



1 SAMUEL 19 - 22
A KING IN PLACE OF THE KING
Week 33 – Jonathan Helps David Flee Saul

Introduction

Samuel anointed David when he was about 15-16 years old. David actually began to reign as king at age 30. During the intervening 14-15 years he was running for his life, trying to escape the murderous hand of Saul.

We see some different sides of David during this period of his life. He may have been a giant-killer and a man after God's own heart; but he was also a human being subject to emotions such as fear and terror. He may have been very strong in his concept of God; but he could also lapse into moods of great uncertainty as to God's plan for his life. He may have been a man of faith; but he also repeatedly resorted to human means (deception, pretending, fleeing) to protect himself.

The superscriptions to a number of David's Psalms suggest that they were written during these years on the run (Psalms 34, 52, 56, 59). These musings help us gain insight into the David's struggle to stay on track with God's agenda for his life.

Jonathan reconciles David to Saul: 19:1-7

After David's defeat of Goliath and subsequent military victories, Saul grew increasingly jealous (ch.18). He even commanded his son Jonathan and his officers to put David to death (19:1). Jonathan, however, refused and warned David. He then interceded on David's behalf.

Jonathan's case to his father was simple: David has not sinned against you; but you are sinning against David:

Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father and said to him, "Do not let the king sin against his servant David, since he has not sinned against you, and since his deeds have been very beneficial to you. For he took his life in his hand and struck the Philistine, and the Lord brought about a great deliverance for all Israel; you saw it and rejoiced. Why then will you sin against innocent blood by putting David to death without a cause?"

Jonathan challenged his father with courage and truth. He did not act afraid of him. He was able to change Saul's intentions temporarily. However, Saul's desire for vengeance was the "fruit" of deeper root issues that were left unaddressed.

Thus, although Saul vowed in the moment that he would never kill David, his "beneath-the-iceberg" issues – fear, pride, jealousy, insecurity, self-love, rebellion against God – would rise up again, causing him to break his vow and seek to destroy David.

It is easy to say to someone who is behaving badly: "Just stop it!" That rarely works, however, unless **the underlying issues driving the behavior** are brought out into the light.

Most often, "above the iceberg" behaviors are the strategies that we employ to alleviate "beneath the iceberg" pain.

It takes time, under the loving guidance of the Holy Spirit (who knows everything about us) to bring to the surface the hidden wounds and lies that are driving our negative behavior. This is why self-awareness ("thinking beneath") is so important.

Until we get to the real roots of our reactions and negative behaviors, we will continue to fall into the same patterns over and over again.

Saul again tries to kill David: 19:8-10

David continued to amass great military victories over the Philistines, causing them to flee (19:8). David's success, however, caused Saul's unaddressed heart issues to surface again. The combination of jealousy and spiritual oppression (19:9) moved Saul to abruptly break his vow and attempt to kill David again. Now David, who regularly caused the enemy Philistines to flee, was himself fleeing in fear from his enemy, Saul.

"Saul tried to pin David to the wall with the spear, but he slipped away out of Saul's presence, so that he stuck the spear into the wall. And David fled and escaped that night" (19:10).

Michal helps David escape from Saul: 19:11-17

David had married Saul's daughter, Michal. Now it was her turn to rescue David from the murderous hand of her father. Saul sent men to watch David's house one night, hoping to kill him in the morning. Michal gave her husband a grave warning that appears to have been a game-changer for David:

*Michal, David's wife, told him, saying,
"If you do not save your life tonight, tomorrow you will be put to death" (19:11).*

Michal aided David's escape with the help of the household idol! He fled his home that night . . . and never returned.

"So Michal let David down through a window, and he went out and fled and escaped. Michal took the household idol and laid it on the bed, and put a quilt of goats' hair at its head, and covered it with clothes" (19:12,13).

Saul blasted his daughter for betraying him (19:17). Michal lied, saying that David had threatened to kill her if she did not help him. **Psalm 59 has been connected to the night that David sat in his house, surrounded by Saul's officers.** The following selections show how desperate David was for the protection of God:

"Rescue me from my enemies, O God. Protect me from those who have come to destroy me. Rescue me from these criminals; save me from these murderers. They have set an ambush for me. Fierce enemies are out there waiting, Lord, though I have not sinned or offended them. I have done nothing wrong, yet they prepare to attack me. . . . They come out at night, snarling like vicious dogs as they prowl the streets. Listen to the filth that comes from their mouths; their words cut like swords. But as for me, I will sing about Your power. Each morning I will sing with joy about Your unfailing love. For You have

been my refuge, a place of safety when I am in distress. O my Strength, to You I sing praises, for You, O God, are my refuge, the God who shows me unfailing love” (Psalm 59:1-4,6-7,16-17).

David’s prayer reveals a different “lens” through which he viewed his enemies. In a previous crisis, Goliath was an “enemy of God” who didn’t stand a chance against a God-empowered David (17:26,43-46).

Now, however, Saul’s men are fear inducing, treacherous murderers waiting to kill him at sunrise. David knew WHO God was, and WHOSE he was; yet he often had difficulty exercising the same fearless faith as he had toward Goliath and other enemies. **His faith and courage were subject to the same ups and downs as all of us.**

The struggle of FAITH in times of CRISIS is to **believe** that God IS Who He says He IS . . . **even as the circumstances threaten to undo us.**

Psalm 59 reveals David vacillating between faith and fear. Half the Psalm is about the fierce enemies poised to murder David. He is disturbed because he *“has done nothing wrong.”*

Yet, the other half is about God, Who was David’s refuge and strength, his source of unfailing love.

As humans with “fallen natures” we will always vacillate between faith and fear. We should seek to uncover the deepest roots of our recurring fears so that fear does not so easily gain a hold on us. At the same time, we must learn to cling to what is true about our God, Who is greater than our greatest crisis, keeping our eyes on Him in the midst the storm.

David flees to Samuel: 19:18-24

David fled first to Samuel, the one who had anointed him as Israel’s next king (16:1,12,13). David undoubtedly needed assurances that what Samuel had told him was true, and that he would indeed someday succeed Saul.

At the same time, he was able to receive prophetic guidance from Samuel as to the steps he should take. Samuel took David to Naioth in Ramah, where a school of prophets was located. Saul sent men to arrest David; but *“instead of seizing David, they were themselves seized”* by the Spirit of God (Matthew Henry). **Saul’s officers were overpowered by God’s presence, and they began worshipping and praising God.** Some ancient Jewish commentators thought that Saul’s men began prophesying that David would overtake Saul as Israel’s next king! When his officers returned empty-handed, Saul decided he himself would go and capture David. Yet, as he approached the city of Naioth, the Spirit overpowered him also, with strange results.

“. . . the Spirit of God came upon him also, so that he went along prophesying continually until he came to Naioth in Ramah. He also stripped off his clothes, and he too prophesied before Samuel and lay down naked all that day and all that night. Therefore they say, “Is Saul also among the prophets?” (19:23,24).

Even after David saw God’s power over Saul and his men, it was not enough to call him out of his “fight-flight” mode. Since Saul was now in Naioth, David departed, fleeing back to Jonathan and demanding to know why Saul was so intent on killing him.

Jonathan follows through on his covenant: 20:1-42

Jonathan had previously bound himself to David in a covenant relationship (18:1-4). Now, he renewed his covenant with David (20:12-17) and took specific steps that proved his love and commitment to his closest friend.

Then David fled from Naioth in Ramah, and came and said to Jonathan, “What have I done? What is my iniquity? And what is my sin before your father, that he is seeking my life?”

“What have I done wrong?” This was David’s question when his oldest brother Eliab accused him of conceit and wickedness in the Goliath incident and lashed out at him with harsh words (17:29).

This was David’s protest again in Psalm 59:4 – **“I have done nothing wrong . . . their words cut like swords.”**

Now, his question to Jonathan was the same: **“What have I done? Why is he seeking to kill me?”**

David was deeply hurt by unjust accusations, so hurt in fact that it overshadowed his ability to “step out of the situation” and take an honest look at his accusers. Their accusations really said more about the insecurities within them (Saul’s jealousy; Eliab’s bitterness; etc.) than David’s issues. In fact, **David was the scapegoat for the issues brewing deep inside of others.**

Perhaps you are the subject of unjust accusations. If so, ask God for insight into what might be driving your accusers. It might be more about what’s brewing inside of them . . . than you.

Jonathan was being kept in the dark as to his father's murderous intentions (20:2,3). Thus, he did not understand why David was so terrified of his father. David asked Jonathan to go and test his father's intentions so that they could both know for sure.

“Behold, tomorrow is the new moon, and I ought to sit down to eat with the king. But let me go, that I may hide myself in the field until the third evening. If your father misses me at all, then say, ‘David earnestly asked leave of me to run to Bethlehem his city, because it is the yearly sacrifice there for the whole family.’ If he says, ‘It is good,’ your servant shall be safe; but if he is very angry, know that he has decided on evil” (20:5-7).

David was asking Jonathan to lie concerning his whereabouts. **Here we see signs of David taking matters into his own hands in order to secure his safety.** Jonathan did as David requested. When Saul asked where David was, Jonathan offered up the lie that he had asked permission to go to Bethlehem. At that point, Saul erupted with abusive speech and violence toward his son.

Then Saul's anger burned against Jonathan and he said to him, “You son of a perverse, rebellious woman! Do I not know that you are choosing the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of your mother's nakedness? For as long as the son of Jesse lives on the earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established. Therefore now, send and bring him to me, for he must surely die” (20:30,31).

Jonathan was stunned by his father's verbal outburst. But Saul went a step further: he threw his spear at Jonathan and tried to kill him! It was then that *“Jonathan knew that his father had decided to put David to death.”*

Then Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger, and did not eat food on the second day of the new moon, for he was grieved over David because his father had dishonored him (20:34).

The next morning, Jonathan went to where David was hiding in the field, and informed him that he must flee because his father was trying to kill him. As they parted from one another, the two men were extremely grieved that they would not be able to serve God's purposes alongside of one another. *“And they kissed each other and wept together, but David more” (20:41).*

A “covenant relationship” is when two people bind themselves to one another in a very special way. There are typically 3 elements involved: 1) Symbols of the covenant. 2) A sacrifice that each party makes for the other. 3) A spoken commitment regarding the terms of the covenant (Beth Moore, *A Heart Like His*, ch.10). Jonathan initiated this relationship with David, which is interesting because he was actually about 10 years older than David. In these early years of David's flight from Saul, it was Jonathan who primarily fulfilled “his part of the bargain.” It would be after Jonathan's death that David would fulfill his part of the covenant, by caring for Jonathan's last remaining descendant (2 Samuel 9).

Jonathan was the “true” older brother that David never had. He supported, encouraged and protected David in ways that Eliab never did. Jonathan is the best example of a “true friend” in the entire Bible!

Who do you have in your life that you are in a covenant relationship with? Marriage is the most common such relationship today; but there can be others IF you choose to form them. Who might you be a true brother or sister with you?

David flees to the priest at Nob: 21:1-9

David was now on the run, and will be until Saul’s death. His first (and most tragic) stop was the city of Nob, the home of Ahimelech the high priest and the entire clan of priests. When Ahimelech asked why David had come, **he concocted a lie** that he was on a ‘secret mission’ from Saul.

David said to Ahimelech the priest, “The king has commissioned me with a matter and has said to me, ‘Let no one know anything about the matter on which I am sending you and with which I have commissioned you; and I have directed the young men to a certain place’” (21:2).

David and his men received provisions from Ahimelech, including the sword of Goliath, which David had taken from the giant on the day of his defeat. In the midst of the account of David’s visit to Ahimelech, there is **an ominous note** recorded about the presence of a certain servant of Saul who was watching everything closely.

“Now one of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the Lord; and his name was Doeg the Edomite, the chief of Saul’s shepherds” (21:7).

This random observer, Doeg, becomes central as the story unfolds.

David flees to Gath: 21:10-15

Surprisingly, David fled for refuge into Philistine territory **twice** during his exile years (see later in ch.27). We recall that the Philistines were the archenemies of Israel. Further, Gath was the city from which Goliath had hailed. Now, David was seeking refuge in Goliath’s hometown!

Very quickly, however, the officers of Achish, king of Gath, reminded their king of the song that the Israelites sang about David: *“Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands.”* At that point, David feared that the Philistines might put him to death. In order to escape, David brought out his best acting skills, **pretending to be insane**.

“David took these words to heart and greatly feared Achish king of Gath. So he disguised his sanity before them, and acted insanelly in their hands, and scribbled on the doors of the gate, and let his saliva run down into his beard” (21:12,13).

The king of Gath scoffed that he didn't need another madman in his country. Thus, David narrowly escaped from this predicament.

Psalms 34 and 56 are connected with the occasion of David's narrow escape from the Philistines in Gath. While David was playing the madman, he was inwardly praying for his deliverance from his own misguided movements. He was *“brokenhearted”* inside, while using his best acting skills to get out of Gath alive! Following are selections from these Psalms:

“I prayed to the Lord, and He answered me ... This poor man cried, and the Lord listened; He saved me from all my troubles... The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; He rescues those whose spirits are crushed. The righteous person faces many troubles; but the Lord comes to the rescue each time” (Ps.34:4,6,18,19).

“O God, have mercy on me, for people are hounding me. My foes attack me all day long. I am constantly hounded by those who slander me, and many are boldly attacking me. But when I am afraid, I will put my trust in you. I praise God for what he has promised. I trust in God, so why should I be afraid? What can mere mortals do to me? You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book. This I know: God is on my side! I praise God for what he has promised; yes, I praise the Lord for what he has promised. I trust in God, so why should I be afraid? What can mere mortals do to me?” (Ps.56:1-4,8-11).

According to the account in 1 Samuel 20:12, David was *“greatly afraid”* of the king of Gath. Yet, in Psalm 56 he writes, *“I trust in God, so WHY should I be afraid?”* **We can hear David vacillating again between fear and faith. This represents the ongoing human struggle to keep our eyes on God and His promises in the midst of our struggles and pain.**

Who would have ever guessed that David was writing songs and prayers to God while at the same time playing the madman at Gath?

Outward appearances can be deceiving. Don't let outward appearances stop you from really exploring another person's heart. **They may be “managing” the situation on the outside; but crying out on the inside.**

David in the cave of Adullam: 22:1-5

Returning to Israelite territory, David made the cave of Adullam his hideout. There, his family joined him, along with many unlikely, misfit warriors.

“So David departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam; and when his brothers and all his father’s household heard of it, they went down there to him. Everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented gathered to him; and he became captain over them. Now there were about four hundred men with him” (22:1,2).

David took his parents to Moab, where he left them in the care of the king (22:3,4). **Here at Adullam, we first hear of “the prophet Gad” who became a lifelong advisor to David.** Perhaps he was sent by Samuel (from the school of prophets at Naioth) to accompany and advise David. In any case, Gad was God’s means for direct communication with David for the rest of his life.

The prophet Gad said to David, “Do not stay in the stronghold; depart, and go into the land of Judah.” So David departed and went into the forest of Hereth (22:5).

David’s openness to hearing and heeding the voice of God determined whether things went well or poorly with him. There were many times when David “managed” his flight with his own ideas and strategies (lying, deception, hiding in Philistine territory, etc.) instead of listening for God’s voice.

Today, God has given us His Word to speak into our lives. His Word, applied very specifically to each of us by His Spirit, is His way of guiding us into His will.

“You will do well to be attentive to this (Word) as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (2 Peter 1:19).

Saul slaughters the priests: 22:6-23

Saul complained to his officers that none of them were truly supportive of him, since they were not informing him of Jonathan’s moves to protect David. Doeg the Edomite, who had previously witnessed Ahimelech the priest assisting David (21:1- 9), decided it was time to speak up and show his loyalty to Saul.

“I saw the son of Jesse coming to Nob, to Ahimelech the son of Ahitub. He inquired of the Lord for him, gave him provisions, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine” (22:9,10).

Doeg’s report made it sound as if Ahimelech was intentionally aiding David in escaping from Saul. **His skewed testimony was a death sentence for all of the priests in the city of Nob.** Saul commanded his officers to kill all 85 priests. When none of them would obey, Doeg was more than willing to be the executioner.

“And Doeg the Edomite turned around and attacked the priests, and he killed that day eighty-five men who wore the linen ephod. And he struck Nob the city of the priests with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and infants; also oxen, donkeys, and sheep he struck with the edge of the sword” (22:18,19).

The death of these priests fulfilled an earlier judgment from God pronounced upon the house of Eli and his relatives (1 Samuel 2:31 and 3:13,14). **Thus, we can see in this terrible incident the actions of human evil merging with the sovereign judgments of God.**

This is similar to the death of Jesus, brought about by a combination of the wicked hands of men and the sovereign purpose of God (see Peter’s explanation in Acts 2:23). The humans who exercise their wills to do evil will be held accountable for their actions. At the same time, the plans and purposes of God will be fulfilled even as humans use their will to do evil.

Abiathar escapes and reports to David: 22:20-23

Of the priest slaughtered by Doeg, only 1 survived. Abiathar made his way to David with somber news of the massacre. David owned his responsibility in the matter, going so far as to admit that the minute he saw Doeg on that fateful day with Ahimelech at Nob (21:7) he knew there would be trouble ahead for the priests.

Then David said to Abiathar, “I knew on that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul. I have brought about the death of every person in your father’s household. Stay with me; do not be afraid, for he who seeks my life seeks your life, for you are safe with me” (22:22,23).

This surely must have been one of the lowest points of David’s life, as he came to grips with the fallout from his own sins and self-protective strategies.

David's flight from Saul will continue, consuming nearly a decade of his life until the death of Saul (1 Samuel 31).

During these early years (chs. 19-22) he learned some hard lessons about how FEAR could cause him to try to MANAGE his own life and PROVIDE for his own protection; rather than TRUSTING God and moving in OBEDIENCE to His revealed will.

David had a clear promise of God hanging over his life: You WILL BE Israel's next king. Still, it was hard for the "man after God's own heart" to believe that God's word was true and His promise sure. And so it is for all of us.