

I Samuel

Lesson 41 - Chapter 26 and 27

Last week we concluded the episode in David's life when Avigayil interceded in her husband, **Nabal's**, fight with David by convincing David that he should not take vengeance into his own hands. God is David's avenger and surely He will act to punish **Nabal** for his lack of charity and the disrespect shown to God's anointed **nagid** (King in waiting) for Israel. David relented and the Scriptures make it clear that it was in David's best interests that he left the matter in the Lord's hands. Had he not he would have committed the sin of blood guilt (unjustifiable killing of a man), and while there is no way for us to know for certain it is likely that this would have derailed David's opportunity to be King of Israel. For the sin of blood guilt is among the worst possible trespasses against the Lord and there is no atonement available for it. Would God have allowed such a man to replace an already failed King? It is highly questionable.

Sure enough in but a matter of days **Nabal** had a stroke and died. While the verses don't specifically say that **Nabal's** death was Yehoveh avenging David, it is made clear that **Nabal's** death was **perceived** as being a divine act. David certainly felt it was God's justice at work and yet, what exactly was **Nabal's** crime? So far as we know it was primarily insulting David and acting without charity and perhaps behaving unfairly according to the customs of the day. But even acknowledging that **Nabal** was a godless fool (as attested by his name) there appears to be no direct violation of Torah Law worthy of capital punishment. So the question is: was **Nabal's** death directly for the purpose of avenging David? Answer, I doubt it. **Nabal** was simply a wicked and unsavory man and apparently the Lord determined that his death would serve Kingdom purposes more than to continue living. I can assure you that if this happened today it would be said that while coincidental to the conflict with David, **Nabal** died of natural causes. The Lord gives and takes away life at His own good pleasure, and for reasons that are rarely apparent to the living. This is an attribute of Yehoveh that is among the most mysterious and bothersome and difficult to accept; and yet it is so.

Knowing a good thing when he saw one David sent messengers to **Nabal's** widow, Abigail, and asked her to become his wife. She immediately agreed. The same passage at the end of chapter 25 tells us two other things about David's marital status: first, he married another woman as well as Abigail; her name was **Achinoam**. Second, King Saul spitefully took David's first wife, Michal, and gave her as a wife to another man, **Phaltiel**. Since there was no divorce by David of Michal, essentially Michal was married to two men simultaneously. Now whether Saul's rash act was the result of getting word of David's two new wives and being offended by it or it was a way of severing official familial connections with David, we don't know. It matters not for the effect was the same. All hope of reconciliation between David and

Saul ended.

So as of the end of chapter 25 David technically had 3 wives: Michal, **Achinoam**, and Abigail. Practically speaking he had only two; but the two he had were as much about politics as was his original bride, Saul's daughter Michal. **Achinoam** and Abigail were from two different and important clans of the tribe of Judah; David's marriage into these clans built up good will and gave him access and influence then with 3 powerful clans within the tribe of Judah, when counting his own clan (the clan of Yishai, Jesse). This would help pave the way for his eventual coronation as King of Judah.

Let's pick up David's story in 1st Samuel chapter 26.

READ 1ST SAMUEL CHAPTER 26 all

Here we find David in an all too familiar situation: Saul was once again in pursuit of him and his men. It didn't take long for the anti-King to forget and rationalize-away his tearful words to David (as recorded in 1st Samuel 24) when Saul told David that surely David was God's anointed King and worthy of the position. Sha'ul was so certain of David's rise to the throne (and of YHWH's hand in it) that he asked him to promise that he wouldn't kill Saul's children and descendants but rather would show them kindness.

Since David will be the focus of our study for months on end, I'd like to make a couple of comments. As I was looking at what various Hebrew sages and Christian commentators thought about this ongoing transition from Saul to David, and whether we can count on the accuracy of the Scriptures in this regard, there were some startling conclusions. While Rabbis and Hebrew scholars tend to make David as nearly flawless and thus have no real problem with the Scriptures as written (except to fancifully explain away David's foopahs), the more liberal Christian scholars and disciples of the Literary Criticism approach to Bible Study have always felt that what we read in Samuel regarding David is more propaganda than divine truth. That essentially what we are reading is a lot of after-the-fact rewriting of history by those loyal to David to make David look good; and thus to accomplish this Saul had to appear (unfairly) as a super-villain.

Early on in our study of 1st Samuel I explained that we needed to view Saul as a type of Anti-King/Anti-Christ as opposed to David as a type of God-anointed Messiah. And that this was a pattern that would persist right on through Revelation. I say unapologetically that Saul ought to be viewed about as we view Hitler or even Lucifer. Here, however, is the view of Otto Thenius, a leading Christian commentator from Germany writing in the mid-1800's when Germany was the center of modern Christian exegesis and doctrinal development. Those views remain the prominent views within Christianity in our time. Here then is Thenius' view on King Saul:

“Saul would have been a moral monster, which he evidently was not, if he had pursued David with quiet deliberation, and through the medium of the same persons, and had sought his life again, after his own life had been so magnanimously spared by (David)....”

I hope you caught the essence of Thenius' thinking on the matter because he represents a very common approach to analyzing Holy Scripture since the late 1700's. And it is that certain Bible passages are not to be trusted if an intellectual Bible Scholar feels that they have a better solution. This is the same approximate period that the modern allegorical method of approaching the Bible also erupted; a method that dominates the institutional Church today. The thinking is that Saul couldn't possibly be all that bad, because no human could be so mean or morally depraved as to have their own life spared and then to determine to kill the person who spared it. Therefore the only logical conclusion for an intelligent person is that the Scripture is faulty and corrupt and instead we need to see Saul more sympathetically and David as significantly less approved-by-God than what we read. We need to give Saul and David a better, more even, balance. And of course this view is imbedded in most of what is written and taught on the matter for the last 2 centuries.

Not only is there no evidence to back up such a view (but rather it revolves only around a learned scholar's personal views and agenda), but such a view has done great violence to the Bible itself. For if we are going to pick and choose which parts to believe and which parts to discredit or even discard then what credence can we give to any of it?

This narrative of 1st Samuel chapter 26 tells of a second opportunity for David to end Saul's life and thus accelerate by his own hand his rise to the throne of Israel (an opportunity which David refuses).

Verse 1 explains that the residents of Zif again betrayed David by going to Saul and informing him of David's whereabouts. Why the leaders of Zif are so adamantly against David one can only speculate. Saul took 3000 soldiers with him, as he had before when seeking David, and left immediately. In the earlier incident when the members of Zif came to Saul with similar intelligence, the king was grateful but not convinced that the men of Zif actually knew where David was so he asked them to verify it and then report back (Saul was not about to send 3000 men on an expedition without some assurances). It turned out that the men of Zif were correct, even though after Saul had surrounded David he had to withdraw because the Philistines took that opportunity to invade Israel. So this time when the men of Zif came to him concerning David's location he believed them and responded without hesitation.

When Saul and his troops arrived to the wilderness area surrounding Zif, they camped by the road that led up to the hill of **Hachilah** where apparently David and his men were currently residing. David's spies spotted Saul's army and informed David, and David sent more spies to reconnoiter. Once David got the surveillance information that he sought, he waited until an opportune moment and snuck up on the encampment after nightfall. He saw that Abner (the supreme general of Saul's army) had come along this time and that Saul was sleeping in a protected area with soldiers all around him. Abner was nearest to Saul, acting as his personal bodyguard.

In verse 6 David asks among his most trusted men who would go with him down to the enemy camp and a fellow named **Avishai** volunteered. We're told that **Avishai** (which means "my father is **Yishai**, or Jesse") was the son of **Zeruiah**, the brother of **Yoab**. As we might expect, **Avishai** was a close relative of David because it was customary (and safer) to have your inner circle consist primarily of family members who have a lot to gain by seeing to your good health. Thus the name Avishai lets everyone know that he is part of Jesse's clan. **Zeruiah** was Jesse's daughter and David's sister, so **Avishai** was David's nephew. **Zeruiah** was mother to **Avishai**, **Yoav**, and **Asahel**. **Avishai** is commander of David's army and so naturally it is he who can't refuse to go with David down to Saul's camp because the army commander is also the leader's chief protector.

Why did David want to go down to Saul's camp? Had he changed his mind and now wanted to confront Saul and finish him off? No; I am sure that **Avishai** thought so but David was still intent on proving his innocence to the King (as naïve as that may be). God blessed those intentions, as risky and unwise as they were. The men that were supposed to be guarding Saul not only fell into a sleep, but a deep sleep. We are to understand that the Lord induced in them this soundness of sleep such that the normally super-aware warriors who would stir at the sound of a stick cracking would be oblivious to David and Avishai's presence in their camp. Noiselessly the two creep closer until they stand looming over the king himself. Sha'ul's spear (which had become his scepter, the symbol of his reign and authority) was stuck in the ground

next to him with Abner, Saul's chief general, but inches away. Avishai naturally concluded that as unlikely as it is that they could get this close to the king and still be alive it could only mean that the God of Israel has His hand in this and has turned Saul over to them for execution.

In verse 8 **Avishai** essentially says, "Let me do it!" He says that using Saul's own spear that he'll kill him in one stroke, there certainly won't be a need for a 2nd one. But David stays **Avishai's** hand and tells him not to "destroy" Saul because nobody can raise his hand against Adonai's anointed king without becoming guilty himself. For David, Saul is still the king (the rightful God appointed king) and he cannot bring himself to have Saul killed because he sees it as an affront to God. He goes on to say that if **Adonai** wants to kill him, or if Saul dies in battle, that's another matter; but David will not kill him or have him killed. In fact David is probably saying that it is certain that Saul will be killed at the Lord's hand in the Lord's timing (he is undoubtedly thinking back to what happened with Nabal).

When David tells **Avishai** to "not destroy" Saul, it is a little different than saying "don't kill him". The Hebrew is **al tashitehu** and it means to mutilate, or to deface or corrupt. And the idea is that while killing the king would bring on the sin of blood guilt, there is also another sin piled on if one would kill the king in a way that disgracefully disfigures him (something that just isn't done to a king). Actually this statement mostly represents the customs of the times when even an enemy king is seen as above most mortals, so he must be accorded special privileges even in his death.

Instead the two men abscond with Saul's spear and his water canteen as proof of their presence, and they leave as stealthily as they arrived. Once they were sufficiently far away so as not to be captured David shouts towards Saul's camp and the bleary eyed soldiers awaken to their embarrassment. David specifically calls out **Avner's** name, in order to humiliate him. Using unrestrained sarcasm David wants to know how it is that Saul's highest officer and best warrior has allowed the enemy to stand over his king, able to kill him in an instant, and neither Abner nor his soldiers be aware of it? And he holds up the king's spear and personal water jug as proof of his claim. By all rights Abner and his men should be ordered executed by the king for being derelict in their duty to guard him. It is the first duty of all the soldiers to protect their king at all costs and they have failed miserably.

Saul awakens amid all the shouting and confusion. He hears a familiar voice and asks rhetorically if it's the voice of "his son" David. David confirms it. Abner is stunned, humiliated and so is silent as the King inquires after David and David responds by politely and submissively asking for permission to speak. David is still searching for the cause of this irrational hatred of Saul against him and so tells the king that if it is God who has instigated this

conflict then they should make an offering to God in hopes He will reverse course and take away Saul's anger. What David actually says is, "May God *ruakh Minchah*" and it literally means to smell the smoke of a sacrifice. We discussed in our study of the book of Leviticus how the smoke of the offering was seen as all-important because the idea was that the smoke wafted up to the heavens where God would smell it and be appeased because it meant that His people were being obedient to his commandments to make sacrifices of atonement. The bottom line is that if Saul's paranoia has been brought about by God as some sort of punishment, then may the Lord show mercy; but if this is just the wicked inclinations of men at work, may they be accursed.

The last part of verse 19 expresses at least part of David's concern for himself; it is that he has been driven out and so no longer has part in the Lord's inheritance. What does that mean? Do you remember what the Lord's inheritance is? It is the land; every Hebrew's inheritance is the Land of Canaan. So David is saying that because of this irrational and unjust war upon him he has been denied the ability to live peacefully within the Promised Land. Thus those who are doing this to him are essentially telling David to go and worship other gods. What has exile from the Promised Land got to do with worshipping other gods? We are dealing with ancient superstition that still held that gods are territorial (and David and Saul also believed that). Each nation had its own gods and when you crossed a national boundary into another country you left one set of gods behind and came into the sphere of influence of the gods of the territory you have entered. So if David was unable to live in Israel, then he would have no choice but to live in some other nation and worship that nation's gods since Yehoveh had no influence anywhere but in Israel.

So for Saul to unjustly chase one of God's chosen out of his own inheritance and away from God's presence actually amounted to a capital offense against the God of Israel who owns the land of Israel and rules over them through a king. So David is saying he certainly doesn't want to die outside of Israel and away from Yehoveh's presence. And even this had to do with the ancient mindset of ancestor worship and what happens after you die.

The last few words of verse 20 lose their meaning when translated into English. Those words say that the King of Israel is chasing a worthless man as though he was hunting partridge. Actually there was some memorable wordplay going on here; let me see if I can explain it in brief fashion. The Hebrew word for partridge is *haqoreh*, and it literally means "the caller". So we have David standing on a mountain "calling" to Abner and Saul and he parallels Saul's chasing after him to the hunting of "the caller" (partridges). In verse 14 Abner says, "*mi atta haqoreh?*" or "who is it that calls?" or most literally "who are you, O caller?" So David turns the tables and mocks Abner's words by referring to himself as *haqoreh*, the caller, (I David am the caller, the *haqoreh*. David says that he is the calling bird (a partridge) who is hunted in the mountains by Saul and Abner. Remember that this story (like all other stories in the Bible) was

handed down by word of mouth for generation after generation before it was eventually written down. So this interesting word play was undoubtedly a highlight of the story and brought on laughter from the audience as it was retold around the campfire.

Reminiscent of their encounter in En-Gedi, Saul turns mushy on David, calls him “his son” and pleads with him to come home to the king’s palace. He promises that he won’t do evil to David any more and that once again David has proven his loyalty by sparing Saul’s life. David has figured out that Saul’s word means nothing, so basically his response ignores Saul’s offer.

David instead offers to return the Kings spear (which is Saul’s scepter) and tells Saul to send one his soldiers to come and fetch it. David has come to grips (even though only perhaps momentarily) with the heavenly reality that our reward for righteousness and faithfulness comes not from other men but from the Lord. While it ought to be reasonably expected that Saul would return good for good, in reality the only guarantor of receiving a blessing for our righteous behavior is Yehoveh and that may not even come in this life, but later. This foundational but critical God-principle is found in the New Testament in a number of forms:

(Matthew 6:1-4 CJB) "Be careful not to parade your acts of tzedakah in front of people in order to be seen by them! If you do, you have no reward from your Father in heaven.² So, when you do tzedakah, don't announce it with trumpets to win people's praise, like the hypocrites in the synagogues and on the streets. Yes! I tell you, they have their reward already!³ But you, when you do tzedakah, don't even let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.⁴ Then your tzedakah will be in secret; and your Father, who sees what you do in secret, will reward you.

^{CJB} Romans 2:7 To those who seek glory, honor and immortality by perseverance in doing good, he will pay back eternal life. (Rom 2:7 CJB)

Saul has the final word; he actually bestows a blessing, a ***berachah***, on David and says that whatever David undertakes he will surely achieve. The two men parted and in life would never see each other again. Soon, just as the Lord took care of matters with Nabal he would take care of matters with Saul, and David would avoid any blood on his hands at least as far as dealing with Saul. But the reality is that heroes are some of the most flawed men on the planet

and David is chief among them; this will be well demonstrated in the next chapter.

Turn to 1st Samuel chapter 27.

READ 1ST SAMUEL CHAPTER 27 all

Here is a chapter that shoots a lot of holes in liberal Theologians' theories that most of the book of Samuel was created as propaganda to validate David's dynasty replacing Saul's. No writer or editor whose goal is to make David seem worthy, let alone perfect, would justify his position by including what we have just read in Samuel 27. If ever there was a time when David had the blood of innocents dripping from his hands; and when his mouth was contorted with his lies and deceptions this is the one. But I think as we delve into this episode you'll see that it might be even worse than it appears at first glance.

Something has shifted in David's thinking. It may have been the encounter in chapter 26 in the Zif wilderness, but it probably was equally as much that Saul had viciously given David's wife Michal to another man. It's hard to put into the words the extreme injury and insult to David's honor that occurred with that act. Nonetheless David no longer believed he could remain in Judah. David concluded that Saul would hound him until one or the other of them was dead so David took the drastic step of once again going to the Philistines. He went back to the same place, Gath, where he feigned insanity only few years earlier to survive. But there is a difference: David first went to Gath as a lone fugitive looking for sanctuary and mercy. He was rejected. This time he went as the leader of a substantial army and had something to offer: services to the King of Gath in return for a good living and protection from King Saul. At the least the King of Gath would "divide and conquer" so to speak by allowing David to come and stay. David was probably the single most influential force within the tribe of Judah, and therefore the territory of Judah. There is little chance that any clan of Judah would now give their full loyalty to Saul, a leader of the northern coalition of Israelite tribes, so Achish undoubtedly figured that the enemy of my enemy is my friend. Even if he didn't fully trust David, David was Saul's mortal enemy and that was useful for the Philistines. Judah would be more co-operative with the Philistines with David as an ally and a resident, so they could focus their military assets on the remainder of Israel in the north.

It seems that this time Achish welcomed David and housed David and his small army in the

city of Gath as his guests. It is clear that David's two wives Achinoam and Avigayil went with him. When Saul heard of what happened, he abandoned his pursuit of David (as David had hoped he would).

Some time passed. Verse 5 has David approaching the king of Gath and asking to be given territory of his own rather than continuing to live under Achish's nose; Philistine territory of course. What we find is that David has essentially become a favored vassal to the Philistine King as Achish grants him his request. This is not at all unlike the feudal system of old in Eastern Europe; David supplies military assistance to the king and in return the king grants David some territory to lord over and a little more independence.

No doubt for Achish it made sense to give David a little space. It could not have looked good for this foreigner with his own army, loyal only to David, to live in the capital city of their supposed master. Moving them out to the countryside solved that problem but it also removed the rather irksome restraints that David would have been under for obvious political reasons. So we see in verse 6 that "that very day" (meaning Achish didn't have to think about David's request for long) the city of Ziklag was assigned to David. It was a logical choice as Ziklag previously belonged to Judah, but now was under Philistine control. But even being considered part of Judah was a recent development. Ziklag was originally assigned by Moses and Joshua to the tribe of Simeon; that it became part of Judah demonstrates something we have discussed before. It is that in a tribal system there is no end to each tribe attempting to increase its influence and to become the most dominant in the region. Already during Saul's reign the tribe of Simeon was substantially absorbed by the tribe of Judah. This was not accomplished by pleasantries but by tribal warfare for the most part. By the time David died and Solomon took over, Simeon essentially all but disappeared as a separate tribal entity and the people and the territory of Simeon became rolled into Judah.

We'll stop here and continue with David's time in Philistia next week.