DAVID: A MAN OF PASSION AND DESTINY

Study Eleven

Two Deaths . . . A Study in Contrast

1 Samuel 31

"I have played the fool." How aptly that describes the life of Saul. "I had God on my side, yet I lived as though He did not exist. The people of Israel chose me to lead them. But they didn't know the inside of me. I have played the fool."

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

This series has focused on the life of David. But you cannot tell the story of David's rise to royalty without also telling the story of his nemesis, King Saul, and his fall from power.

In a word, Saul's life was *tragic*. The Israelites chose Saul as their king because he was taller, stronger, and more handsome than any other man in Israel. They built him up as their hero. Yet Saul's hard heart was brittle, and the weight of the kingdom was too great to bear. Being pressed between crown and throne, he slowly crumbled to nothing. Out of the debris of Saul's reign arose the next king—David, the young shepherd.

The stories of Saul and David present a fascinating study in contrast. Where Saul was impressive and proud, David was modest and humble. Where Saul was physically strong, David was spiritually strong. Where Saul trusted himself, David trusted God. These contrasts make a key point: David was God's choice for the king of Israel.

While Saul's *life* contrasts with King David's, his *death* contrasts with another King's. This *Searching the Scriptures* study will examine these two deaths to see how followers of God can find hope through the story of Saul's otherwise hopeless life.

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SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES STUDY

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Before you wade into the waters of God's Word, use the words of *Psalm 55:22–23* to ready your heart for what God has prepared for you:

> *Give your burdens to the LORD,*
> *and he will take care of you.*
> *He will not permit the godly to slip and fall.*
> *But you, O God, will send the wicked*
> *down to the pit of destruction.*
> *Murderers and liars will die young,*
> *but I am trusting you to save me.*

TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Saul seemed to have it all. He was the king. The people loved him. He was winning battles. But his proud heart was far from God, so his days of glory were numbered. As soon as David arrived in Saul's court, Saul's sense of control over his circumstances faltered. The enemy Philistines were attacking Israel, and he suspected it wouldn't be long before David took the throne.

In a moment of desperation, Saul abandoned the camp to find help. In Endor, he turned—not to a priest or a prophet of God—but to a pagan medium. Saul wanted to talk with Samuel, the prophet who had died years earlier. And the medium summoned his spirit from the dead.

According to *1 Samuel 28:16–19*, what did the spirit of Samuel say to Saul? What did this spirit say would happen to Saul in the coming days?

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The tough words of Samuel's spirit came true, and 1 Samuel 31 records these events. Turn there now, and see how Saul's life finally came to its tragic end.

Observation: Saul's Tragic End

Observation, the first step of the *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method, requires asking, "What does the text *say*?"[1] Read *1 Samuel 31*, and as you read, take note of how the warnings from Samuel came true.

Saul's Demise—1 Samuel 31:1–6

Just as Saul feared, the attacks of the Philistines on Israel only grew more severe. According to *1 Samuel 31:2–3*, what did Israel's enemies do to Saul's sons? What did they do to Saul?

What did Saul ask his armor-bearer to do in *31:4* in response to the attack of the Philistines? What did Saul finally do when his servant denied his request?

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The Philistines' Response—1 Samuel 31:7–13

According to *1 Samuel 31:9–10*, what did the Philistines do when they found Saul and his sons' bodies?

According to *31:12–13*, how did the people of Jabesh-gilead respond when they discovered what the Philistines had done to Saul?

> *Saul, the man who once knew the joys and blessings of the kingdom, the man who was the representative of God, the man who cared so much about his own image, is now dead. This man need never have died like this. But the truth of the matter is he chose this path. He chose inch by inch, day by day to compromise and to live in the light of disobedience. What a horrible, tragic scene.* —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Interpretation: Saul's Shameful Choice

To understand the meaning of the end of Saul's life, it is important for students of Scripture to place themselves in the sandals of the characters in each scene. Crossing the bridge from the modern world to the ancient world is no simple task, but thankfully, a good set of *Bible study tools* can help guide someone on a journey back thousands of years.

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The cultural norms of ancient Near Eastern societies were determined based on values known as *shame* and *honor*. Read about these terms in a Bible dictionary. Briefly summarize what *shame* and *honor* are, and explain the role they played in ancient Israel.

Based on this historical background, why would Saul choose to take his own life rather than allow his enemies to kill him?

What warnings can followers of Jesus today learn from Saul's tragic example?

Saul did not want to suffer the final indignity of having the hated Philistines make sport of his body or mock him in death. Isn't it interesting, he's very concerned about his image with the enemy but shows little concern for his relationship with God whom he is about to meet? That happens when disobedience has dulled our senses. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Correlation: Christ's Triumphant Sacrifice

The death of King Saul creates a compelling contrast with the death of King Jesus. Before examining this contrast, though, turn to *Romans 6:1–14* to see what Christ's death accomplished for those who place their trust in Him.

According to *6:1–4*, what is a Christ-follower's new response to sin?

According to *6:5–11*, how does Christ create this new response to sin for those who trust in Him?

According to *6:12–14*, what freedom does this new relationship with Jesus give His followers?

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Here's the good news: we who know the Lord Jesus Christ carry within ourselves a renewed soul and spirit—that part of us which He took control of the moment we became Christians. He has taken up His residence there and has given us a new nature. Though our outer shell hurts and groans and is dying, our inner person is alive and vital, awaiting its home with the Lord. Being with the Lord occurs the moment—yes, the very moment—we die.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Application: Everyone's Inevitable Fate

Pastor Chuck Swindoll developed his application of 1 Samuel 31 by contrasting Saul's death with the death of Jesus Christ. At first glance, their circumstances seem totally disparate, but the similarities are striking. Take a few moments to review the following chart.

Saul's Death	Christ's Death
Appeared to be the end of all *national* hope for *Israel*	Appeared to be the end of all *spiritual* hope for *humanity*
Suggested that *the Philistines* had won the final victory	Suggested that *Satan* had won the final victory
Paved the way for an entirely new plan of operation—the era of the *Davidic dynasty*	Paved the way for an entirely new plan of operation—the era of the *Holy Spirit*
Opened the throne room of *Israel* to *David*, once a modest shepherd	Opened the throne room of *God* to *sinners* who place their trust in Him
Ended an era of dissatisfaction and failure—from *Saul's reign* to *David's reign*	Ended an era of dissatisfaction and failure—from *the law's reign* to *grace's reign*
Displayed the foolishness of *man—from Saul's perspective*	Displayed the foolishness of *God*—from a *human* perspective

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Which truth from this chart stands out to you most? Which do you most need a reminder of? How do these truths encourage you in your walk with God today?

How have you been ruling your life lately? As an independent, self-directed monarchy, like Saul? Or as a theocracy with God as the head, like David?

What personal lessons have you learned from witnessing Saul's tragic fall? What action steps can you take to make your life resemble David's faith more than Saul's pride?

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Saul's life truly was a tragedy. His life shined with promise and hope, but his reputation was tarnished because he did not have a heart for God. Saul's story acts as a warning for the people of God across time, and his life raises a singular question: Will you trust yourself or trust God? Saul ultimately placed his faith in himself, which led to his demise.

Today, many struggle with feelings of deep depression and have suicidal thoughts. If you or someone you know is reaching that point of desperation, please know that caring people are eager to help. The 24/7 phone number for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention is 800-273-8255. Also, Insight for Living Ministries offers a variety of resources on the topics of *encouragement and healing*.

A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for sending Your own Son to live the perfect life I could not live and to die the death I deserve. I ask You to strengthen me to go about my days believing that I am dead to sin and alive to God. Help me remember Saul's example during those times when I begin to look to myself for strength, rather than You. I pray these things in Jesus' strong name. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, "*How to Study the Bible for Yourself*."

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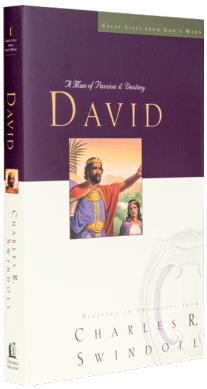
Tools for Digging Deeper



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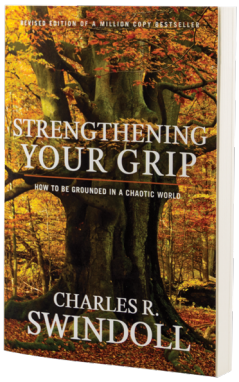

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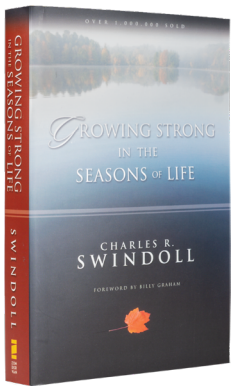

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For the 2022 broadcasts of *David: A Man of Passion & Destiny*, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Brad Smith, writer, *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.

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