
Saul and David: Envy, Conflict, and Broken Shalom

SCOTT HOEZEE

Perhaps we have all, at one time or another, been acquainted with someone who we might characterize as being a difficult person. Maybe it is an extended family member who seems to enjoy making controversial statements that seem designed to disrupt a holiday dinner gathering. Maybe it is a work colleague who seems to make it their mission in life to disagree with you no matter what you say. Some people are just quarrelsome and finicky; such that we say they can either blow hot or cold, and you never know which one you will get in any given encounter. Well, to put it mildly, King Saul, in the Old Testament book of 1 Samuel, proved to be just such a difficult person, and then some. Today on *Groundwork*, we will dig into passages in 1 Samuel that deal with this. Stay tuned.

DARRELL DELANEY

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, this is now the sixth program...program number six...of our planned seven-part series on the Old Testament book of 1 Samuel. So far, we have traced the backstory of the prophet Samuel; we have seen how Samuel made Israel a more spiritually healthy nation after a time of great decline during the period of the judges and after. We traced the rise of Saul as he became Israel's first king, but then also, Saul's slow decline that led to God's selection of David as the next king; and today, we will see, alas, the definitive decline of Saul in a series of stories beginning now later into the book of 1 Samuel.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, Scott, it is important to note, too, that you should read the entire book of 1 Samuel. We have been bringing in excerpts, and it is hard to get all of that in a seven-part series; even though seven parts is kind of a longer series for us. I would encourage anyone to read the story in its entirety to get the full context of what God is teaching; but we will be bringing excerpts; and specifically today, we will be in Chapters 18 and 19 and in Chapters 23 and 24 today. So, we will not be getting all the details of every single thing in, but we do encourage you to look at it and read the entire context.

SCOTT HOEZEE

What we are going to see now, starting, really, in 1 Samuel 18 and beyond, is just a series of just sort of maddeningly frustrating ups and downs in the life of Israel's first king, Saul. Saul, as we are going to see, Darrell, in these stories, routinely would go from having apparently nothing but love and affection for this up-and-coming guy named David...he loves him; he has affection for him...and then boom; turn around and he is in such a blind rage toward David that he literally tries to kill David on multiple occasions.

We could note here, Darrell, that not a few scholars have suggested that Saul may have suffered from a serious mental disorder. Now, the biblical text will say that when Saul lapses into murderous rages against David, it is the result of an evil spirit coming over him. That is how you would expect ancient peoples to respond today to what we might describe as really terrible mood swings; but whether it was a mental illness behind this, or a bad spirit exploiting a mental illness, what we end up seeing here is just tragic.

DARRELL DELANEY

I mean, it is kind of a case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde with Saul, because, I mean, mild-mannered one time, loving and understanding; other times, just this rage, this frustration, and trying to actually kill David. There are other times in scripture...I don't think we are going to get to it...where he is literally throwing spears at David while David is playing the music to try to calm this guy down. So, it is really tragic to see that this tumultuous relationship that we mentioned in earlier episodes is happening between Saul and David. It is interesting how God is finding a way to work in spite of all of that stuff happening. We are not here to talk about whether there is mental illness or not, because we don't know, but what we do know is that God is sovereign and he still works through the midst of difficult circumstances.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I think that, you know, Saul does not come off well here, but we can have a little compassion for him, too. He may have been the victim of, indeed, an evil spirit or just some real difficulties; but let's dig into 1 Samuel 18.

DARRELL DELANEY

It says: After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan become one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself. ²From that day Saul kept David with him and did not let him return home to his family. ³And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. ⁴Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt. ⁵Whatever mission Saul sent him on, David was so successful that Saul gave him a high rank in the army. This pleased all the troops, and Saul's officers as well. ⁶When 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. ⁷As they danced, they sang: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands."

SCOTT HOEZEE

⁸Saul 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?" ⁹And from that time on Saul kept a close eye on David. ¹⁰The next day an evil spirit from God came forcefully on Saul. He was prophesying in his house while David was playing the lyre, as he usually did. Saul had a spear in his hand ¹¹and he hurled it, saying to himself, "I'll pin David to the wall." But David eluded him twice. ¹²Saul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with David but had departed from Saul.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; it is really interesting the different parts of this story; like...so, this is the platinum hit that went viral, if you will...the women singing this song: Saul has slain his thousands but David has slain his tens of thousands. And then Saul does not like to hear that. He has a lot of pride on the line; he has ego on the line. He is the king, and he is hearing that this other guy is getting more fame than him. It is really interesting that the relationship that they have is rocky; it is getting worse; and this hearing this song has somehow made it worse.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And what do we see here except the deadly sin of envy, right? And when do we all feel envy? Well, it is whenever a near rival outshines us. Envy creeps upon us whenever we feel that we are standing in the chill shadow of somebody else's fame. So, this is Cain when he sees his little brother Abel garnering more favor with God than Cain has managed to receive. In more recent times, this is the figure skater, Tanya Harding, feeling repeatedly chagrined when her fellow skater, Nancy Kerrigan, again and again took home the gold metal while Tanya only managed a silver or bronze metal. And Darrell, how do we respond to this ugly feeling of envy? Well, we want to knock the other person down a few pegs. If we cannot be better than them, let's at least make them look worse in some way; and then maybe I de facto move up a notch myself, you know. So, if somebody else keeps winning the blue ribbon for the best apple pie, and you always get second

place, you take them down a notch. Well, you say to other people, sure, she makes a good pie and all, but I hear her marriage is in trouble, you know; so, where Tanya Harding had to hire somebody to take a baseball bat to Nany Kerrigan's knee so she cannot skate better anymore; and of course, worst case scenario, Cain actually kills Abel; and here, Saul actually tries to kill David.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, envy...either it wants what you have or it wants to destroy what you have. So, destroying the character of a person, and it could even destroy the physical body of a person; and it is a deterioration that comes from not being content where you are. So now, somebody's contentment has to come down because of yours. Yours is not there.

What we just read from 1 Samuel 18 was just a sad and very, very disturbing scenario, and alas, all of this will continue; but in just a moment, we want to see that in some further tales of Saul and David, there are some more things going on. So, let's stay tuned for that.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, with Darrell Delaney, and you are listening to *Groundwork*; and Darrell, a few moments ago in this program, we looked at the first part of 1 Samuel 18, and in the balance of that 18th chapter, Saul figures that maybe one way to keep an eye on David and kind of place David a rung below him, as we just said Saul wanted to do, was to make David his son-in-law...kind of an odd, curious strategy by which to control David, but that is what Saul hit upon. So, let's marry him off to one of my daughters. Okay, so David refuses the first daughter that Saul offers. She marries somebody else; but then, Saul has another daughter named Michal, who actually is in love with David, and so David agrees to marry her; and so, he becomes a son-in-law now, of Saul, but that does not really help.

DARRELL DELANEY

No, it doesn't help; and then, right after that, we move into Chapter 19 of 1 Samuel, where we read this: ¹Saul told his son Jonathan and all the attendants to kill David. But Jonathan had taken a great liking to David ²and warned him, "My father Saul is looking for a chance to kill you. Be on your guard tomorrow morning; go into hiding and stay there. ³I will go out and stand with my father in the field where you are. I'll speak to him about you and will tell you what I find out." ⁴Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father and said to him, "Let not the king do wrong to his servant David; he has not wronged you, and what he has done has benefited you greatly. ⁵He took his life in his hands when he killed the Philistine. The Lord won a great victory for all Israel, and you saw it and were glad. Why then would you do wrong to an innocent man like David by killing him for no reason?" ⁶Saul listened to Jonathan and took this oath. "As surely as the Lord lives, David will not be put to death." ⁷So Jonathan called David and told him the whole conversation. He brought him to Saul, and David was with Saul as before.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, David is getting some help from his good friend in Saul's son Jonathan, but as we are going to see, despite the happy ending here...this first part of Chapter 19...tragically, with King Saul, he is kind of trapped in that cycle of shampoo, rinse, repeat. It is like, there is a light switch somewhere in Saul's heart, and in the blink of an eye, that switch can get flipped from the love David setting to the kill David setting; and you know, Darrell, this must have been dreadfully difficult to deal with; and alas, for Saul's son and David's best friend, Jonathan, who again and again, got trapped in the middle. Again, as we said at the top of this program, if you have ever had to deal with someone like this in your family or at work or at school, then you know how exhausting it can be; but Darrell, it is also just so emotionally wrenching. That had to be true for Jonathan, too.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; this seems to go on and on, because, I mean, look at what we are reading right now. I was going to read in 1 Samuel 19, look at how this happens. It says: ¹¹Saul sent his men to David's house to watch it and to kill him in the morning. But Michal, David's wife, warned him, "If you don't run for your life tonight, tomorrow

you'll be killed." ¹²So Michal let David down through a window, and he fled and escaped. ¹³Then Michal took an idol and laid it on the bed covering it with a garment and putting some goats' hair at the head. ¹⁴When Saul sent the men to capture David, Michal said, "He is ill." ¹⁵Then Saul sent to men back to see David and told them, "Bring him up to me in his bed so that I may kill him." ¹⁶But when the men entered, there was the idol in the bed, and at the head was some goats' hair. ¹⁷Saul said to Michal, "Why did you deceive me like this and send my enemy away so that he escaped?" Michal told him, "He said to me," 'Let me get away. Why should I kill you?'" ¹⁸When David had fled and made his escape, he went to Samuel at Ramah and told him all that Saul had done to him. Then he and Samuel went (back) to Naioth and stayed there.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, David has to be glad that Saul's kids were not like their father...

DARRELL DELANEY

Oh, my gosh.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The first time, he got saved by Jonathan, now he gets saved by Saul's daughter Michal, who is also now, as we said, David's wife. So, Saul just cannot seem to catch a break, thankfully, as his own kids check his worst impulses. Kind of a funny story; I mean, put like a mannequin in the bed. It said it was an idol. I don't even want to know why they had an idol, but be that as it may, it is like a mannequin. Put a little goats' hair...it looks like David's hair, you know; pull the cover up to his eyes, and it fooled them and gave David a little extra time to escape.

DARRELL DELANEY

Where she got it from, I don't know.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I don't know where she got that; but anyway, in the end, of course, it is not just Jonathan and Michal who are on David's side, but clearly, God as well.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; it is clear, I mean, we just read that David went to hiding under the protection of the prophet Samuel, and once Saul catches wind of this, off he dashes again to get rid of David once and for all. So, we get this pattern, where he is going to kill David, he is *not* going to kill David. He is after him; he is *not* after him. This continues, and it is really crazy, except that course of action does not turn out that way for him to try to get rid of David. So, we look at verse 23, where it says: So Saul went to Naioth at Ramah. But the Spirit of God came even on him, and he walked along prophesying until he came to Naioth. ²⁴He stripped off his garments, and he too prophesied in Samuel's presence. He lay naked all that day and all that night. This is why people say, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

SCOTT HOEZEE

Another kind of funny story here. So, in the previous one, we saw the men get fooled by kind of like a mannequin in the bed with some fake goat hair on it for a head of hair. So now, Saul...and as you said, maybe he heard that David was by Samuel, so Saul comes roaring in. He is saying: I am going to kill David. I am going to kill David. I am going to kill David. Then suddenly the Spirit of God descends on Saul and the next thing Saul knows, he is not saying that anymore. He is singing a hymn; he is prophesying good things. So, there is a sense in which Saul has been stripped bare spiritually, and so, almost as a way to match this physically, Saul *literally* strips off his clothing and he lays vulnerable before Almighty God. All in all, Darrell, that is some strange stuff.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; it is strange; divine intervention indeed. It seems that the Spirit of God, you know, intervened in this situation to change his attitude; and unfortunately...see, in the Old Testament, the Spirit of God will come on you when you obey God, then leave you when you disobey God. Now, of course, in the New Testament, now that Pentecost has come, the Spirit lives in us and never leaves us; but in this situation, you can see why Saul would have a good moment and have a bad moment coming right after. But maybe before the next segment, we want to jump ahead to 1 Samuel 23 and 24 and take a moment to appreciate something that we noted earlier before on *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, what we have seen before in other *Groundwork* series is how honest the Bible is. The Bible is so honest in how it tells these stories from the history of God's people; and the Bible tells us these stories in a completely unvarnished way. It does not scrub out history's ugliness. Sometimes, Darrell, we sanitize these stories. We erase a lot of detail so that we can teach them in Sunday school or something. We create what some people call a *canon within the canon*. So, that means we only read the parts of the Bible we like, and we push everything else to the side. But Darrell, we have to appreciate that there is an honesty to God's Word that resists the impulse to pretend that the history of God's people proceeded ever and only in nice, neat, and straight moral lines. That is not how the story actually went, and that is not how the Bible operates. It honestly preserves the stories of King Saul, the good, the bad and the ugly; and you know, one thing we can take away from that by way of encouragement is that God is at work in the middle of the messes that we make today, too. Our lives don't have to be neat and moral and straight for God to be there, forgiving us, renewing us, restoring us. I think that is good news. But in just a moment, as you said, we are going to jump ahead to 1 Samuel 23, and especially 24. So, stay tuned,
Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, we are now going to jump ahead a few chapters...so, we were just in 1 Samuel 18 and 19. We are skipping 20, 21, and 22, and we are really only going to summarize 23, but in those intervening chapters, and as you said earlier in the program, Darrell, you know, we encourage people to read all of 1 Samuel and do a full Bible study, including the stuff we have to skip because we just don't have room, even in a seven-part series. But suffice it to say that in 20, 21 and 22, in these intervening chapters, Saul continues to go after David as Saul flips from loving David to wanting to murder David. It is just sad; it is very sad; and in Chapter 23, again, Saul is relentlessly pursuing David across the land. Unfortunately, Darrell, what that means is that...his obsession with David means he is no longer doing his duties as king. There are actual enemies to fight, namely the Philistines, not David; and so, Saul is neglecting his kingly duties while he is at it.

DARRELL DELANEY

And while he is doing that, he is chasing after David, focused on David, and David is getting victory after victory in every place he goes and gaining more and more fame with the people. So, this whole, "Saul has slain his thousands and David has slain his tens of thousands" is growing...

SCOTT HOEZEE

It just keeps growing.

DARRELL DELANEY

Because of the situation, and God is still with him in battle, giving him victory and favor; and so, the hole is getting dug deeper for Saul's decline, and it is growing higher for the favor of God on David.

SCOTT HOEZEE

David is not king yet, but he is acting like the king in a way that Saul is not, and it is only, as you said, making Saul's situation worse.

So, now we are going to jump ahead, and we will finish out this program...again, the sixth of our seven-part series here...we are going to jump ahead to Chapter 24 of 1 Samuel. Saul has gotten a tip that David and his men were hiding out in a place called En Gedi.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, it says: ²So Saul took three thousand able young men from all Israel and set out to look for David and his men near the Crags of the Wild Goats. ³He came to the sheep pens along the way; and a cave was there, and Saul went in to relieve himself. David, and his men were far back in the cave. ⁴The men said, "this is the day the Lord spoke of when he said to you, 'I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish.'" Then David crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul's robe. ⁵Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe. ⁶He said to his men, "The Lord forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, or lay my hand on him; for he is the anointed of the Lord." ⁷With these words David sharply rebuked his men and did not allow them to attack Saul. And Saul left the cave and went his way.

SCOTT HOEZEE

⁸Then David went out of the cave and called out to Saul. "My Lord the king!" When Saul looked behind him, David bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. ⁹He said to Saul, "Why do you listen when men say, 'David is bent on harming you'?" ¹⁰This day you have seen with you own eyes how the Lord delivered you into my hands in the cave. Some urged me to kill you, but I spared you; I said, 'I will not lay my hand on my lord, because he is the Lord's anointed.' ¹¹See, my father, look at this piece of your robe in my hand! I cut the corner off of your robe, but I did not kill you."

DARRELL DELANEY

So, you know, we know that they didn't have what we have now. We've got porta-potties, we've got these places where we can just go anywhere to use a restroom. We've got rest stops and all these things, but they didn't have that, so usually they either went in a cave or dug a hole; and this is the cave that David happened to be hiding in, where Saul went to the bathroom. So, he was literally caught with his pants down, if you will; and he is in a situation where he could be very vulnerable, and David snuck up on him, but he did not kill him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He just cut off a corner of his robe; but then, look at how the character of David is revealed here, Darrell. David has such respect for the Lord's anointed one, even though Saul is a long way from acting like the Lord's anointed one these days, but David has so much respect for the fact that Saul had been anointed, that he is guilt-stricken that he even showed enough disrespect to cut off part of the king's robe! I mean, sure, he spared his life, but that is how good David is; even disrespecting him enough to ruin a piece of his clothing, like that is a big deal compared to everything Saul has been putting David through, but he is. He is good enough that he says: I dishonored him, even by doing this little thing; and he felt bad about that; and he said to his men: We are not touching him. But it did reveal once more that David is a better man than Saul.

DARRELL DELANEY

You know, you talked about this Lord's anointed, that that title is very important to David. It is so important to David that it transcends the life of Saul. Because if you look down later in 2 Samuel, he is still calling Saul the Lord's anointed, even after Saul is dead; and he looks for anybody in Saul's family that he can welcome to his house because Saul was the Lord's anointed. So, he continues to honor the office of what that is...that stance...that position...even when Saul is gone. So, he really does appreciate the fact that, even though he is the Lord's anointed because he literally got anointed when he was a teenager. He is honoring Saul's office, even though he does not act that way. I mean, that could preach in and of itself.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Indeed; and here in chapter, we will not read all of it, but once again, this kindness leads to one of the many moments when Saul feels kindly. He says: ¹⁷“Is that your voice, David, my son?” And he wept aloud. “You are more righteous than I.” And he kind of promises that he is going to treat him well. So again, we are back to: I like David.

But you know, as we think about this now and wrap this episode, Darrell, let’s summarize a few things we could ponder. One is what we said earlier: Let’s honor and admire the Bible’s honesty. The brokenness of our sinful world is not hidden from sight when we dig into scripture. It is the proverbial warts and all presentation of facts and events; but that is why, Darrell, scripture addresses us in our warts and all lives as the imperfect disciples of Jesus that we are to this day. So, no; we do not look at the moral failings of Saul to excuse our own problems, but we take hope that even when we make some messes, God is still there to forgive us and he is still molding us into the shape of Jesus our Lord.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am thankful for that. I think, while we look at the fact that the Bible does not put varnish on it and does not sugar-coat it, and that shows he can work with us; but also, the part of the remolding project of the Holy Spirit that the Spirit is doing, the Spirit is enabling us to fight against besetting sins that can ever only vandalize God’s desired shalom, and bring nothing but disruption to the Christian community. The fact that the Holy Spirit is using us and helping us to fight against those things is really powerful; and in the case of these stories before us today, we can see that the sin and the corrosive effects are still happening; but the deadly effects often disrupt the relationships that we have with others, but because envy can do that and the fact that God’s desire for shalom is actually calling us closer to him, even though there is an anti-God force at work, we can trust the Lord for his sovereignty through it. Thanks be to God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Darrell Delaney. Join us again next time as we conclude our study of 1 Samuel.

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DARRELL DELANEY

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