

# Homiletics Analysis: 1 Samuel 18

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## Content & Intent

### **This Text — Content:**

First Samuel 18 records the immediate aftermath of David's triumph over Goliath and his formal entry into Saul's court and military service. The chapter moves on multiple relational tracks simultaneously. Jonathan, Saul's son and heir apparent, forms an extraordinary covenant bond with David — stripping himself of his royal robe, armor, and weapons and giving them to David, a gesture that carries both personal and dynastic weight. David rises rapidly in military prominence, succeeding in every mission Saul assigns him, winning the loyalty of both the army and the people. The women's victory song — "Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands" — triggers Saul's jealousy and fear, and from that point forward Saul's relationship with David deteriorates through stages: suspicious watch (v. 9), murderous impulse (v. 10-11), strategic distance (v. 13), tactical scheming (vv. 17-27). Saul offers his daughters Merab and then Michal as potential wives, both times with concealed intent to use the Philistines as instruments of David's death. David deflects the first offer; Michal genuinely loves David, and Saul exploits this, demanding a bride price of one hundred Philistine foreskins, expecting David to die in the attempt. David returns with two hundred. Throughout all of this, the narrator repeatedly punctuates the narrative with the same refrain: "the LORD was with David" and "Saul was afraid of David." The chapter ends with Saul as David's enemy, and Michal as David's wife.

### **This Text — Intent:**

God is seeking to establish in the reader an unshakeable confidence in the invincibility of His sovereign purpose. The chapter's narrative architecture is designed to make one thing visible above everything else: no human opposition — however powerful, however cunning, however persistent — can derail what God has purposed. Saul holds every structural advantage: he is the king, David's commanding officer, his prospective father-in-law, the one who assigns missions, controls marriages, and wields the spear. He uses every tool available to him to destroy David. Every attempt fails — not because David outsmarts him, but because the LORD is with David. The reader is meant to see divine sovereignty not as abstract doctrine but as a lived reality that holds even when the enemy is the most powerful person in the room.

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**Subject Sentence:** The LORD's sovereign purpose for David advances despite Saul's every attempt to destroy it.

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**Primary Claim:** God is demonstrating that His sovereign purposes for His anointed cannot be frustrated by human opposition, no matter how strategically resourced that opposition is — and He is calling the reader to live in the confidence and freedom that flows from that certainty.

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## Interpretive Evaluation

**The Covenant with Jonathan (v. 3-4):** The nature of Jonathan's covenant with David has generated interpretive discussion, particularly regarding Jonathan's stripping of his royal regalia. Some interpreters read this as purely emotional — a deep personal friendship finding symbolic expression. A richer reading, supported by the narrative logic of 1 Samuel as a whole, recognizes the dynastic dimension: Jonathan is the crown prince, and the giving of his robe, armor, and sword is an implicit abdication — a recognition that the anointed future of Israel belongs to David. This reading is not anachronistically imposed; it tracks consistently with Jonathan's later explicit acknowledgment (1 Samuel 23:17: "you shall be king over Israel and I shall be next to you"). The friendship is real and profound, but its narrative significance is dynastic. The Reformed reading holds both: genuine covenant friendship and a Spirit-worked recognition in Jonathan of what God had purposed.

**The Repetition of "The LORD was with David" (vv. 12, 14, 28):** Some readings treat these as editorial summaries — authorial commentary that explains David's success. They are more than that. They function as theological anchors embedded in the narrative, structuring the reader's interpretation of every event in the chapter. David's military successes, Saul's failed schemes, the loyalty of the people — all of these are theologically interpreted by the narrator before the reader can misread them as products of David's skill or charisma. The Reformed reading insists that the narrator is doing theological work here, not merely explaining outcomes. The phrase is a confessional claim: Israel's true king succeeds because covenant faithfulness follows the LORD's anointed.

**Saul's Psychological State — Diagnosis Disagreements:** Some interpreters, particularly in psychological or therapeutic homiletical traditions, focus heavily on Saul as a case study in envy, insecurity, and mental illness (the "harmful spirit" of vv. 10-11). This produces application that diagnoses and treats Saul's pathology. While there is genuine insight here, the text is not primarily Saul's story in this chapter — he is the obstacle through which the primary claim is being demonstrated. The pitfall is psychologizing Saul into the sermon's central character and losing the theological frame: Saul's opposition is real, resourced, and relentless — and it is defeated not by David's emotional intelligence but by the LORD's presence. The Reformed reading is willing to observe Saul's condition while insisting the text's controlling claim is not about Saul's psychology but about God's sovereignty.

**The Bride Price as Historical Detail:** Some interpreters read the foreskin demand (v. 25-27) as merely an awkward cultural detail to be explained or minimized. In fact, it is theologically integral: it shows Saul at his most calculating and his most desperate — using David’s obedience and the LORD’s blessing as the very instruments of what he hopes will be David’s death. The LORD’s sovereignty is displayed precisely in this: the more Saul schemes, the more David is exalted. This is not incidental; it is the chapter’s theological argument made in narrative form.

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## Key Canonical Support

- **Genesis 50:20** — Joseph’s declaration to his brothers: “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good.” The same narrative logic governs 1 Samuel 18: the opposition of the powerful against the LORD’s chosen becomes the instrument of the LORD’s exaltation of the chosen.
  - **Psalms 118:6-7** — “The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?” This psalm, likely Davidic in origin, may well reflect the lived experience of chapters like 1 Samuel 18. The theological confidence it expresses is exactly the confidence the narrative is meant to produce.
  - **Romans 8:31-39** — Paul’s climactic question: “If God is for us, who can be against us?” and his catalog of unsuccessful opponents (tribulation, danger, sword, principalities, powers) is the New Testament theological articulation of what 1 Samuel 18 demonstrates narratively. The chapter is not incidentally parallel — it is a foundational exhibit for Paul’s claim.
  - **Acts 4:27-28** — The early church’s prayer recognizing that Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles, and Israel conspired against God’s Anointed, and “did whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.” The pattern of 1 Samuel 18 — the most powerful forces in the room opposed to the LORD’s anointed, and failing — reaches its climactic expression in the cross and resurrection.
  - **Isaiah 46:10** — “My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.” The chapter’s repeated refrain (“the LORD was with David”) is the narrative expression of the LORD’s counsel standing against every human attempt to overthrow it.
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**Aim:** To ground the reader’s confidence not in their own resources or strategic advantages but in the certainty that the LORD’s purpose for His people cannot be frustrated — and to expose the anxiety and striving that flows from forgetting this.

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## Content Table

| Verse(s) | Content                                                                                                                                                         | Notes                                                                                                                         |
|----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1-4      | Jonathan's soul is knit to David's; he makes a covenant and strips himself of his royal robe, armor, and weapons, giving them to David                          | Dynastic significance: Jonathan recognizes in David what God has purposed; the robe and sword are symbols of royal succession |
| 5        | David is successful in all his missions; Saul sets him over the men of war; accepted in the sight of the people and Saul's servants                             | First statement of David's success — before any opposition is introduced                                                      |
| 6-7      | Women sing as the armies return: "Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands"                                                              | The song is innocent celebration; Saul's interpretation of it is the problem                                                  |
| 8-9      | Saul is very angry; interprets the song as a threat to his kingdom; eyes David from that day forward                                                            | The pivot of the chapter — Saul's suspicion turns toward David                                                                |
| 10-11    | The next day a harmful spirit from God rushes upon Saul; he rants in his house; David plays the lyre; Saul hurls his spear twice — both times David evades      | First open attempt on David's life; David escapes twice; God's sovereignty in the evasion                                     |
| 12-13    | Saul is afraid of David because the LORD is with David and has departed from Saul; Saul removes David from his presence and makes him a commander of a thousand | Second anchor statement: "the LORD was with him" — Saul's fear is theologically interpreted                                   |
| 14-16    | David has great success in all his ways; the LORD is with him; all Israel and Judah love David                                                                  | Third anchor statement; David's popularity is nationwide                                                                      |
| 17       | Saul offers his daughter Merab to David with hidden intent — he hopes the                                                                                       | Saul's first marriage scheme — using obedience as a trap                                                                      |

| Verse(s) | Content                                                                                                                                                      | Notes                                                                                            |
|----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|          | Philistines will kill David in battle                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                  |
| 18-19    | David deflects humbly; Merab is given to Adriel instead                                                                                                      | David's self-deprecation; the scheme comes to nothing without Saul achieving his goal            |
| 20-21    | Michal loves David; Saul is pleased — he sees it as a snare; offers her to David as a second opportunity for the Philistines to kill him                     | Saul weaponizes his daughter's genuine love                                                      |
| 22-25    | Saul's servants relay the offer; David protests his unworthiness; Saul demands one hundred Philistine foreskins as bride price, fully expecting David to die | The scheme is maximally calculated — using David's courage and the LORD's commission against him |
| 26-27    | David and his men arise; he kills two hundred Philistines and brings the foreskins to Saul; Saul gives him Michal                                            | Every calculation is defeated; the impossible bride price doubled                                |
| 28-29    | Saul sees that the LORD is with David and that his daughter Michal loves David; Saul is more afraid of David and becomes his enemy continually               | Fourth and climactic anchor statement: Saul now sees clearly — and doubles down on enmity        |
| 30       | The Philistine commanders come out to battle; David has more success than all Saul's servants; his name is highly esteemed                                   | Chapter closes with David more honored than ever — each opposition leaves him more exalted       |

## Divisions Table

| Division | Verses | Label                                                   |
|----------|--------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| 1        | 1-5    | The Covenant and the Commission: David Enters the Court |

| Division | Verses | Label                                                                |
|----------|--------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2        | 6-11   | The Pivot: The Song, the Suspicion, and the Spear                    |
| 3        | 12-16  | The LORD's Presence Confirmed: Saul Fears, David Succeeds            |
| 4        | 17-27  | The Schemes: Two Daughters, Two Traps, Two Failures                  |
| 5        | 28-30  | The Reckoning: Saul Sees and Still Cannot Stop What God Has Purposed |

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## Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

**Subject Sentence:** The LORD's sovereign purpose for David advances despite Saul's every attempt to destroy it.

**Primary Claim:** God is demonstrating that His sovereign purposes for His anointed cannot be frustrated by human opposition, no matter how strategically resourced that opposition is — and He is calling the reader to live in the confidence and freedom that flows from that certainty.

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## Applications (Five)

**1. Reframe who your actual opponent is.** (*Mind/Belief*) Saul is the most powerful human in David's world — commander, king, prospective father-in-law — and he is fully committed to David's destruction. Yet the narrative repeatedly refuses to let Saul be the decisive reality in the story. The decisive reality is "the LORD was with David." The application is diagnostic: when you are facing opposition — at work, in a relationship, in a ministry — you are at risk of making the opponent the largest reality in your field of vision. This passage reframes the situation. The most strategic, well-resourced opposition in your life is not operating outside the LORD's knowledge or beyond the LORD's governance. Reframe your situation not by minimizing the opposition but by correctly assessing what is actually decisive.

**2. Stop treating your own resources as the explanation for your standing.** (*Mind/Belief*) David succeeds in everything he does — militarily, relationally, publicly. The narrator will not allow any of this to be credited to David's skill, charisma, or strategy. The repeated refrain — "the LORD was with him" — is a theological interpretation of every success. The application is for the reader who has experienced seasons of success and has quietly

begun to construct a narrative in which their own competence is the primary explanation. The text insists otherwise. What you have been given, what you have accomplished, what has been built — the LORD is the explanation. This is not false modesty. It is accurate accounting. And it has a pastoral consequence: if the LORD is the explanation for your standing, then your standing does not depend on your continued performance.

**3. Grieve the Sauls in your life without being defined by them.** (*Affections/Worship*)

Saul's hatred of David is not abstract — it is personal, sustained, and expressed with a spear. The text does not pretend this is painless. Jonathan's covenant with David (vv. 1-4) is all the more poignant because the reader knows it is his own father who is the threat. The application is not stoicism — “just remember God is in control and you'll be fine.” It is an invitation to honest grief in the presence of a sovereign God. It is possible to be genuinely wounded by human opposition, to feel the weight of sustained enmity, and to simultaneously hold that the LORD's purpose is not derailed by it. These are not in tension. The Psalms — many of them David's own — demonstrate exactly this. Bring the wound to the LORD whose presence with you is precisely what provokes the opposition.

**4. Refuse the specific fear that comes from watching the most powerful person in the room align against you.** (*Affections/Worship*)

The text is explicit: “Saul was afraid of David because the LORD was with David.” Saul's fear is not irrational — he correctly perceives that God is with David. The irony is that what Saul fears, David has no reason to fear. The application targets a specific form of anxiety: the anxiety of being opposed by institutional power, by the person in authority, by the one who controls your advancement, security, or reputation. The chapter is a sustained demonstration that this specific anxiety — “the most powerful person in the room is against me” — is the one anxiety that the LORD's presence most directly dismantles. The LORD with you is a greater power than the most powerful person against you.

**5. Trust God's purposes enough to remain in the place of obedience even when that place is where the opposition schemes.** (*Will/Behavior*)

David does not flee the court. He keeps playing the lyre before Saul. He keeps going on the missions Saul assigns. He brings back double the required bride price. The schemes require his continued engagement — and he keeps engaging, not carelessly but faithfully. The application is behavioral and specific: there is a place of obedience that you are tempted to abandon because it is also the place where the opposition is most concentrated. A job. A church. A family situation. A calling. The chapter does not counsel recklessness, but it does counsel continued faithfulness in the place God has assigned. The schemes against you in that place do not change your assignment. Stay obedient. Let the LORD be the one who handles what Saul's schemes cannot accomplish.

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## Theological Importance

**Theological Importance:** First Samuel 18 is a sustained narrative demonstration of one of Scripture's most foundational claims about God: that His sovereign purposes cannot be

defeated by human opposition, even when that opposition holds every structural advantage. The fourfold repetition of “the LORD was with David” is not rhetorical filler — it is the chapter’s theological spine, the interpretive lens through which every event must be read. The chapter teaches that the LORD’s presence with His anointed is the decisive variable in any situation, rendering all other power differentials ultimately irrelevant. It also teaches that God’s sovereignty is not static or passive — it is actively expressed through the failure of every scheme marshaled against His purposes. Every one of Saul’s attempts becomes an instrument of David’s further exaltation. The God of this chapter is not merely watching over David from a distance; He is governing every attempted obstacle and turning it to the opposite of its intended end.

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## Reformed Theological Significance

**Reformed Theological Significance:** First Samuel 18 is a narrative exhibit of the doctrine of divine sovereignty that Reformed theology has consistently grounded in the whole canon of Scripture. The chapter anticipates what Paul will articulate in Romans 8:31-39 and what the early church confessed in Acts 4:27-28 — that the most concentrated human opposition against God’s anointed ultimately serves God’s purposes rather than defeating them. This reaches its climactic expression in the cross, where the rulers of this age crucified the Lord of glory (1 Corinthians 2:8), and in doing so accomplished precisely what God had predestined (Acts 4:28). David’s story in 1 Samuel 18 is not merely a type or illustration of this; it is part of the same covenant-historical movement — God preserving His anointed king against every attempt at elimination so that the promise made to Abraham, to Moses, to the house of David, would hold. For the Reformed reader, the chapter is also a guard against the synergistic assumption that God’s purposes require human strategic competence to succeed. The narrator goes to deliberate lengths to remove David’s skill and charisma as the explanation for his survival and advancement. The explanation is the LORD. This is not an incidental point — it is the point.

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## Main Takeaway

Saul had the throne, the army, the spear, the marriage contract, and the Philistines — and he used every one of them to destroy David. Every attempt failed. Not because David was smarter or stronger, but because the LORD was with David. The opposition you are facing — however powerful, however calculating, however close — is not operating outside the LORD’s governance. Live in the freedom that comes from knowing that the most decisive fact in your situation is not the power arrayed against you but the LORD who is with you.

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## Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Making Saul the sermon's central character.** The most common mishandling of this chapter is spending the bulk of the exposition diagnosing Saul's psychology — his envy, his insecurity, his mental deterioration — in a way that makes Saul the narrative's center of gravity. This produces interesting character study and may even generate applications about managing jealousy, but it fundamentally misreads where the text's weight falls. Saul is the obstacle through which the chapter's theological claim is being demonstrated. His psychology explains the schemes; it does not explain their failure. The failure of the schemes requires a theological explanation — "the LORD was with David" — and that is the text's primary business.
- **Reducing Jonathan's covenant to mere friendship.** Jonathan's bond with David is genuine and moving, but collapsing it into a sermon on deep friendship or loyalty misses the dynastic significance the text is signaling. Jonathan is stripping himself of his royal identity and giving it to David. This is an act of Spirit-worked recognition and self-surrender to the LORD's purpose — not merely an expression of personal affection. Preaching it only as "what a good friend looks like" flattens the theological weight and loses the gospel resonance: the rightful heir yielding to the LORD's anointed.
- **Moralizing David as a model of humble success.** David's repeated self-deprecation ("Who am I, and who are my relatives, my father's clan in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the king?" v. 18) is genuine, but preaching this chapter as a case study in how humility leads to blessing turns the passage into a self-improvement strategy. The narrator is not teaching David's method of success; he is demonstrating the LORD's sovereignty expressed through David's anointing. David's character is real, but it is not the theological engine.
- **Ignoring the pattern of escalating schemes and their failures.** The structure of the chapter is deliberate: Saul's opposition escalates — from suspicious watching, to attempted spearing, to strategic distancing, to marriage traps — and each escalation ends in David being further exalted. A sermon that skips this structural logic loses the rhetorical force of the passage. The escalation is the point: Saul tries everything available to the most powerful man in Israel, and everything fails. Preaching this as individual incidents rather than a cumulative argument misses the narrative's design.
- **Applying the chapter only to dramatic, visible persecution.** The application of "the LORD was with David against Saul's schemes" can be wrongly limited to readers who face obvious, high-stakes opposition. But the chapter's claim is meant to govern the reader's posture toward all opposition to the LORD's purposes in their life — the colleague who subtly undermines, the institution that structurally disadvantages, the family member who persistently opposes. The theological

principle is not scale-dependent. The LORD's sovereign purpose holds against the spear and against the slow campaign of erosion alike.

- **Failing to connect the chapter to its fulfillment in Christ.** David's preservation against every attempt on his life is not simply an inspirational story — it is part of the covenant-historical line that must remain intact for the Messiah to come. The reader of 1 Samuel 18 is the reader who knows that the enmity against David's line will eventually produce the cross — and that even the cross will fail to stop what God has purposed. Preaching this chapter without at least gesturing toward that fulfillment leaves the passage's canonical weight unregistered.