

# 1 SAMUEL—WEEK 13

## SCHEMING



F. Michael Slay

*A DEEP Study*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

*The Cover Picture is David and Goliath by Titian (1487–1576)  
On display in the church of Santa Maria della Salute in Venice, Italy*

David finishes off Goliath, and the Philistines forget his challenge and run away. That doesn't end well. Meanwhile, Saul reacts strangely to this crucial victory. He's more jealous than happy.

He keeps scheming to overthrow God's will by knocking David off.

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! Samuel, Week 13 — Scheming  
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1 1 Samuel 17:50–54

*So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, and struck the Philistine and killed him. But there was no sword in the hand of David. Therefore David ran and stood over the Philistine, took his sword and drew it out of its sheath and killed him, and cut off his head with it.*

*And when the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled. Now the men of Israel and Judah arose and shouted, and pursued the Philistines as far as the entrance of the valley and to the gates of Ekron. And the wounded of the Philistines fell along the road to Shaaraim, even as far as Gath and Ekron. Then the children of Israel returned from chasing the Philistines, and they plundered their tents. And David took the head of the Philistine and brought it to Jerusalem, but he put his armor in his tent.*

David doesn't know whether Goliath is dead or just knocked out, so he finishes him off ASAP. The Hebrew clearly says that David drew Goliath's sword *and* killed him *and* cut off his head. That definitely sounds like Goliath was alive when David drew his sword.

And notice that Goliath's sword was still in its sheath. That's because he wasn't close to David when he was struck by the stone. He was holding his spear—his distance weapon. He would have drawn his sword if David had gotten close.

Then, sure enough, the “champion contract” is instantly ignored. Remember this?

*Then he stood and cried out to the armies of Israel, and said to them, “Why have you come out to line up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and you the servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants. But if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us.” — 1 Samuel 17:8–9*

Now, having lost the “champion challenge,” the Philistines simply run away. The passage doesn't even mention them thinking about honoring this agreement. Don't be silly. They're obviously not going to honor it. That idea never crossed their minds.

It didn't cross David's either. In 1 Samuel 17:44, Goliath said to David, “*Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field!*” David's response was, “*This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.*”

David rejected the “champion contract” to begin with. What followed was just what you'd expect.

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David was wise not to bargain with the enemy. Contracts are only as good as the authority that has the power to force people to honor them. Goliath's challenge only had the force of a verbal contract anyway.

“*A verbal contract isn't worth the paper it's written on.*” — Apocryphal (not actually Sam Goldwyn)

2 1 Samuel 17:55–58 (ESV)

*When Saul saw David going out against the Philistine, he said to Abner, the commander of the army, “Abner, whose son is this youth?”*

*And Abner said, “As your soul lives, O king, I do not know.”*

*So the king said, “Inquire whose son this young man is.”*

*Then, as David returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, Abner took him and brought him before Saul with the head of the Philistine in his hand. And Saul said to him, “Whose son are you, young man?”*

*So David answered, “I am the son of your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite.”*

Saul doesn't recognize David from his harp playing days in the palace. How can that be?

Saul seems almost unimaginably stupid, but let's not forget the context. Saul had called for David when he was being tormented by a bad spirit. He was more than a little distracted.

Also, when David was playing the harp, he wasn't dressed in his shepherd's clothes. He didn't bring his sling, nor his pouch, nor his staff.

Instead, David was dressed nicely, didn't smell like a shepherd who hadn't bathed in days, and was carrying a harp (i.e., a lyre). That's the David that Saul employed.

So, the smelly, rag-clothed kid that just knocked off Goliath might not be all that recognizable to Saul. Thus, when David said, *“I am the son of your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite,”* Saul was likely taken aback.

If he had said, *“I am David, the son of your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite,”* Saul might have fainted.

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There's another factor at play here. Saul is well aware that his successor is somewhere nearby.

*So Samuel said to him, “The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today, and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you.” — 1 Samuel 15:28*

So, David's seemingly miraculous victory over Goliath may have started some gears turning in Saul's mind.

And notice that Saul doesn't ask David who he is; he asks whose son he is. So David answers it literally.

*“I am the son of your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite.”*

Saul's interest in which “house” this lad is from reflects an interest in his “place” instead of in him.

Saul is up to no good.

3 1 Samuel 18:1–9

*Now when he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. Saul took him that day, and would not let him go home to his father's house anymore. Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan took off the robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his armor, even to his sword and his bow and his belt.*

*So David went out wherever Saul sent him, and behaved wisely. And Saul set him over the men of war, and he was accepted in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of Saul's servants. Now it had happened as they were coming home, when David was returning from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women had come out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with joy, and with musical instruments. So the women sang as they danced, and said:*

*“Saul has slain his thousands,  
And David his ten thousands.”*

*Then Saul was very angry, and the saying displeased him; and he said, “They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed only thousands. Now what more can he have but the kingdom?” So Saul eyed David from that day forward.*

This passage feels like David is on the brink of becoming king. He's not, but everything seems to be converging on that destiny. Presumably, only Jesse and his household know about David's anointing—blabbing that would have obvious risks—yet lots of folks act like they know.

Specifically, Jonathan's actions are tantamount to him renouncing his claim as heir to the throne and transferring it to David. Is it possible that David told him about the anointing?

That seems likely. They were “soul friends.” While the description of the bond between David and Jonathan is brief here, it's strong and clear. They have the level of friendship in which secrets are shared. David could trust Jonathan to not tell anyone, especially his dad. Thus, David telling Jonathan about his anointing would make sense.

David not telling him would be odd.

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Everyone needs friends like this, but few people have even one. You know a friendship is this deep when you have conversations where someone gets called out. It doesn't have to be an intervention about a major failing; any significant constructive criticism will do. Real friends have impact.

But many friendships don't share enough information to allow even minor criticism. That's how you can know that a friendship isn't deep—sensitive information is being withheld.

Still, as important as deep friendship is, you can't rush it. Trusting someone who is untrustworthy is far worse than not having a soul friend.

4 1 Samuel 18:10–16

*And it happened on the next day that the distressing spirit from God came upon Saul, and he prophesied inside the house. So David played music with his hand, as at other times; but there was a spear in Saul's hand. And Saul cast the spear, for he said, "I will pin David to the wall!" But David escaped his presence twice.*

*Now Saul was afraid of David, because the LORD was with him, but had departed from Saul. Therefore Saul removed him from his presence, and made him his captain over a thousand; and he went out and came in before the people. And David behaved wisely in all his ways, and the LORD was with him. Therefore, when Saul saw that he behaved very wisely, he was afraid of him. But all Israel and Judah loved David, because he went out and came in before them.*

Saul is still upset over the women praising David as the slayer of ten-thousands versus Saul's mere thousands. His actions, however, go way beyond just being upset. This is too crazy to be explained by mere psychology. The distressing spirit is making Saul go mad.

And it looks like Saul has figured out that Samuel was talking about David when he said, "*The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today, and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you.*"

Saul's madness includes thinking that he can thwart God's will by killing David.

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Knowing my future would be pretty maddening—especially if the future isn't good—even without a "distressing" spirit tormenting me. So, some sympathy for Saul is warranted. He hasn't adjusted to his fate yet, and may never.

Saul doesn't have the spiritual maturity to let God be God. Samuel's pronouncement has put Saul in a tough spot. He needs to accept God's sovereignty even though he doesn't like God's choices.

And Saul knows what those choices are. Samuel told him exactly what God has determined for his future. That's pretty unusual.

Or at least it used to be. Modern medicine can sometimes produce a diagnosis that predicts, with remarkable accuracy, our future, especially when that future is bleak. When that happens, it's tough to accept the road God has put us on.

Of course, it's good to pray that God will bring miraculous healing—and He often honors those prayers. But life includes tragedy. Everyone will one day face a crisis where denial is hard to overcome. This may not be until the end of life, but it will come. Not all requests for healing are granted.

That's when our faith in God's sovereignty, wisdom, and goodness are put to the test.

Faith that has passed that test is mature.

5 1 Samuel 18:17–29 (ESV)

*Then Saul said to David, “Here is my elder daughter Merab. I will give her to you for a wife. Only be valiant for me and fight the LORD’s battles.” For Saul thought, “Let not my hand be against him, but let the hand of the Philistines be against him.” And David said to Saul, “Who am I, and who are my relatives, my father’s clan in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the king?” But at the time when Merab, Saul’s daughter, should have been given to David, she was given to Adriel the Meholathite for a wife.*

*Now Saul’s daughter Michal loved David. And they told Saul, and the thing pleased him. Saul thought, “Let me give her to him, that she may be a snare for him and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him.” Therefore Saul said to David a second time, “You shall now be my son-in-law.” And Saul commanded his servants, “Speak to David in private and say, ‘Behold, the king has delight in you, and all his servants love you. Now then become the king’s son-in-law.’” And Saul’s servants spoke those words in the ears of David. And David said, “Does it seem to you a little thing to become the king’s son-in-law, since I am a poor man and have no reputation?” And the servants of Saul told him, “Thus and so did David speak.” Then Saul said, “Thus shall you say to David, ‘The king desires no bride-price except a hundred foreskins of the Philistines, that he may be avenged of the king’s enemies.’” Now Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines. And when his servants told David these words, it pleased David well to be the king’s son-in-law. Before the time had expired, David arose and went, along with his men, and killed two hundred of the Philistines. And David brought their foreskins, which were given in full number to the king, that he might become the king’s son-in-law. And Saul gave him his daughter Michal for a wife. But when Saul saw and knew that the LORD was with David, and that Michal, Saul’s daughter, loved him, Saul was even more afraid of David. So Saul was David’s enemy continually.*

At first, Saul offers his eldest daughter, Merab, to David but adds a creepy condition—David must fight “*the LORD’s battles*.” But the reason Israel asked for a king was to have someone to fight their battles. Saul is asking David to do his job for him.

The text notes that Saul’s motives are anything but honorable. David politely declines, or at least hints at declining. This parallels David’s rejection of Goliath’s terms. Then Saul reneges totally on the deal.

Enter Michal’s heart. The plot twists in an unexpected way, but Saul responds predictably. He’s still scheming to do away with David. He demands a ridiculous dowry; killing Goliath should have covered that. Then David mocks it by delivering double.

Saul hatred of David is becoming an all-consuming passion.

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But notice that the passage doesn’t use the word hate. It says, “*Saul was even more afraid of David*.” The Hebrew word for to be afraid (אָרַךְ, lay-roe) can mean to be in awe or have reverence for as well as to fear. This is all because, “*Saul saw and knew that the LORD was with David, and that Michal, Saul’s daughter, loved him*.”

Saul thinks he’s scheming against David, but he’s actually scheming against God.

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. When have you seen contracts or treaties not honored?
2. Has someone's interest in the wrong thing ever made you suspect them?
3. Describe deep friendship.
4. Has your faith ever had a severe test?
5. Have you seen someone at war with God's will?

*Items for prayer:*