

David - threatened by Saul, protected by God

1 Samuel 19

Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands, together with her cabinet, moved to England during the Second World War. At that time a poem appeared in the papers that started as follows: “No, yours was not a flight, but a following of God’s calling.” In itself, ‘fleeing’ and a ‘following of God’s calling’ do not have to be contradictory. In the Bible passage which you focus on today, you may read about David’s flight from Saul. This flight is at the same time a following of God’s calling. See Outline 2, part 6. David has to learn to submit himself to the ways of the LORD.

What was mentioned above does not mean that David followed the LORD at each stage of his flight. At one point we notice him surfacing among the Philistines (21:10; later again, ch.27). That was not a “following of God’s calling”. Yet, God uses these events to teach David to trust in Him alone.

1. Verse 1

The root of Saul’s hatred towards David is jealousy (18:8), distrust (18:9), and fear (18:12, 15, and 29). The emphasis in the narratives is on Saul’s fear. It is striking that we do not read anything about fear in the heart of the man who gets a spear thrown at his head, but about fear in the heart of the man who handles the spear!

Saul realizes that his position as king is being threatened. He is not concerned about God’s kingdom. He is solely concerned with his own kingdom. For that reason he refuses to back off for David. He is willing to kill in order to maintain himself as king. David needs to die. In a later chapter he massacres the entire priestly family in Nob (22:16-19).

Question 1: I came across the following comment somewhere: “Saul is concerned with things that pertain to humans.” How may this comment be applied to Saul’s actions? This comment was based on a saying of the Lord Jesus. To whom did Jesus say that he was not concerned with the things that pertain to God but to things that pertain to humans?

In chapter 18 Saul generally hides his hatred towards David. He even gives the impression that he wants what is best for David (vv.17, 22). In this chapter he openly declares that he wants to remove David. This shows how Saul is in the process of hardening his heart.

The apple does fall far from the tree. Jonathan’s attitude towards David is completely different from his father. He does not fight for a position that he sees is being threatened. Apparently, it became more and more evident to Jonathan what the LORD’s purpose for David was. In chapter 23:17 he expresses this verbally (see also 20:13-16). Thus he knows that he, a crown prince, has to make way for David. Moreover, stepping aside for David means making way for the coming Christ. That is exactly what we see him doing, not under protest but out of love. To Jonathan, making way **before** David and taking his place **beside** David go hand in hand in the form of an intimate friendship.

Question 2: Read chapter 18:1-4. In those verses you can see that Jonathan's 'taking his place beside David' goes together with his 'making way before David'. How does Jonathan combine the two?

The love between David and Jonathan has often been extended to a physical relationship (homosexuality). In these verses the Bible speaks about love in a completely different sense. Can you explain in what sense the Bible speaks here about love?

Question 3: Jonathan's love toward David will bring him into great conflict with his father (20:30). How does this action compare with the fifth commandment? Can you explain why Jonathan has to make a decision against the will of his father for the sake of Jesus Christ? (Compare Matt.10:37.)

2. Verses 2-7

Jonathan acts as the advocate of the king whom God has chosen. Notice the arguments he brought forward to change his father's mind:

- a. David is innocent; he has done nothing deserving punishment (v.4a, 5b).
- b. You have nothing but benefited from David (v.4b).
- c. Remember what the LORD has accomplished through David; were you not happy with the results (v.5)? The latter argument weighs the heaviest. If Saul attacks David, he in fact attacks the LORD's work of salvation.

David re-enters the service of Saul and resumes his task as army commander. You will notice that David does not leave his position just like that. He did not tell Jonathan in advance, "Don't even try talking to your father. I'll just leave." Even after all the things that Saul attempts to do in this present chapter, David agrees to *another* attempt at reconciliation. He flees only when it is completely clear that it is the only option open to him and when the LORD Himself sends him away (20:22). For the time being, though, he remains where the LORD has stationed him. This characterizes him as a man who seeks to be a 'king after the will of God'.

Question 4: Does David's standpoint have something to do with obedience to the fifth commandment as well? Can you think of present-day situations in which David's standpoint can be instructive?

3. Verses 8-17

When does the attitude of Saul towards David turn sour again? When David gains a great victory (v.8). That was also the cause of Saul's frustration with David in chapter 18. The spear throw of Saul must not be seen as mere repetition of an event that happened in chapter 18:10,11. There is a continuation of sinful behaviour, and thus a hardening of heart is taking place.

David does not regard the spear throw as an isolated incident anymore. He departs and goes home. Apparently he thinks he is safe there. He does not expect Saul to come after him. But that is exactly what happens.

Michal chooses David's side, just as her brother Jonathan had done. That was a good choice. However, she does not display the same courage as her brother. She tries to get herself out of a sticky situation with a lie — a lie that puts David in the wrong with Saul (v.17). Michal does love David (18:20), but this love has less of a spiritual character than Jonathan's. From the fact that she keeps an idol in her house it also appears that she is not spiritually one with her husband.

Question 5: In chapter 15:23 Samuel calls to account Michal's father Saul for the sin of idolatry. Does this sin of Saul refer to the worshiping of what was found in Michal's house?

Question 6: In a commentary on this chapter the lie of Michal is put on par with the 'necessary lie' of Rahab in Joshua 2:4,5. What is your reaction to that?

4. Verses 18-24

Notice where David seeks his safety now that he is not safe anymore at his own house. He goes to the man who earlier had anointed him as king according to the command of the LORD. He goes to Samuel, the bearer of God's Word. David seeks a foothold where the Word of the LORD is. As a child of God, where else would you find security? The road to Samuel is a sensible way for a man who must soon be king after God's will.

The group of prophesying prophets forms a phenomenon which accompanies the reformation the LORD brought about through the work of Samuel. You can read about this phenomenon already in chapter 10:10. The Word of the LORD is not rare anymore in Israel (compare with chapter 3:1)! The content of the prophets' prophesies carry no significance in this chapter. The focus is on what can be seen rather than what can be heard. Saul saw people who were spiritually ecstatic, declaring the great deeds of the LORD with great enthusiasm, using their entire body. Saul was confronted with a visible manifestation of the Holy Spirit. That is what receives the emphasis in this chapter.

The sight of these prophesying prophets makes it clear that the Holy Spirit surrounds David like a wall. Saul directs his men toward David in order to arrest him, but they are not able to capture him. They, amazingly, are actually captured themselves, instead. They are captured by the Holy Spirit. They join the prophets. They have to, even if it is against their own will. The same happens to Saul himself. His capture is even more severe. He is already captured by the Holy Spirit, even before he arrives in Ramah. His actions are so exuberant that he has no energy left in him. For twenty-four hours he lies on the floor, completely exhausted. Just imagine him laying there, a miserable human being. This is how God treats his enemies. In this way, God makes his protection for David visible. Whatever David witnessed here becomes a source of strength when he continues his flight. God's Spirit, which he received when he was anointed, will remain standing around him like a wall.

Comment: It is significant to notice that Saul's spiritual ecstasy is only an external matter. His heart is not touched by the Spirit. Here we read that the Holy Spirit came upon him. In chapter 10, where we saw him join the prophets too, it was different (see v.9). There we read that the Holy Spirit came *mightily* upon him. For more about chapter 10, see comments on v.24 following.

Question 7: Compare these events with the account of Balaam (e.g. Num. 23:11,12). What are the similarities?

In the meantime, notice again Saul's hardening of heart. Saul finds out what happened to the men whom he sent to Ramah (v.21). Thus, he could have figured out that it is the Spirit of the LORD who protects David. And yet two more times he sends another delegation. Even when there is no success the third time, he goes himself. Reading about it sends shivers up and down your back. Also remember what Stephen later says to the Jewish council (Acts 7:51).

In verse 24 you can read a proverb that had originated at an earlier time. The proverb began to circulate before Saul had become a king. Read chapter 10:9-13. The fact that Saul was then among the prophets was for him a sign that God indeed wanted him to receive the kingship. Amazement resounded in the original saying. There was amazement over the guiding hand of the LORD who called a simple young man from the farm to the position of king. In chapter 19 we see a change in the meaning of the proverb. Here the proverb has a different flavour. Now there is amazement in this saying about the might of the LORD who slays his enemy with powerlessness. He does this because he wants David on Israel's throne. The meaning of the proverb changes. It is adapted to the present reality. However, the flavour remains the same. The saying contains a flavour of wonderment about the deeds of the LORD who executes his decrees and does as he pleases (Is. 46:10).

Question 8: Does the changing meaning of the proverb indicate that the LORD has changed? Or do you hear in this saying a confirmation that he remains the same and does not change?

5. The work of the LORD in this account

Also in this chapter you may see that God is not going to allow anyone to put an obstacle in his way. The spear throw does not harm David. Saul's soldiers are not able to capture David at his own house. In addition, in Ramah Saul and his men are powerless over against the protecting might of God's Spirit. God's plans will not fail. The Christ will come to save us also from the power of Satan and to protect us and keep us in that salvation. (See the conclusion of HC, LD 12, Q&A 31.) That wall of protection also surrounds our lives.

For the introduction

1. The path that David has to travel is a path 'through suffering to glory'. This will remind you of the path on which Jesus Christ, the great Son of David, would have to travel later. It will also remind you of the path which all God's children in later ages would have to go. Although it is good to mention this in your introduction, it is necessary to note that all these instances are not identical. The reason why David has to travel the road of suffering (see 3.1.1) is naturally completely different than the reason for Christ's suffering or the reason for our suffering, even though there are similarities between David's and ours.
2. You may want to expand the reference to chapter 18 when dealing with verse 1 (see 3.2.1). You could explain in more detail why Saul is jealous, distrustful, and afraid of David. Especially point out the last part of 18:8 where Saul says, "What more can he get but the kingdom?".
3. When dealing with v. 6 you can point out how Saul trifles with the oath he swore. This is a serious offence. Every action he undertakes against David is in fact a breaking of the

oath he made. At the same time, Saul's sudden change in attitude toward David shows how unstable he is. There is no evidence of any repentance. The continuation of this account proves that, too.

4. David does not have to flee from an external enemy but from a brother, even God's anointed king who became an enemy. It was very difficult for him to cope with this situation.
5. If you want to pass on some additional insight you could include a reference to Psalm 59 in your introduction. The events related in verses 11-13 formed the motivation for the composition of this psalm. (Maybe you could pick this psalm to be sung at the beginning of the meeting; hopefully you learned the psalms with unfamiliar melodies at school, too.) It is striking that David puts the enemies that he is concretely faced with, Saul and his men, on par with Israel's external enemies (vv.6, 9). Notice verse 11 also ('my people'). During a time of personal need David does not forget that he has been anointed as king over the people of Israel.
6. When dealing with verses 18-24, highlight how impressive it must have been for David to see how the Holy Spirit overwhelmed God's enemy and thus eliminated him. Also accentuate that the protection of David is in fact the protection of the coming Saviour, and thus the protection of our salvation. You could say it like this: In these events God's Son is busy safeguarding his coming into the world. For that reason Saul hits his head against the wall of the Holy Spirit.

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