: *"Ichabod"* (the glory has departed) and *"Ebenezer"* (God has helped us). The difference? Manipulation versus repentance... and a mighty intercessor in Samuel (a picture of Christ as our high priest, Lk.22:31-32; Rom.8:34). So what's with the monument (*"Ebenezer"* 12)? It is the memory of God's mercy – past, present and future. May that be our mind and heart at the Lord's Table.

8 - One might say that we are to read the Bible; but in reality, it's the Bible reading us: exposing us and leading us (ch.8). The shift from one generation to another (7:13 – 8:3) sets it all up, no veneer allowed. So as we reflect here, we learn some things about God's people and about ourselves: First, that desires can be right (e.g. for a king, Deut.17), but motives can be so wrong (4-6). Ultimately, their motive was *"not a replacement for Samuel, but for God"* (Davis). But what of repentance, prayer, and hope in *"our Help thus far"* (7:12)? Second, exposed was their (our) sophisticated and reasonable idolatry: a misplaced trust in a material and mechanical solution over the spiritual (Lk.19:14). Third, exposed also was Israel's (our) *"aversion to holiness,"* to be a distinct people; their passion to blend, to belong, to fit in (5, 19-20). Why be different: a different definition of success, purity in conversation, faithfulness in marriage, justice and compassion for the helpless? Fourth, like my old seminary prof's love of quoting Ps.32:9 to me, Israel seems tone-deaf to wisdom's voice (11-18, 12-22). In spite of Samuel's clarity on what a king will demand, we learn that knowledge or information does not in itself transform. *"F.A.T."* (faithful, available, teachable) – that's the difference between a true follower over a fool (Prov.12:15); Israel doesn't get it (nor do we).

9 - Ch. 9 is the introduction of God giving His people what they wanted – a king – even at their peril (8:21-22). God does that sometimes and there's a lesson. But why, now, the details of a donkey chase (1-10)? Time, place, people, posture... common stuff, right? A chain of ordinary events of a day, a week, things that happen on the way to work or at home or at the ballpark; yet *"God has a way of magnifying the minutiae of our lives into channels of His mercy"* (Davis). He never wastes one second. We call it *"Providence"*: the *"wonderful, strange, mysterious way God has of ruling His world and sustaining His people, and his doing it, over and under and around and through or even in spite of the most common stuff of our lives or even the bias of our wills"* (Davis). But we often miss it. Saul did, along with his servant, at least until God opens our eyes to His divine intrusions (15-17). In the original Hebrew text, v.15 actually begins not *"Now the day before..."* but rather *"Yahweh revealed..."* Umm... why this changes everything! Saul is sent, designated, and now disclosed by God at the right time, place, people, posture. Don't you just love being "in" on the secret (Prov.16:9; 20:24)? Samuel did. Two things to remember: God's providence extends not just to the kingdom elite, but each and to all; but God may not always let you "in" on exactly what He's up to (though you may see traces of fingerprints and footsteps later as you look back).

10 - Unfolding is God's plan meet Israel's demand for a king (1), but quite possible a *"lost"* king akin to the lost donkeys (ch.9). *"All that glitters is not gold,"* for this tall, dark and handsome *"all-star"* has

*“another heart”* (9). Umm... we shall see (16, 22). But maybe the more important is how relentless God’s Word is (18-19, 22). But why the sour note to kick-off a public ceremony? *“Sometimes truth must come before propriety. Israel’s God may love us too much to be nice. His Word may pursue us relentlessly until we hear it* (Davis).” What is also clear is that God’s choice is clear, both in private (9:15-17) and public (20-21). However, don’t miss that it was from the “tribe of Benjamin,” the smallest of tribes. Sounds just like what God would do, right? (1 Cor.1:26-31) And we must observe in the narrative just how utterly dependent God’s people are (21-24). It is ironic that Israel, on her own, will be no more successful finding Saul than Saul had been finding his donkeys. The focal point is the revelation by God even in the simplest of matters (22). And then we see just how necessary God’s Law is (25) for the people, but also for the king. Saul is but a “vice-king” under the King of Kings; therefore, he is to govern accordingly (Rom.12-15). Lastly, it must be noted how divisive God’s Servant can be (26-27). Sound familiar? (Lk.5:28-29; 12:51; Jn.6:42).

11 - Hope... nothing like victory in shutting the mouths of naysayers (10:27). Saul is proven to be Israel’s appointed king by his leadership and victory against the enemy Amorites. And not to take away from Saul’s quick action (7-9), courage and strategy (11)... but the story behind the story is about *“salvation”* (yasa, *“to save, deliver”* used 3x’s) – God’s work on behalf of Israel (13). Most importantly, for the moment, is that Saul, Israel’s king, knows it! Nahash was only known for terrorism; he seemed to love playing his game, watching Israel sweat; and his trademark being the gouging out of Israel’s right eye. *“Disgrace”* (2) of God’s people is the goal. Sound familiar? (Jn.15:18; 1 Jn.3:13). The difference, what engenders hope, is friendship with God (Jn.15:14,15). What else makes the difference? The Spirit of God (6)... in the way He equips a leader, and the great reversals (Judges 19-21). *“Salvation came not because Israel had a king, but because the king had God’s Spirit...”* (Davis). Lastly, don’t miss a key phrase in Samuel’s (not Saul’s) agenda in the matter: *“renew the kingdom”* (14). Maybe the goal was less about a king and more about The King and His Kingdom? And Gilgal? The perfect place for renewing one’s allegiance (Josh.5:1-12, where a ‘new’ people came into being after the 40 years of wilderness). Such is the Christian life, for the Greater Samuel (King Jesus) calls the “new Israel” (the church) to the same (Matt.6:33)... in that there is joy! (15)

12 - Still at Gilgal, Samuel rehearses the call for covenant renewal (1): Israel has broken covenant with God, failing in fidelity to God in asking for a king. Note first *“the Case”* (1-15): Samuel had been faithful and so had God; Israel had not. Regardless of a glorious history, their help (they assume) is not in the proven arm of God but in a new form of government. That being so, do you see how there are still two choices? Live under God’s Word or suffer under God’s hand. Second, note *“the Fear”* (16-19): Samuel’s wisdom and reason, an airtight case, would not faze Israel. Therefore, visual aids serve to strike fear in their hearts and drive them to their knees. Isn’t it true that *“only when God’s people see their sin from His perspective is there hope they will turn from it?”* (Davis) Here we witness both the kindness and the severity of God (Rom.11:22); or lyrically, *“Twas grace that taught my heart to fear...”* Third, then, note *“the Grace”* (20-25): even in the midst of disastrous decisions constituting rebellion, the Lord says *“Don’t be afraid; and yet...”* Here lay a future and a hope; such is the beauty of God’s covenant of grace... greater than all our sin. *“Go and sin no more.”* (Jn.8:11) Lastly, do not miss *“the Man”* (23): Samuel’s faithful mediation and intercession points to a Far Greater Samuel we have in Christ (Mtt.11:29; Jn.15:15; Heb.7:25).

13 - In Greek Mythology, *Procrustes*, a rogue blacksmith, ruined people by stretching them or cutting off their legs to force them to fit the size of his iron bed. Similarly, Saul forcefully ruins the crown, stretching and cutting what it means to be king. First, it wasn’t Saul on the battlefield; and then, Saul promotes Jonathan’s success as his own (1-4). This is a hint about Saul’s true character and my guess is everyone

knew the truth. This does not bode well for his kingship (5-7). But don't miss how God is not constrained; His purposes are never thwarted when his more "authorized" servants prove reluctant. More importantly, though, is Saul's royal disobedience (8-15): it was an act of insubordination against God's Word. But doesn't he deserve understanding and empathy rather than censure or punishment? Saul's justification (as our own) falls flat; worse, he plays the "blame-game" and "victim card." It's the big "P" – pride. All this happens at Gilgal – the place of renewal (ch.12) has become the place of failure (ch.13). And now Saul is alone... Samuel walks away (16-23). He can strategize and "number the troops," but that is all he can do. *"To be stripped of the direction of God's Word is to be truly impoverished and open to destruction."* (Davis) Yet it God's pattern – the total helplessness of His people serves as the backdrop for God's greater deliverances – and in that there is always hope.

14 - Chapter 14 is the second half of one story begun in ch.13 and it opens once again with literary clue – Jonathan rather than Saul... Jonathan on the move; Saul sitting (1-2; *'em... note to self*). But in all of Jonathan's "Seal Team 6" success against the Philistines, however, there comes a drama of sadness. First see here the "imagination of Jonathan's faith" (6-23): "perhaps" is the key word; who knows what God might do for us? There's no limit how He can save! Genuine faith leads-out because it doesn't focus on circumstances but on God. Jonathan was right (6); and so God saved Israel on that day (23). Second, in view of the now-unfolding drama (24-46), we're given another literary clue, another contrast (23, 24; great salvation, great sadness). But such it's been, and Saul once again acts rashly and foolishly, pure superstition, and it will cost Israel. In every way, Jonathan appears more kingly than his father, yet such appointment will never happen because the Lord has eliminated Saul and his lineage (13:13-14). Why does God work this way? Jonathan would never question God, for he knows better; knows it's not his kingdom nor Saul's, but God's alone and he is there only to serve the true King of the Kingdom. So in view of the negatives, what now of the surprising positive summary of Saul's reign (47-52)? Maybe this: that *"human history is an external calculation of a person's life and work. But in the end, God has the final verdict. What matters is not success (political or military or whatever) but covenant. God is not looking for winners but for disciples."* (Davis)

15 - 1 Samuel break into 3 sections – *A Prophet from God's Grace* (1-7), *A King in God's Place* (8-14), *A Man after God's Heart* (15-31). All three begin with a crises; here, it's Saul's rejection. (Davis) Once again, a key word that tips the hand of the story: "Listen..." (1) The main thing is to keep the main thing – submit to God's will. God's clear command was to justice (1-9, 18, 32-33). Shocking vengeance; true but never sanitized; always virtuous. Why? Because it's God's perfect justice for what Amalek did to Israel (2; Ex.17:8-16; Deut.25:17-19). And you want Him this way, that God never forgets injustice, for there lies our comfort (Isa.61:2). Next we read of God's shocking assessment of Saul (11). A premium is always placed upon obedience (10-23). Three accusatory questions by Samuel; three justifying assertions by Saul: and the slamming verdict of treason – formal worship cannot be substituted for an obedient life. (19-20). The sin underneath the sin – now that's a problem; and so is repentance (both God's and Saul's). The reference to God's repentance (11, 35) is shocking but it *"does not suggest God's fickleness of purpose but the intensity of divine sorrow (grief, Gen.6:6) over sin."* (Davis) The paradox (29; God does and does not repent) is uncomfortable, but God does not play mind games. His decision is irrevocable. As to Saul's repentance (24-31), it appears quite superficial, which is probably why Samuel has to repeat God's judgment to Saul twice... but be careful to cast the first stone. Now the way the chapter ends ought to be a warning about sin – it always leads ultimately to the sadness of isolation (34-35).

16 - *"Occasionally, weep deeply over the life that you hoped would be. Grieve the losses. Feel the pain. Then wash your face, trust God, and embrace the life that he's given you."* (Piper) Maybe that expresses

God's first word to Samuel (1). Here lies hope over fear: God is in control... fundamental is that God looks to and provides His own king! And God's second word to Samuel? *"When it comes to whom I will choose to use, it's never what you expect... never about physical prowess or human assessment, but always the heart!"* (7) Now, as important as what God says to Samuel is, equally so Samuel's response: *"Samuel did what the Lord commanded..."* (4). Hmm... now there's a few good lessons for me! Regarding the emphasis here on the presence and work of the Spirit, note first the utter dependence upon the Spirit that anyone (and everyone) in His service must have (13-14). Second, how that being filled or not filled with the Spirit can affect one deeply in all kinds of ways (15-18). Third, *"no sooner does the Spirit touch David than he is catapulted into all kinds of trouble"* (chs.18ff, Davis). True of David's son/Lord (Mk.1:10-12) and of the servants of David's Lord, (Acts 14:22). Maybe we're to *"understand that this conflict is not a sign of our sin but a mark of our sonship."* (Davis)

17 - Goliath of the Philistines makes quite an impression (1-11) and the reader is to be aware of the literary juxtaposition to David (12) in order to understand the story (and our own story). Goliath's boast – *"defy"* (to mock, deride) – appears six times in the narrative and while it is aimed directly at Israel's God, Israel is afraid (11). If only they had known what we know now! (16:7; this *"applies to both our finest choices and to our most formidable enemies,"* Davis) The introduction of David (12-23) might seem quite casual, but is cause for worship – never forget what God is up to behind the scenes. Now to the *"voice of faith"* (26), we note how David's theology brings a whole new worldview. David's *"vitality of faith"* (34-37) is grounded in real game video (*"the Lord who delivered..."*). And then there's the *"victory of faith"* (41-54), where ironically (but typical) *"God gave victory but through what the world regards as weakness,"* (Davis). No matter real or better weapons, it's always about whether one has the real God! Lastly, think about the *"vision of faith"*: What is it that drives David? It's the exact opposite of Goliath; it is not his manliness but his main concern for the glory and honor of his God.

18 - There's nothing like a song and parade to shake things up (7). Recall what we learned in ch.16 - *"no sooner does the Spirit touch David than he is catapulted into all kinds of trouble."* Yep, the *"mark of sonship"* is cause for *provocation* in two ways: Jonathan's esteem side by side with Saul's envy (1-9). Jonathan's covenant of love with David involved more than the severing of an animal; the bequeathing of robe and armor meant Jonathan transfers the right of succession to David. But Saul will have none of this. Seems David's Descendant had the same knack for bringing division (Jn.7:43; 9:16; 10:19; Mtt.10:35). And like unto the Greater David, God's favor never seemed so clear (10-30). Here we discover four references to David's success, three to God being *"with"* David, and six uses of some form of the word *"love."* Everyone loves David except Saul. How did David not know of Saul's intentions? Probably because Saul's moodiness was well-known. How is that David is so successful? It is because God is with him; God's favor and protection surrounds him, even while David is often unaware. *"Might it mean to suggest that this quiet protection of Yahweh is the heritage of others among his servants? Might it imply that much of Yahweh's protection is completely unknown to you?"* (Davis)

19 - Part 2 of the *"shake up"* begun earlier: a top secret meeting and Saul laid his design on the table (1). What unfolds is a chain of deliverances in unusual circumstances (1-7; 8-10; 11-17; 18-24). The message seems clear: God continually protected His servant David, and by this, we can learn a few things. We learn that, while God may use human instruments to provide protection, the *"means of deliverance must never eclipse the source of deliverance."* (1-7, Davis) And while the pressure never ends throughout the chapter, maybe David should stop to recognize that sometimes the proof you've not been abandoned is not found on the other side of the trial but that you're still standing in the midst of it. Saul could learn a thing or two as well, like *"wake up!"*... impotence exposed against omnipotence and heaven laughs (Ps.2). God's protection also teaches us how the diversity of God's means and methods

(including the irony in using Saul's own family) reflect the His creative imagination and ought to elicit profound praise and thanksgiving to God. All this, in the end, teaches us and instills confidence that God will keep me until whatever He has ordained for me to be or to do is accomplished (1 Thess. 5:24).

20 - One cannot miss what this chapter is about: it's not Hallmark sentimentality but about the "covenant" (8, 12-17, 23, 30-31, 42) and the security it gives. David seeks answers to the problem (1); he knows what's at stake (3) but perhaps Jonathan is still a bit naive. But the covenant *provides certainty in uncertainty* (1-9). David dares turning to Saul's son on the basis of their covenant (18:1-4) and he expects Jonathan to act with "*hesed*" toward him (mercy, steadfast love, loyalty, compassion). Would not all Israel find comfort in the message here: in confusion and trouble, take yourself to the one who has made a covenant with you (Ex.34:6; Jn.1:14). And then note, too, how the covenant *provides a vehicle for uncommon faithfulness*"(12-17). What Jonathan commits to and does is upside down! You don't hand over your place to your rival and promise to protect him. The commitments (oaths) prove mutual, to the extent of preserving Jonathan's descendants (2 Sam 9). How covenant faithfulness conquers culture! May we see this today in the church and the family. Easy? Hardly. The covenant here *may demand costly commitment* (24-34). Jonathan demonstrates that which the apostle Paul speaks (Phil.3:8), for he knows that life does not consist in securing "your kingdom" but in reflecting faithfulness. Lastly, don't miss how the covenant bond between David and Jonathan *provides peace in the midst of confusion* (35-42).

21-22:5 - The previous ended and the present one opens poignantly: David on the run. Alone. There's a sense of sad desperation (20:42; 21:1). The beauty in all this is: While David must let go, the Lord will never let go of David. We discover this when it comes to God's *provisions* in desperate times (1-9). There's hunger and there's danger, and there's the witness of the Lord sustaining David... and not because of David's merit but because God is gracious. Now, "*doesn't God's small provisions in my big problems tell me something?*" (Davis) It's unbelievable and unexplainable why David would seek refuge in Goliath's hometown carrying Goliath's sword (10-15). What might come of this odd circumstance? There amidst desperation, we discover, comes *praise* (Ps.34, 56)! Continuing into chapter 22, we discover a connection between desperation and *providence* (1-5). The "*Wanted – Dead or Alive*" posters nailed up have caused alarm for many, most importantly for David's parents, and key is David's "*till I know what God will do for me*" (3). But "*Mizpeh of Moab*"? Umm... remember a Moabite named Ruth – David's grandmother? Who would have thought Naomi's suffering would form the perfect parameters of providence 100 years later? God. Lastly, what are we to make of a reference to an unknown prophet (5)? "*Desperation is no fun, but desperation and silence is unbearable.*" (Davis) So we discover a connection between desperation and *prophecy*. God's troubled people still hear that voice through the "*prophetic word made more sure*" (2 Pet.1:19-21).

22:6-23 - Enemies of the faith and of God's people. Jesus said count on it (Jn.15:18; 2 Cor.2:15-16; Eph.6:10-12; 2 Thess.2:1-12; 1 Jn.2:18). And this is where Saul comes in as an antichrist figure. Reality sets in, as the conspiracy is heightened (6-10), everyone's (Saul included) suspicions are confirmed (11-15), and Saul murders anyone who threatens him. What did you expect? Expectations can often sabotage the present; therefore, we need the realism of the text for a more confident fighting the antichrists we face. A few things that jump from the text are as follows: 1) Even in the slaughter (18-19), God's enemies serve to fulfill and prove the truthfulness of God's Word (2:30-36). This never takes away sorrow and grief, but it does give a secret certainty of victory. 2) God's people experience the hatred of His enemies (16-19; 1 Pet. 4:12-14; Rev.13:5-8). Maybe, though, there's consolation in the fact that all His and our enemies are, by nature, fragile, isolated and weak. 3) God's people reveal the invincible Church (20-23). Don't overlook the contrast between "*Saul & Ahimelech*" and "*David & Abiathar.*" One

says “*you shall die*,” the other says “*you will be safe with me*.” Abiathar’s escape and safety are a sign of how God always preserves His people in the midst of destruction. “*The people of God may be put down but never put out*.” (Davis; 2 Cor.4:7-12). “*In the midst of such things, where is the soul that trembles and weeps, except the soul lacking hope and faith?*” (St. Cyprian of Carthage; Ps.56:11)

23 - Thus far, the many divine contrasts have served as literary clues help us understand the story. For example, at Nob, Saul – the destroyer, but at Keilah, David – the savior; Saul complains of non-disclosure, but God discloses all to David; Saul’s companion (Doeg) covers his hands with blood, but David’s companion (Jonathan) strengthens his hand in God. But being on the run and threatened, David cannot always see it; he needs (as we all do) continual assurances of God’s resources available. So here we see the advantage of *divine access* (guidance through Abiathar) which David enjoys, in contrast to Saul’s deficiency (1-13). Is this not the same access to God I enjoy through the Greater Priest (Heb.4:14-16)? Next we note the advantage of *divine encouragement* (14-18)... an oasis of encouragement even in the wilderness through Jonathan, who simply reaffirms the promises of God to David. “*Perhaps believers cannot help seeing here in Jonathan’s mission the shadow of a ‘greater than Jonathan’*.” (Davis) Lastly, we are to note the advantage of *divine providence* in the midst of nearly fatal betrayal (19-28). The tension and drama leave one breathless, and so does the irony: a reversal of roles, the Philistines at once the enemy and then again the saviors. Providence often is the strange ways of God (“*shadow of the Almighty*,” Ps.91:1) that keeps David on his feet... and us on our toes!

24 - “*Actions speak louder than words*,” so it goes. Chapters 24-26, a unit of 3 episodes, David’s character as “*a man after God’s own heart*” is revealed in that he does not seize kingship God has promised, but rather waits for it to be given to him. Our chapter opens with Saul, never without a scouting report, once again at David’s throat (1-2). What a *test for God’s servant* in the middle of a bathroom break (3-7). Not hard to see providence here, and “*it’s almost as if David’s men begin singing, ‘This is the day, this is the day that the Lord hath made...’*” (Davis) But what’s would David do? For David, “*the ends never justify the means*,” God’s will must come to pass God’s way. So in this test, the cutting of the cloak, his own remorse and rebuke of his men prove David’s faithfulness, integrity and humility, without which he would prove unqualified as God’s appointed and anointed servant. Sound familiar (Matt.4:8-9)? No secrets and short cuts allowed for any of God’s servants. Then we note the amazing *appeal to God’s justice* (8-15). Rehearsing the truth of the matter, David never seeks security in any change or promise of Saul, but rather he simply casts his case upon God’s divine justice. Surely this is the secret that explains David’s waiting in confidence. But leaving vengeance to the Lord is no sterile affair (Ps.54:5; 58:6-9; 139:19-24), and there lay our hope and freedom. Lastly, note the *assurance of God’s faithfulness* (16-22), and that, ironically, out of the mouth of Saul himself.

25 - The contrasts continue, this time Nabal and his wife, Abigail; one in which I can all too well identify. His name means “*fool*.” Her name means “*joy of the father*” or “*leader of the dance*.” More than a literary hint, it’s substantiated (3). And while this is a beautiful character sketch of a godly woman, the repetition reveals the story is about what God has done (26, 33-34, 39). We see clearly the *restraint of God’s providence*: Abigail’s, David’s... sometimes rescuing us in stupidity, or from executing sinful purposes, or intercepting us on the road to foolishness. We also might learn something here about the *instruction of God’s providence*: David as restrainer (ch.24); David as restrained (ch.25). In ch. 24 David sees what he must not do; but here, David doesn’t see it at all. The “*wisdom transfer*” from one circumstance to another didn’t make it all the way (umm... note to self), and thus Abigail must instruct David to make the connection (30-31). And when it comes to the *servants of God’s providence*, Abigail certainly takes center stage and vindicates herself well, but she is not alone – there’s the unnamed servant (14-17). Everything depends on his having spoken to Abigail. God does that sometimes – the



Sovereign using the small one in the shadows to help deliver His people. Lastly, we can learn something about the *surplus in God's providence*. More than merciful restraint and another wife, David receives a fresh assurance of God's promises to him (28-29). In the larger view of ch. 25, "*the task will never be fully entrusted to human instruments. There was only one Servant who could be trusted...*" (Heb.12:3; Davis)

26 - Here we read, one might conclude, of the drama of the "*golden rule*" (Lev.19; Matt.7). But the "*rule*" is not a defensive posture; love of God and neighbor never is. Rather, it calls for risk, audacity, integrity and courage. We've seen this before (chapters 23-24): Saul's intentional pursuit to murder David; David's surprising demonstration of mercy and restraint. In all, David receives assurance that God is and is a rewarder (Heb.11:6) – the kingdom will be his (23-25). How could David respond the way he did? Faith; and it's powerful fruit. First, note the *patience* faith maintains (6-12). David has learned that God can be trusted to handle both fools and enemies in all kinds of ways. Would that I had such imaginative faith! Second, note the *encouragement* faith receives (13-16). God's will is often a mystery, but how helpful when He leads by leaving obvious traces of His presence (12). Would that I anticipated such simple encouragement! Third, note the *distress* faith feels (17-20). David's theology was anchored in the "Land," in the sanctuary of God's presence and favorable future; in this he ached in being cut off, shut out. Would that I experienced the ache of soul for God's ordinances and worship! Fourth, note the *hope* faith holds (21-24). David's blunt response to Saul's insincere groveling drives a stake (spear) in the ground: "you come get your spear; I'll go with my God." David is not looking to Saul; rather, he places himself only under God's eyes and hands. Would that I face life with such hope in God's ways!

27-28:2 - How we can identify with David – fickle, up & down! His private thoughts (1) and public actions (2-3) are telling. One can hardly blame him, for he senses he's already in forced exile (26:19-20). An outline helps us see the story unfold: *David's plan, 1-4; David's town, 5-7; David's practice, 8-12; David's dilemma, 28:1-2*. (Davis) What might be notable, however, is the absence of "God" – there's no mention of Him or what He may be doing; nor is there any "moral commentary" on the events. Even so, look and learn three principles offered here to the Lord's people. First, *lean on true security* by preaching truth to self (God's character and record) rather than mentally rehearsing unfavorable circumstances (1-3). There are no adequate substitutes. Second, *learn the skills of wisdom* by seeking faithfulness over successfulness. David's plan worked (4), but pragmatism (5-12) instead of wisdom can turn out to be an "Achilles heal." (28:1-2) Third, *gripping grace* (thus avoiding disappointment, anger, the "blame-game") as you see both the flaws of our heroes and admit the same in yourself. David's overkill (9-12) dispels of hero worship. No "Mr. Clean" here, for "*this chosen, anointed servant of God is made of the same stuff as all the Lord's people. We should not criticize the Potter because of the clay but rather marvel that He stoops to work with such stuff.*" (Davis)

28:3-25 - Using a line from an old country song – "*the night the lights went out in Georgia*" – the flashback of Samuel's death (3; 25:1) is intentional for a reason: Saul's desperation and darkness. Threatening circumstances can push us to turn to any resource we think will give hope (4-7). But the living God is no "*jeannie-in-a-bottle*" and His silence turns a desperate Saul to necromancy, a practice previously banned (3; Deut.18). But ummm... Saul's men know precisely where a practitioner can be found and the irony is not lost: Saul swears the oath by God while seeking help from a source God has condemned. "*Stupid is as stupid does.*" (Forest Gump) But how do we explain the appearance of Samuel? Impossible, except to appeal to the mysterious power and permission of God, and that for His own reasons. Now, what else might be taught here? (Davis) First, "*The most hopeless misery in all of life is to be abandoned by God,*" (15). God is mute because Saul would not listen, which amounted to rebellion. If you despise God's word, He will take it from you. Second, "*Burdens appear lighter when*

*seen in the proper context.*” David’s dilemma – being caught up with the Philistines (27:1-28:2) – pales in comparison with Saul being cut off from communion with God (28:3-25). Third, *“Spiritual desperation can be misdirected”* in the seeking of Samuel instead of seeking God himself (11-19; Ps.13:1-3; Ps.88; Jn.6:67-68). Fourth, *“There is a light that shines in the darkness”* and this by way of a good meal (21-25). When it says, *“Then they rose and went away that night”* ought to remind us of another *“night,”* another last supper (Jn.13:30). There is One who went into the darkness of God’s absence for us... and the light still shines.

29 - One has to wonder at the strange providence that an unbelieving pagan Achish takes center stage, almost in a “savior-like” role to God’s servant David. (By the way, it’s never hard for God to deliver; but it is hard for people to accept His way of deliverance.) So amidst the amassing of Philistine troops, Achish comes to deliver the bad and the good news to David (2-10). But in this conversation, it’s almost humorous how *“the deceived defends his deceiver and the relieved disputes his relief!”* (Davis) Certainly we cannot assign all of this to a “lucky break” but of a divine deliverance, a merciful deliverance. What else about God here that we might know Him better? First, we see how *God’s presence is so quiet.* We would do well to review our life’s experiences and itemize, with gratitude and praise, all the times when it was God silently present and at work for us. Second, we see how *God’s ways are so surprising.* We would do well to recognize that even in our foolishness and weaknesses, *“we are still no match for God, who has thousands of unguessable ways by which He rescues His people – even by pagan Philistines.”* (Davis) Third, we see how *God’s mercy is so tenacious.* We’ve been left hanging since chapter 27, and now that deliverance is right there, finally... you just have to sit back and sigh at the *“hound of heaven”* who is never denied His prey of mercy! (Ps.30:5)

30 - The contrast is brilliant: ch. 28 ends with Saul walking into the darkness; ch.29 ends with David walking into the light of salvation. But sometimes *“the light at the end of the tunnel is but the light of an on-coming train.”* That will be their experience as they drag back into camp – *God’s servant is overwhelmed* and grief became bitterness and rage (1-6). So much for the prosperity gospel, eh? This is a disturbing text, but a needful one, for you can trust a God who never varnishes the real truth of the matter (Jn.16:33). Next, we can sure that *God’s strength is sufficient* (6b-9). Strengthening oneself in the Lord does not begin with finding some magic potion but in possessing again God’s promises personally (23:16-17, in the way Jonathan encouraged David; Ps.23). Strengthening also happens in our access to God’s presence (7-8; Heb.4:14). Thirdly, we note how *God’s providence is essential* in the mission (11-15). Seems small, but happening onto this discarded Egyptian is the whole key for David’s recovery operation. Fourth, note how *God’s grace is decisive* in David’s leadership (21-25). His theology of grace determines his viewpoint and stands behind his directive (24). Lastly, then, *God’s victory is encouraging* (26-31). What God had promised (8), He had delivered (18); and its importance for the fidelity of God and the future of Israel is punctuated by his greetings and gifts to the various elders of Judah. One can’t help but see here a preview and a pledge of final victory when God makes the Davidic Messiah’s enemies His footstool (P.110:1). So it is that chapter 30 *“begins in tragedy and ends in triumph. Yahweh has a way of doing that.”* (Davis)

31 - Fresh from victory (ch.30), we are immediately thrust into a blunt and bloody part of war (1). What a “yo-yo,” right? Like *“whoa... now just hold on, not just yet.”* It’s a sad, dark story... and a tragic end to Saul. But maybe the *greater tragedy* is the death of God’s steadfast servant, Jonathan (2). His obituary might read: *“He remained a true friend to David and a faithful son to Saul. He surrendered his kingship to David; he sacrificed his life for Saul.”* Now the *truth of matter* in this brutal disaster is this: the fulfillment of God’s threat (3-7). While hardly a happy ending, it constitutes the veracity and purposes of God’s word (15:28; 28:17-19). That being said, are we not provoked by the *shame*, the

mockery of God's name? (8-10) *"The gory head belongs to Yahweh's anointed; therefore Yahweh has been defeated."* (Davis) Israel is crushed, but the deeper sadness is the God is mocked. Would that the all God's people mourn and that His honor be our top agenda! Now in the raw video we see a sense of gratitude, the kindness of God's people (11-13). Jabesh-gilead had never forgotten. *"Gratitude carries its own 'ought'... now expressed expressed in love and courage... whether it changes anything or not."* (Davis) It's hard to smile the tragedy away, and 1 Samuel seems full of it. But here is the kingdom of God enduring one failure after another. At present, nothing looks quite so dismal as Gilboa, but then it's not what man sees that counts (16:7).

### Reflecting on 1 Samuel-

Before moving on to our next book of the Bible, take some time today to reflect on what we've read in 1 Samuel. Perhaps re-visit a favorite chapter or an especially meaningful passage. Or read the beginning chapter(s) again, now that you've read the whole. Or go back to a part of the book that struck you as curious and see if it makes more sense now. Or speed-read the whole thing again, seeking to reinforce its main themes. Or... perhaps you need a catch-up day to finish 1 Samuel before we move forward?

*"For the Scripture says, 'Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.'"* Romans 10.11