

David, the shepherd who became king

Part 1

Preface

The importance of David in the unfolding story of God's grace to sinners in the Bible is very significant, not least because of his direct link with the Lord Jesus Christ who is often referred to in Christian literature as 'great David's greater son'. In the New Testament passages describing the birth of Christ Luke records the words of the angel Gabriel to Mary concerning Jesus that:

"He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; his kingdom will never end." (Luke 1,32-33)

David was the most influential king Old Testament Israel ever knew and his influence in establishing the kingdom is well documented. But we must never forget that though David was a great man of God whom the Lord used in remarkable ways, he was just a man. Like us he knew the ups and downs of life with its many trials. As well as famous successes he also knew what it was to fail God and we find reflections of our own characters in the often turbulent details of his life, some of which are in this first volume covering his life. For David there was a long period of preparation before he was eventually crowned king, and this book looks at some of those years. What is clear throughout is that the hand of God was on this man

for good, as it is upon all those who truly belong to him (see Romans 8,28).

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1) David's ancestry

The very first mention we have of David in our Bibles is in the very last chapter of the book of Ruth. You will remember that Ruth, who came from the country of Moab, became a true believer in the Lord, the God of Israel. She eventually married godly Boaz in Bethlehem and the Lord gave them a son. This is how this is described in Ruth 4,13-17:

"So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. Then he went to her, and the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. The women said to Naomi (Ruth's mother-in-law): 'Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has

given him birth.’ Then Naomi took the child, laid him in her lap and cared for him. The women living there said, ‘Naomi has a son.’ And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.”

All this is a reminder of just how much the grace of God is in evidence in all the events surrounding David’s life. Ruth was not born into the nation of Israel, and Moab was an idolatrous nation, but the Lord none-the-less rescued her from that sinful past and by his grace brought her into the people of God. In a real sense her conversion was a foretaste of the way the gospel of God’s grace in the Lord Jesus Christ would not be limited to only one nation, but would be effective in the lives of millions of people from all the nations of the world.

Ruth’s first declaration of her love for God is recorded in Ruth 1 beginning at verse 16. Her mother-in-law Naomi was returning to Bethlehem after many sad years in Moab and she had urged Ruth to return to her own people, but she refused, and this is what she said:

“But Ruth replied, ‘Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me.’”

Not only that but we also see the honour God bestowed on Ruth and David because they became direct descendants of

the Lord Jesus Christ himself. You will find the details in Matthew chapter 1. As mentioned in the Preface, this is why the Lord Jesus Christ is often called ‘great David’s greater son’.

2) David’s background.

Some of these things we will look at in greater detail as we work through David’s life chronologically, but they deserve a mention at this point so that we get a good picture of this mighty servant of the Lord. As well as being Ruth’s great-grandson, he was the youngest of 8 brothers. (1 Samuel 17,12 tells us his father Jesse had 8 sons, and 1 Chronicles 2,16 mentions two daughters.) So David would have been used to family life and the rivalry that often characterises children in a family. We can also say that, unlike Joseph in the book of Genesis; he was not a favourite or spoilt son, he was simply the youngest.

When introduced to us in 1 Samuel 16 we find David was also a working shepherd and would have been brought up by his father and his brothers to look after the family’s flock. This was an important training period in David’s life as a number of the skills he learned whilst minding the sheep would come into great usefulness later on. For example he learned courage, fighting off wild animals including a bear and a lion when they attacked the flock. This was put to good use in battles with God’s enemies later on, notably the Philistine giant Goliath. Also as a shepherd he would have learned tenderness, patience and thoughtfulness as he cared for his sheep. These he displayed in his own life and leadership and particularly in

his Psalms where he describes the Lord as his Shepherd. This was seen in its fullest extent in David's most famous descendant, the Lord Jesus Christ who described himself as the good shepherd.

David also suffered hostility from his brothers, just like Joseph did but not as severely as they sold him into slavery but that did not happen in David's case. However when he came to visit the Israelite army as it was facing the Philistines and their champion Goliath, David's older brother Eliab spoke very harshly to him and about him (see 1 Samuel 17). No doubt this was because of jealousy over his God given abilities and also that he was anointed by Samuel while Eliab was passed by.

What all this background helps us to see is that God was at work in David's life long before he came to prominence in Israel. And that is something we see again and again in the Bible. It is interesting to note, for example, that Moses and Amos were shepherds before they came to leadership positions. Often as we look back over our lives we can see that God was at work in them long before we were aware, and also that he was using all the particular experiences of life that we have individually experienced – the good and the bad – to prepare us for greater usefulness in the Lord's work in the future. Jeremiah was told that even before he was born God was shaping him into the kind of man God wanted him to be in order for him to become God's prophet (Jeremiah 1). From this we learn that nothing is wasted in the Lord's dealings with his children. We may not always understand what God is doing with our lives,

but we can rest assured that he does all things well and that he will use all that happens to us to make us more like Christ.

3) David's introduction.

After that first mention of David at the end of the book of Ruth we then have to wait until 1 Samuel 16 before he is mentioned again. During that intervening period Israel had chosen to become a monarchy. They wanted to be just like other nations around them. Their words spoken to Samuel are recorded in 1 Samuel 8,5:

“They said to him (i.e. Samuel), ‘You are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have.’”

This was something that made God's prophet Samuel deeply distressed, and the Lord spoke to him about it in 1 Samuel 8,7-9:

“And the Lord told him: ‘Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will do.’”

Therefore God let them have what they wanted. Saul was appointed as their first king. Saul's reign began well, but it

was not long before he became disobedient to the Lord. Through Samuel, God told Saul to completely destroy the Amalekites who had been long-term enemies of the Lord's people. Indeed everything they owned had to be devoted to God by being destroyed. Saul won the battle with them but spared their king and saved the best of the sheep and cattle. He tried to excuse his actions by saying he had saved them so they could be sacrificed to the Lord. Samuel's reply was devastating in 1 Samuel 15,22ff:

“But Samuel replied: ‘Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you as king.’”

This is an important lesson for us to learn well. Obedience is something that God prizes highly in his children. Indeed, obedience, Jesus said in John 14 verses 15 and 21, was one of the distinguishing marks of those who love him.

“If you love me, you will obey what I command...whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.”

The lesson from this is clear. Disobedience grieves God and deprives us of his blessing. The result for Saul was, although he lived for several years after this incident with

the Amalekites, there was the need to anoint a new king to succeed him. God had rejected him.

This is where David comes to the forefront of Old Testament history. We shall look at the precise details in the next chapter, but we need to note that so often when we see the sinfulness of man and the spiritual darkness that brings, the Lord breaks into that darkness in his grace. The appointment of David as Israel's next king is an excellent example of this. This in turn encourages us to remember that God's work will always be accomplished however strong the opposition or how sinful the world may become. God is not at a loss at such times, and we see this with David here. Remember the Lord Jesus Christ assured us that there was no doubt at all about the fact that he would build his church (Matthew 16:18). Not only that, Jesus went on to say that all the opposition in the world could not frustrate his purposes, for not even the gates of hell would be able to prevail against it. This does not mean that opposition and evil will not trouble us, as they will, but it does mean the Lord's work will succeed. This is a great encouragement when we are serving in difficult circumstances and when it seems that evil men are gaining the ascendancy. We must look to the Lord and stand firm and he will make us see the salvation of our God.

Chapter 2: David anointed to be King (1 Samuel 16,1-13)

It might surprise you to know there are no less than 58 references to the Old Testament King David in the New Testament alone. In fact his importance is seen further in that he is quoted more than any other Old Testament writer. He was a great man of God and we have much to learn from him. But this did not mean he was a perfect man: only Jesus could be given that title. Just like us, David had his flaws, and these will become apparent in coming chapters. They are no doubt recorded that we may learn to avoid making the same mistakes ourselves, but our starting point today is not with David's low spiritual points but one of extraordinary spiritual heights. Three chapters before ours, that is in 1 Samuel 13, God told King Saul through Samuel that his kingdom would not endure and then added this in verse 14:

"...the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him a leader of his people..."

This verse is quoted by Paul in Acts 13,22 where he declared:

"After removing Saul, he made David their king. He testified concerning him: 'I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.'"

It is a most remarkable testimony which God himself made about David, and it had important implications in the appointing of Saul's successor, which initially even someone as spiritually minded as the prophet Samuel was

not fully aware. The Bible commentator John Gill explains this description of David as meaning he was a man every way agreeable to the will of God, and who would fulfil that will. Already in his early years, as David would probably have been in his mid teens at this stage, God saw him to be a godly man who was already displaying those qualities that would be required of him as the King of Israel, the temporal leader of God's Old Testament people. He was a man whose life centred on God, so that he was in tune with the Lord. The desires God had, David had. The likes God had, David had. The hates that God had, David had. His whole way of thinking and speaking and behaving was spiritual and Scriptural. His life was submissive to God and his directives, and he was sensitive to God's will. David was a man whose motives were not selfish but selfless, desiring God's honour in every part of his life. Another Bible commentator, Charles Swindoll, has written:

"A servant has one great goal, and that is to make the person he serves look better, to make that person even more successful. A servant does not want that person he serves to fail. A servant doesn't care who gets the glory, just so the job gets done."

And that was David's attitude in his service for God. It was all for his praise and honour. But we have to say that none of this was at all obvious to those who knew David well, including his own father Jesse, as we shall see.

Old Testament scholars put the date of this chapter around 1025 BC although it was a further 14 years later before David was publicly acknowledged as king.

1) Samuel told to anoint Saul's successor. (1 Samuel 16,1-5)

The prophet Samuel's ministry was very widespread and at times very difficult. It was he who had delivered God's message of rejection to Saul in 1 Samuel 15, and that put his life in considerable danger. As we mentioned before, he had earlier told Saul that God had already his successor in view in chapter 13. Indeed, we have to say these were very difficult messages to deliver, but Samuel was a faithful servant of the Lord and he obeyed God to the letter. It is this background which helps us to understand his reaction to God's next instruction to him. Samuel had moved to Ramah (1 Samuel 15,34). In 1 Samuel 16:1 the Lord told him to stop mourning for Saul and to go to Bethlehem to anoint his successor.

“The Lord said to Samuel, ‘How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king.’”

Up until then the name of Saul's successor or precisely where he was to be found had not been revealed by God, but now that time had arrived. Having seen Samuel's previous obedience in delivering difficult messages to Saul, one might think this more joyous task would be undertaken

with great fervour by Samuel. However, he foresees a great obstacle and tells the Lord about it. The journey from Ramah to Bethlehem passed through Gibeah of Saul, and immediately Samuel is fearful. We read in 1 Samuel 16,2:

“But Samuel said, ‘How can I go? Saul will hear about it and kill me.’”

Such a reaction was understandable knowing the jealous nature Saul had. It also shows us that even this great prophet of God was only a man, and he had the same concerns that we often have. Samuel was like many other great servants of God who were fearful at times, such as Moses and Jeremiah. We have to admit how easily we can say we cannot do what God asks us. Then how good to know the Lord delights to use the weak things of the world to accomplish his purposes and ensure all the glory is given to him. The Lord does not rebuke or crush Samuel, but graciously gives him a reason for going to Bethlehem, namely to offer a sacrifice (v2) and Jesse was to be invited. If Saul did learn of this it would have had a restraining effect on him knowing Samuel was doing the Lord's business. Samuel obeyed immediately.

On arriving at Bethlehem such was the stature and high regard in which the people held Samuel; we read their elders trembled (v4) wanting to know if Samuel's purpose was one of peace. Samuel told them he had come to sacrifice to the Lord and that there would be a feast, therefore he urged them to prepare spiritually as well as

ceremonially for the occasion. Samuel then consecrated Jesse and his sons.

2) Man looks at the outside, God looks at the heart. (1 Samuel 16,6-13)

Knowing that it was one of Jesse's sons who was to be anointed king one can imagine the sense of holy excitement as Samuel sees the first of Jesse's sons arriving. His name was Eliab and it seems he was of good appearance and also height. Remember Saul was also head and shoulders above the rest of the men (1 Samuel 9,2). Eliab certainly made an impression on Samuel for we are told what he thought in 1 Samuel 16:6

“When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, ‘Surely the Lord’s anointed stands here before the Lord.’”

As God knows even our thoughts from afar, he corrected Samuel's assumption in the next verse:

“But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.’”

Samuel had been judging by externals. Eliab looked the part, his stature was right and so on, but that was as far as Samuel could see. So the Lord had to teach him there is a much more important aspect of a man's character that has to be considered, namely his heart. That is, his innermost being, the spiritual nature of a person, the real you inside.

When God looks at an individual his gaze is absolutely penetrating. Nothing can be hidden from his view. Every aspect of our lives is like an open book to the Lord which he can easily read. We cannot deceive him or hide anything from him. He knows all about us. Samuel's mother, Hannah, had declared in 1 Samuel 2,3:

“...the Lord is a God who knows, and by him deeds are weighed...”

This is a theme which David himself takes up in a number of his Psalms, notably Psalm 139. It is both searching in that God sees all our sins, and comforting for God sees all our distresses. The New Testament takes this theme up also when for the Christian believer's assurance it tells us that the Lord knows those who are his (2 Timothy 2,19). Here God could see that Eliab was unsuitable to lead his people, even though he may have looked a mighty warrior in stature. Exactly what God saw we are not told, only that he was not the man.

Jesse caused his next son, Abinadab, to come to Samuel, but he also was not God's choice. Jesse did this with all seven of his sons and each time Samuel had to declare the Lord had not chosen any of them. It was at this point he asked Jesse if these were all the sons he had (v11). The answer Jesse gave is really instructive.

“‘There is still the youngest,’ Jesse answered, ‘but he is tending the sheep.’”

He did not even mention David's name! So it is clear that Jesse did not think that David should have been invited to the feast. We might think that surely as David's father he would have been aware of the spiritual qualities and the integrity which his son was developing, but even he could not see what God saw.

There is an important lesson for us to learn from this. How easily we can fall into the same trap. For example we might have a new visitor to our church who is good looking and a good businessman and wealthy as well. All too easily we could be tempted to not only rush him into being accepted into church membership but also to be given a responsibility in the church leadership. This has happened so many times and shipwreck and a damaged church has resulted. We need to examine the heart, starting with our own, to ensure we really are the Lord's and that we are living our lives in a manner that is pleasing to God. This is to be our priority for ourselves and for those who would lead us.

Thankfully Samuel had learned this lesson by now and orders that the young shepherd be brought to the feast. David arrived, and although the youngest of the brothers, was a good healthy looking young man, just like any ordinary young shepherd boy of his time, but that was not what impressed Samuel. It was what God said to him that counted most. We read in 1 Samuel 16,12:

“Then the Lord said, ‘Rise and anoint him; he is the one’”

This was the man whose innermost being pleased God. This was God's choice, even though others might have thought otherwise. Samuel's response is recorded in the next verse:

“So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power.”

This small group of witnesses would ensure the confidentiality of the occasion and safeguard Samuel from malicious attacks from Saul. It would also save David from any future accusation that he was trying to usurp Saul's throne, as these men saw Samuel anoint him. At this stage of things it is not clear that Jesse and his sons knew exactly why David had been anointed, but they would have been aware that this marked him out for something special in coming days. As far as David is concerned the Lord was evidently with him, and he gave him his Spirit to equip him for all that lay ahead. And this is a principle we find throughout Scripture: the Lord equips those he calls into his service.

Conclusion.

None of us will be called to kingship as David was, but if we are Christian believers we are called to serve God. Writing to the Thessalonian believers Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 1,9:

“...you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God...”

As the Lord looks at us and penetrates our innermost being, our heart, what does he find? Does he see us as those who love him deeply, who humbly delight to do his will in holy obedience, who desire that our lives should bring honour to him and commend the gospel of his grace in Jesus Christ to our world? Are we the kind of people that we are both meant to be and that he can use today? Or does he see coldness towards him and indifference, rebellious hearts who disobey him without a thought, those whose aim is to please self and not to honour him first? Are we individuals unfit to bear the name 'believer' and to be used in his service? If so then there is the need for some real heart searching on our behalf. There is the need for careful consideration of the way we are living, and the need for deep and thorough repentance. There is the need for us to confess to God of our sinful lives, and seek the cleansing of the blood of Christ to make us right with God again. Perhaps reader you have never trusted in Jesus to change you at all. Then you need to do that without delay, seeking his mercy and salvation, urgently.

We also need to note another Biblical principle that it is those who are faithful in little whom God knows he can trust with much. For many years David lived in obscurity, working on the lonely hills around Bethlehem, caring for and protecting sheep in all weathers. But he did it reliably when no one else was watching him and God saw that.

As we close this chapter the question that arises is 'How did God begin to use David?' The answer to that will be found in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: David serving Saul (1 Samuel 16,14-23)

In 1 Samuel 16,13 we read the tremendous statement:

"...from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power."

It is a wonderful provision from the Lord for all that David would face and have to do when eventually he would come to the throne, and even in the preparation years before that date.

We need to mention here that this was the help of the Holy Spirit for serving the Lord, not the occasion of David's spiritual birth. For David the Lord had worked in this way in his heart some time before his anointing as he was already a man after God's own heart. The Christian believer is also commanded to be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5,18) and the tense here is continuous. This is to be a daily experience. We need his help as we worship so that we will honour God in the right way. We also need his help in our service and testimony so that we will live and obey God in his strength and for his glory.

It is this which really became David's experience in 1 Samuel 16. The Lord empowered him for all that he was going to be required to do, and as we continue through his

life we will see the evidence of this again and again. And we must say this is what each believer in the Lord Jesus Christ needs. Our lives must be under the influence and control of the Holy Spirit of God and lived by his enabling. And of course we cannot help but draw the parallel between David and the Lord Jesus Christ. As he began his public ministry and at his baptism we read in Luke 3,21-23:

“When all the people were being baptised, Jesus was baptised too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: ‘You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.’”

Jesus was anointed by the Spirit of God for his public ministry. These were very precious times and a clear indication of the Lord’s blessing, and returning to David, a particular empowering for his future leadership.

We could say this was a ‘mountain top experience’, a high point in David’s spiritual life, a blessing that indicated he was highly favoured by the Lord. Recognising this, we might be tempted to think that this would mean everything in David’s life from now on would be wonderful and free from difficulty. Indeed, there have been those in our own generation who have claimed that being filled with the Spirit of God means all your struggles will be over. Nothing could be further from the truth. This anointing by the Spirit of God led David into an extremely turbulent period of years, where even his very life would be in

danger on more than one occasion. Conflict lay ahead for him that was going to be hard to face and difficult to handle. And we see a parallel thing in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. Having been baptised and having the Holy Spirit descend on him we find he was immediately led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. The Saviour had a head on collision with the enemy of God which was far from easy. And the lesson for us from this is to realise that such periods of spiritual conflict and difficulty are not because the Lord is displeased with us. Instead the very opposite is true. This is God’s testing and proving and preparing ground and is not an unusual experience.

This is a very important point as there have been those who falsely teach that testing and trial only come because God is angry or displeased with us. They even go so far as to say to those who are suffering or facing trial that they must have committed some great sin or this would not be happening to them. We must say that such a response is a very wrong, unbiblical and a sinful assumption for which they have no grounds. It is true that the Lord does discipline us when we continue in sin (see Hebrews 12), but difficulty and opposition often come because we are doing the will of God. So we need to be very careful about making hasty decisions about those who are facing struggles in their lives. Jesus’ conflict came when his Father had declared he was well pleased with him. And this was the same in David’s case, as we shall see him suffering at the hand of King Saul. Being filled with God’s Spirit more often than not leads us into conflict with the

enemies of the Lord and not into a life of ease. We say this not to discourage you but to help you when it happens. At such times we might be tempted to think something must be very wrong with us, but in fact God is at work in our lives and making us into the people that he wants us to be.

This leads us to the question with regard to David; what happened in his case? This came gradually and in stages which we will begin looking at in this and future chapters. It all begins with David entering Saul's service.

1) Saul in great distress. (1 Samuel 16,14)

By complete contrast to David who received the Spirit of God, because God had rejected Saul as king the Spirit of God departed from him. And the result was dramatic as 1 Samuel 16v14 indicates:

“Now the Spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him.”

This is one of the saddest verses in the Bible. Saul was abandoned and the Holy Spirit's help was withdrawn from him. There are a number of verses similar in their sadness to this one. An example from the New Testament is after Jesus healed two demon possessed men in Matthew 8 and the demons entered a herd of pigs so that they ran into a lake and drowned. We read this in Matthew 8,34:

“And when they saw him (i.e. Jesus), they pleaded with him to leave their region.”

It was so tragic, for this was the very Son of God with whom they wanted nothing to do! Here in Saul's case the Spirit of God was removed from him. This was the judgement of God upon this disobedient man who had repeatedly disregarded the clear instructions he had received from God. Saul was given over to the consequences of his own unrepented sin. In fact Saul stands as a warning to anyone who is tempted to think they can disregard God and get away with it. No one can do that, therefore to think that way is foolish in the extreme. This should make everyone of us make sure we are truly in a right relationship with God through faith in Christ displayed in holy lives.

However, that was not all of the judgement that came on Saul. In his sovereign providence, God, who controls all things, sent an evil spirit to torment Saul. We learn here, as elsewhere in the Bible, that God is in control even of evil spirits and they can only operate within the boundaries and limits that he sets for them.(See Judges 9,23; 1 Kings 22,19-23; Job 1,12 & 2,6.) The effect of this on Saul was that he was tormented and he plunged into misery. As we shall see Saul became increasingly depressed, agitated and even violent as a result of this activity of this evil spirit. His mental condition clearly deteriorated at times. (NB. We need to be careful at this point because the Bible is not saying that everyone who is mentally unwell is in this condition as a direct result of an evil spirit, but in Saul's case the evil spirit certainly caused psychological disturbance.)

2) A solution suggested. (1 Samuel 16,15-23)

Such was the torment Saul experienced, others could see it. His servants recognised it was an evil spirit from God who was causing him this distress (v15), and they suggested they look for someone who could play soothing music to Saul to make him feel better (v16). It is not insignificant that none of his servants suggested Saul turn to the Lord for help, or call Samuel to show him what to do, instead they only prescribed music. Saul issued the command that they should seek out such a musician (v17).

It is at this point that David is introduced into the scene. One of Saul's servants had heard David play the harp, and told Saul about this and also that he was a great warrior (v18). This teaches us God can use anything in our past to further his purposes, and really nothing is wasted. As he grew up David learned to play musical instruments, and we know from 1 Samuel 17 he had also become a man of valour as he fought wild beasts, and he may well have had to defend his sheep from thieves at times. Saul's servant added,

“He speaks well and is a fine looking man. And the Lord is with him.”

It is clear from this that David's testimony was becoming known by others. He was a man who had good control of his tongue. He was a man who walked with God, or more importantly who had God walk with him, and others could see that. I wonder what others see in us as they examine our lives? Is there the evidence that the Lord is with us

also? We are not told what Saul thought about this statement by his servant, but one cannot help but wonder if it helped to emphasise the fact that the Lord was no longer pleased with him. Saul agreed and sent to Jesse for David to come from minding the sheep to help him. Jesse and David agreed to this and so David came to Saul with a gift of bread, wine and a young goat.

In the providence and overruling of God, yet unknown to Saul, his very successor was now in close contact with him. The ways of God are past finding out. So from relative obscurity as a shepherd, David is brought to prominence in the royal court, albeit in a low-key position at this stage. The Lord was working out his purposes for his servant!

It is significant to note that although David had been anointed to be the next king he never once used this to abuse Saul. He was not envious or jealous of Saul's position; neither did he take steps to get rid of Saul as quickly as possible. Instead he waited patiently for God's time. (See Hebrews 6,12.) He really was a man after God's own heart. It is also not at all difficult to see how dangerous a position this could have been for David, and which it did indeed become as we shall see as this series develops. However, Saul liked David so much he made him one of his armour bearers and requested that Jesse allow him to remain in his service. Whenever the evil spirit from the Lord came on Saul, David would take his harp and play the soothing music and Saul would feel better and the evil spirit would leave him. The music David played brought relief to Saul's troubled mind

soothing the torment he was experiencing. On the surface all looked calm and peaceful and David appeared to be absolutely safe in Saul's employment, but this is really only the calm before the storm for David. The first sign of those storm clouds were beginning to gather as the Philistines gathered for war against Israel.

Chapter 4: David and Goliath (1 Samuel 17)

In the last chapter we saw how David had been brought into the service of King Saul. His music helped soothe Saul's troubled heart and mind, and he became an armour bearer of the king. At this early stage we are told that Saul liked David very much (1 Samuel 16,21). This all appears to be very congenial but it was soon to change quite radically and it began with the incident described in 1 Samuel 17 which we will now consider. Before coming to the details of this event it is worth pointing out that although David had been brought to the royal court he was only there from time to time and not as a permanent resident. We are told in 1 Samuel 17,15:

“but David went back and forth from Saul to tend his father's sheep at Bethlehem.”

This will be useful later in our study of this incident.

1) The battle scene. (1 Samuel 17,1-11)

One of the persistent enemies of the people of God in Old Testament days were the Philistines. To use a modern day saying, they were a thorn in Israel's side causing them

considerable discomfort at times. The scene before us is that of the Philistine army coming to attack the Israelite army. The battle scene is at Socoh in Judah which was situated some 15 miles west of Bethlehem. Saul and his army were camped in the valley of Elah with themselves on one hillside of the valley and the Philistines on the other. The Philistines had a particularly potent weapon which they wielded against Saul and his men. There was a giant of a man in their ranks who went by the name of Goliath. His stature was considerable. Now we know that Saul was head and shoulders above the Israelites, but Goliath's height was over 9 feet or 3 metres tall. We are told he wore a bronze helmet and also a coat of bronze scale armour which weighed 5 thousand shekels, which is about 125 pounds or 57 kilograms. In addition his legs were clad with armour. He also had a bronze javelin strapped to his back and the shaft of his spear was like a weaver's rod and its iron point weighed 600 shekels which is around 15 pounds or 7 kilograms. And as if that was not enough we are told he had another man to carry his shield ahead of him. He was a formidable man indeed, and his mere description tells us he was no man to play around with.

We can picture the scene in our minds: each day, morning and evening, Goliath would come out of the Philistine camp to challenge Saul and his men. His words are recorded in 1 Samuel 17,8-10:

“Goliath stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, ‘Why do you come out and line up for battle? Am I not a Philistine,

and are you not the servants of Saul? Choose a man and have him come down to me. If he is able to fight and kill me, we will become your subjects; but if I overcome him and kill him, you will become our subjects and serve us.’ Then the Philistine said, ‘This day I defy the ranks of Israel! Give me a man and let us fight each other.’”

There is no doubt about it that he was some opponent. However, the most tragic thing of all was not so much the audacity of this Philistine and his arrogance, but the reaction of Saul and his men. We are told in verse 11:

“On hearing the Philistine’s words, Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified.”

From a merely human perspective we could easily understand why they felt so overawed, but remember these were the people of Israel whose God was the Lord. Had he not promised to establish their kingdom and committed himself to them in solemn covenant? Again and again God had promised his help as this small selection of Bible passages indicate:

Exodus 23,22 *“If you listen carefully to what he (i.e. God’s angel) says and do all that I say, I will be an enemy to your enemies and will oppose those who oppose you.”*

Deuteronomy 3,22: *“Do not be afraid of them; the Lord your God himself will fight for you.”*

Deuteronomy 20,1-4: *“When you go to war against your enemies and see horses and chariots and an army greater than yours, do not be afraid of them, because the Lord your God, who brought you up out of Egypt, will be with you. When you are about to go into battle, the priest shall come forward and address the army. He shall say: ‘Hear, O Israel, today you are going into battle against your enemies. Do not be faint-hearted or afraid; do not be terrified or give way to panic before them. For the Lord your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory.’”*

But it was as if God did not exist, such was the low spiritual ebb that prevailed amongst them. There was no prayer. There was no pleading with God to deliver them. There was no confidence that the Lord would not abandon his people. In fact, there was no reference to God at all! It was as if he had never made these promises! Faith seems to have eluded everyone in the Israelite army, even Saul’s son Jonathan who was already known as a might warrior. They should have depended on the Lord and gone against Goliath, but sadly they did the opposite. What a tragedy! Truly the Spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul, and the spiritual state of the nation was at a low ebb.

Another lesson that is evident is that Israel’s attempt to gain security by having a king like the surrounding nations failed miserably. Trusting in men is bound to disappoint. As one hymn puts it:

“the arm of flesh will fail you”

In addition, because the Lord had pledged himself to his people they were not to be afraid, but they had wandered from the Lord and fear was the result. It is a sad picture indeed, and humanly speaking bleak. But God is never at a loss, and again and again when men fail him he comes in his grace to transform the situation and this he now does through David.

2) David's confidence in God. (1 Samuel 17,12-37)

David had returned the look after his sheep when his father Jesse, who is now very *“old and advanced in years”* called him to visit his three oldest brothers who were fighting with Saul, Eliab, Abinadab and Shammah (v3). David's youth is again stressed for us in v14 and this information makes the outcome of the chapter all the more clearly the work of God through his young servant. As a young teenager he would not have been expected to fight nor have the experience and strength for war, but as we shall see that is no obstacle for the Lord. Indeed God so often uses that which is weak and insignificant in the world's eyes to accomplish great and mighty works with the result that all the praise and honour goes to him (see 1 Corinthians 1,26-29).

At this point in time a period of 40 days had lapsed since Goliath first came with his twice daily challenges (v16). So Jesse sends David with some food for his brothers and their commander and to enquire how the battle had been going. David left early in the morning and arrived just as the army was taking up its battle positions which the men

did shouting the war cry. With the two armies facing each other Goliath came out to make his challenge again. In v23 it is described as *“his usual defiance”* and that paves the way for what David will shortly say about him. The result was as predictable as it had been on the previous 40 days of the war. The men ran from him and this time their fear is described as *‘great’*. The passing of time had not made them more prayerful or confident in the Lord at all, and their fear just grew. It seems that Saul had promised the man who defeated Goliath great wealth, marriage to his daughter and freedom from taxes for all his family. David enquired of those standing near him what would be done for the man who killed Goliath and they told him. At this point, David's oldest brother Eliab who had heard him speak was filled with anger against him.

1 Samuel 17,28 *“Why have you come down here? And with whom did you leave those few sheep in the desert? I know how conceited you are and how wicked your heart is; you came down only to watch the battle.”*

Why he made such an outburst against his brother we are not told, but it does seem there was some jealousy in his heart that David had received Samuel's anointing while he had been bypassed. David's answer indicates this had been an unjust accusation, and not put off he asked other men what Saul would do for the one who triumphed over Goliath and received the same answer. All of this was reported to Saul who sent for him. David's faith and confidence in the promises of God burst onto the scene like the sun shining through the clouds after a thunderstorm.

1 Samuel 17,32-37: *“David said to Saul, ‘Let no-one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him.’ Saul replied, ‘You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a boy, and he has been a fighting man from his youth.’ But David said to Saul, ‘Your servant has been keeping his father’s sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.’”*

Here was God’s man for the hour, even though everybody spoke of him as only being a lad. David, who enjoyed God’s presence on a daily basis, was full of trust in the Lord’s ability to grant victory over this ungodly man who had not just defied Israel’s army, but also Israel’s God, the Lord of heaven and earth. For David there was no option but to take this arrogant self-confident Philistine head on, because the honour of the Lord was at stake. This was of much higher importance than even his own safety, but his confidence in God was such that he knew the Lord would give him the victory. David was a man who, even in these early years of his life, was focused on God and it was this which governed his life. It is interesting that when Saul protested that David was but a lad, and David told him how the Lord had helped him to kill a lion and a bear who were

attempting to steal his sheep, that Saul agreed to let him go and fight Goliath. Even in his own tragic spiritual condition he also recognised the Lord’s hand was upon this young boy, so he declared to David in v37:

“Go, and the Lord be with you.”

The Bible commentator Gordon Keddie draws an obvious parallel between David and the Lord Jesus Christ, but with one significant difference.

“Israel was God’s flock, Goliath no more than a predator and David stepped forward as the shepherd who would protect his sheep. This is the symbolism of redemption itself. The Psalmist sings: ‘Hear us, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock.’ (Psalm 80:1) The God of the covenant, Yahweh, ‘is my shepherd, I shall not want’ (Psalm 23,1). And the Lord Jesus Christ identified himself as ‘the good shepherd’ who ‘lays down his life for the sheep’ (John 10,11). Like Israel in the Valley of Elah, ‘We all[i.e., lost humanity], like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way’ (Isaiah 53:6). Like David the shepherd, Jesus the Good Shepherd came forward ready to give his life for the sheep. But David was merely a shadow of Christ. Christ took no weapons; Christ went not to fight, but to die, for as Isaiah prophesied, ‘The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth...For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors’ (Isaiah 53,6 &12).

3) David's victory in battle. (1 Samuel 17,38-58)

Like a typical soldier, Saul dressed David in his own tunic and gave him his own armour something, to which David was completely unused. So David took them off and went into battle just as he was. We could forgive any spectator who might have said that David was so vulnerable. Goliath had all his armour and his shield bearer, but David had no armour, no sword, just his staff, his shepherd's bag into which he put 5 smooth stones he had picked up from the stream, and his sling. It looked like no contest at all, surely Goliath would pulverise this mere boy, and indeed that is exactly how Goliath himself viewed the situation. He considered David as someone to despise and to mock and abuse.

1 Samuel 17,42-44: *"He looked David over and saw that he was only a boy, ruddy and handsome, and he despised him. He said to David, 'Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?' And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. 'Come here,' he said, 'and I'll give your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field!'"*

This belligerent Philistine, full of self-confidence and pride, loathed the sight of David as he came out to him. But the sight that had filled the Israelite army with dread and fear for 40 days did not disturb David at all. His confidence was in the Lord and he was not afraid to tell Goliath however fierce he sounded and looked.

1 Samuel 17,45-47: *"David said to the Philistine, 'You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I*

come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty (that is the Lord of Hosts,) the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will hand you over to me, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. Today I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give all of you into our hands."

These are quite remarkable verses. They show us something of David's own awareness of the greatness of God and his humility before him and his devotion and love. The Lord was not some weak idol such as the Philistines had made who had eyes that could not see and ears that could not hear and limbs that could not move. No. The God of Israel was the Lord of Hosts, the God whose power is limitless and for which no obstacle was too great to overcome. He was the one to be feared and honoured and respected and worshipped and served. This was the God of creation who spoke and it was done. This was the God of Abraham who gave him a son in his old age and through him brought the nation of Israel into being and into the Promised Land. He was the God of Moses who brought his people out of Egypt, destroying Pharaoh and his army. He was the God who destroyed Jericho with a shout and defeated the Midianite army with Gideon and 300 unarmed men. The Lord is the God for whom nothing is too hard and no difficulty too great to be overcome. This was and is God alone, and it was his honour that the Philistine had

despised. It was his name this arrogant man had opposed. Therefore it was for the Lord's sake that David came out so fearlessly against him. His own relationship with God, which was real and warm and living, made all the difference that we see between David the shepherd boy and Saul the rejected king. In addition David went in the Lord's strength, in reliance, not on his own abilities, but on the Lord. His confidence was in God, not men, and he knew God would not fail him.

We need to be careful here as some have misunderstood David's confidence into thinking all you have to do is to demand something from God and he will automatically grant it. David's whole foundation was the glory of God and his will being done, not any selfish demands he might make on the Lord. He was resting on what God had promised he would do for those who trust him, and not in trying to twist God's arm to do something he was reluctant to do. Our understanding of who God is should humble us before him constantly, and our desire should be to submit to his will. This is what David was doing here, not demanding his own personal wishes. David's purpose was not that the whole world should know how great David was, but how great God was, and that he was in Israel at that time. David wanted his dejected people to focus on God again, the God who had promised to be with them and to bless them. The battle was the Lord's, therefore victory was secure.

Goliath was not moved by this at all, and he moved closer to David to attack him. With a simple stone and his sling

David hit the giant in his forehead, and he crumpled to the ground a dead man. Not a sword was used as David had declared. Quickly David took hold of the giant's sword and severed his head. The Philistines fled terrified and Israel pursued them to the entrance of Gath. So successful were they that bodies were strewn all along the route and they plundered the Philistine camp. David brought Goliath's head to Jerusalem and his weapons he placed in his own tent. The Lord had granted a great victory, and it was the man after his own heart who was his instrument to achieve it.

What encouragement for us today with the giants that we come into confrontation with. They may not be men 3 metres tall but they can be men who oppose us because we follow Christ, they may be temptations we think are too strong for us to overcome, they may be trials we feel are too great for us to endure, they may be tasks which we feel so ill equipped to perform. Remember our God is David's God, and he has not changed nor his power diminished. As we trust in him and lean upon him he will sustain and support and see us through to the very end. He can equip us. Sometimes the battle will end in obvious victory, other times strength will be given to endure, but true faith and confidence in God will never be misplaced and the Lord will always reward. Hebrews 11 gives us a catalogue of men and women like David whose faith was fixed firmly in the Lord. Some knew amazing deliverances, others died, but the Lord was with them all, and he will be with us and sustain us, as we trust in him.

The chapter closes with Saul enquiring who David was, even asking Abner the commander of his army who did not know the answer. It has puzzled some that Saul did not seem to recognise the teenager who had played music to soothe his troubled mind in the previous chapter. We need to remember as we said at the beginning of this chapter that David was not permanently residing in the royal court, but he frequently went back to look after the sheep, so it could well have been quite some time since Saul had seen David and so did not recognise him and would not have known much about his family. Another possible solution is that Saul was so amazed at such valour that he was asking if his family background accounted for his ability. Either way the problem is not difficult to answer, and the passage ends with David making it very clear to Saul just who he was and who his father was, Jesse of Bethlehem.

Conclusion.

This was a great turning point in the lives of these two men. Saul the rejected king was beginning to be seen as such, while David the future king was showing the evidence that he truly was the Lord's anointed. This decisive battle was to bring to David not just fame in Israel and wider, but also great danger and hostility and we will begin to see that in our next chapter.

Chapter 5: Saul becomes jealous of David (1 Samuel 18)

Following the defeat of the Philistines 1 Samuel 18 begins with the lovely record of the friendship that resulted between Saul's son Jonathan and David. But the chapter

does not go very far before that lovely scene is replaced with one of bitterness and envy as Saul turns against David in his heart and mind. So as we said some time back, David's coming to prominence and the fact that the Spirit of God came on him in power, did not result in a prolonged period of ease and comfort for him. In fact the situation became very dangerous for David and resulted, as we will see in coming chapters, in several attempts being made on his life. But before coming on to those matters it is right that we first examine the special friendship that arose between David and Jonathan.

1) Jonathan and David. (1 Samuel 18,1-4)

David seems to have spoken at some length with Saul (v1) but exactly what was said between these two men is not recorded. Some commentators think David spoke of the way the Lord had helped him and that his actions were a result of his trust in the Lord (which was true even if he did not tell Saul the details). However, David's attractiveness as a faithful servant of God seems to have produced a deep appreciation of him in the heart of Saul's son Jonathan.

1 Samuel 18,1: "*Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself.*"

There is the need for careful explanation of this verse because one of the great sadnesses coming from the unbelieving world is that the term love has been completely misunderstood and misused. Many in our world equate love with lust, which is a complete contradiction. Many also twist the term to encourage

immoral relationships, and the Bible is very clear that all such acts are sinful in the eyes of God and come under his judgement (see 1 Corinthians 6,6-10). So the question we need to answer is, what was this love between David and Jonathan if it was not any of the things we have just mentioned? The answer we must give is that it was a friendship of the highest moral kind which had at its centre the fact that both these men were spiritual individuals who loved and served God. We have already seen this was true of David, but it was equally true of Jonathan. Jonathan expressed this to his armour bearer in a previous battle with the Philistines.

1 Samuel 14,6: *“Jonathan said to his young armour-bearer, ‘Come, let’s go over to the outpost of those uncircumcised fellows. Perhaps the Lord will act on our behalf. Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few.’”*

So Jonathan’s love for David was a uniting of hearts that were devoted to God. It was a relationship which sought to promote the wellbeing of the other in every way, physically and spiritually. It was a love in which both held each other in the highest regard, and we will see this in more detail when Jonathan knows that David is to replace Saul as king in Israel, for there was not the slightest resentment in Jonathan’s heart that this was going to be so. Instead he rejoiced in knowing this was God’s will. It was a selfless holy love that united their hearts. It was a foretaste of that oneness in Christ which Christian believers share and of the love which Paul described in 1 Corinthians 13,4ff:

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.”

It was a delightful friendship, and it was Jonathan who initiated it (v3) by making a covenant with David. The details of this are not recorded but history shows it to have been one of mutual loyalty and friendship as Jonathan accepts David as his equal, even though he was the king’s son. This was openly expressed by Jonathan giving David his robe, sword, bow and belt. It would seem that already Jonathan sees David as Saul’s successor. We are also told that from that time on Saul kept David with him and he did not return to his father’s house (v2).

2) Saul against David. (1 Samuel 18,5-11)

The fact that the Lord was with David is seen in the way David was successful in everything Saul gave him to do. He excelled (v5), and the result was both the people and Saul’s officers were glad. Already the Lord was beginning to bring David to prominence, although his full coronation was some time off.

However, this was where things turned sour. Returning from the battle with the Philistines there was understandable rejoicing in the nation. God had undoubtedly given them a considerable victory through

David. As was the custom of the time the returning army was greeted by women from all over the nation coming to meet them with singing and dancing. However, what they sang did not please Saul at all and filled his heart with envy and anger (v7).

“Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands.”

As this refrain rang out in the streets Saul’s heart was filled with hatred towards David (v8-9).

“Saul was very angry; this refrain galled him. ‘They have credited David with tens of thousands,’ he thought, ‘but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom? And from that time on Saul kept a jealous eye on David.’”

What a sad state of affairs these verses describe. Instead of Saul being thankful to God that a notable victory had been granted, and instead of seeking the Lord’s mercy and forgiveness for his own previous failings, he despises the Lord’s man. What an evil thing unrepented sin is! It grows and increases, and Saul became suspicious of David in an evil manner. Clearly the Spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul, yet he did not seem to recognise it. How spiritually blind he had become that he could not recognise the hand of God with any thankfulness at all, and what a contrast to his own son Jonathan who viewed David with a godly admiration and thankfulness.

We need to note that these sinful attitudes were not openly expressed at first, for we are simply told this is how Saul ‘*thought*’ (v8), and what a lesson this is about sinfulness. Again and again it begins in the mind where no one else can see it. But of course even that does not hide it from God, as this record indicates. Further, sin, if it is not dealt with immediately by repentance, eventually comes out into the open. The very next day when the evil spirit from the Lord tormented Saul and David played his harp to bring some relief for Saul, he actually picked up his spear and hurled it at David (v11).

“‘I’ll pin David to the wall.’ But David eluded him twice.”

Saul began to show his true condition. He hurled his spear at David twice, and openly. Consider the solemn warning of James 1,13-15:

“When tempted, no-one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.”

3) Saul’s temporary solution (1 Samuel 18,12-16)

Saul’s evil reaction to David had one direct source (v12).

“Saul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with David but had left Saul.”

It was a deeply spiritual reason, because God was no longer with him. Therefore Saul applied a bandage to the sore in his heart instead of performing drastic surgery and cutting out the jealousy from his heart. He sent David away (v13) and gave him command over a thousand men whom he led in their military campaigns. There is an old English proverb which says, 'out of sight, out of mind.' But sending David away was not going to hinder or delay the Lord's plans for him. So we read that David succeeded in everything he did, and the reason was that the Lord was with him (v14).

In a sense the Lord was shouting at Saul about his gross sinfulness as this was part of the Lord's direct judgement on him. Tragically Saul's heart only grew harder and his fear of David increased because of his successes, yet the people loved David more and more. Underneath it all Saul's envy and hatred of David just grew and grew. Sending him away was no solution at all, but Saul could not see it.

4) Saul's subtlety (1 Samuel 18,17-30)

The cunning of Saul's heart now came to the forefront. He showed David an act of kindness, which to the outward appearance seems to be an act of considerable generosity. He offered David his daughter Merab to be his wife. Then under the guise of using spiritual words he urges David to serve him bravely and to fight the battles of the Lord (v17a). One could be excused for thinking Saul was beginning to come back to God, something he should have done a long time previously, but that would be a complete

mistake. Saul's purpose in all this was not to obtain David's help but to pursue his death. Why?

1 Samuel 18,17: *"For Saul had said to himself, 'I will not raise a hand against him. Let the Philistines do that!'"*

What a twisted individual he had become! How subtle and deceitful he was! However, his plan stalls right at the beginning because David protests his complete unworthiness to be married to the king's daughter (v18).

"But David said to Saul, 'Who am I, and what is my family or my father's clan in Israel, that I should become the king's son-in-law?'"

We see here a glimpse of the humility of David, even though he was a mighty warrior already. He was a man who was not self-made nor self-reliant, but one who knew he owed everything to the Lord and his grace to him. So Saul's daughter Merab was given to another man named Adriel of whom we know little. Just when it seemed Saul's plans were completely thwarted he noted that his younger daughter Michal was in love with David so he used her to lure him into another trap (v21).

"'I will give her to him,' he thought, 'so that she may be a snare to him and so that the hand of the Philistines may be against him.' So Saul said to David, 'Now you have a second opportunity to become my son-in-law.'"

Anticipating that David was likely to refuse as before, Saul urged his attendants to speak with him privately and to say that Saul really liked David and was pleased with him, as well as the attendants. But David protested to them (v23).

“But David said, ‘Do you think it is a small matter to become the king’s son-in-law? I’m only a poor man and little known.’”

However, when they reported it to Saul he saw his opportunity to trap David once more (v25).

“Saul replied, ‘Say to David, “The king wants no other price for the bride than a hundred Philistine foreskins, to take revenge on his enemies.”’ Saul’s plan was to have David fall by the hands of the Philistines.”

Saul’s whole intention was to wipe David from the face of the earth; he was so opposed to him. But all such action is so foolish because it fails to take into account the sovereign purposes of the Lord which no one can frustrate. God’s purposes are irresistible, for he is God Almighty, the omnipotent God. Kings, even mighty kings, are but dust and ashes in his sight and their opposition to him can never succeed. In fact the whole plan backfired on Saul, for David gladly took up the challenge and actually killed twice as many Philistines as Saul had asked for! (See Romans 8,31.) How foolish for anyone to think they can resist God and succeed. Reader, make sure you do not make the same mistake. Submit to his lordship and trust in his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, while you have time and

opportunity. If you resist him the day will come when he will resist you and your end will be dreadful. Then do not hesitate, flee to Christ today and seek his pardon for your every sin.

So Saul has to give Michal to David to be his wife, and she loved David more and more. By contrast, Saul grew more and more afraid of him, and sadly we read (v29):

“...and he remained his enemy for the rest of his days.”

This however did not hinder the Lord working through David, and he succeeded in battle against the Philistines more than all of Saul’s other commanders. He went from strength to strength, and his name became well known (v30).

Lesson.

There are many lessons in this chapter, but we shall just emphasise one. Once God sets his hand upon us for good, no one and no thing can stop him achieving his great end. If you are a Christian believer then God has already placed his hand on you for good. And what does that mean? Well, having saved you he is going to keep you and sanctify you and watch over you and provide for you in every way until he brings you safely to heaven where you will sit with Christ in his throne, just as he sat on his Father’s throne. Absolutely nothing will stop that being achieved. This does not mean you will not have to face trials, for David faced many as we have seen, but he did not face them alone and neither shall we. Satan shall not

stop the Lord blessing us. The antagonistic sinful world we live in will not stop the Lord blessing us. And even the weakness of our own hearts will not stop God blessing us. Therefore we can be absolutely assured God holds us in his hand and we shall never perish. He will keep us through all that life may throw at us, and even through death when it comes and bring us safely to where he wants us to be, in heaven. How this should comfort our souls and stimulate us to serve God with all our hearts, as David did.

Chapter 6: Saul tries to kill David (1 Samuel 19)

In our last chapter we saw David's position became increasingly dangerous. Although the Spirit of God had come upon him in power, he still had to face trial and difficulty, in particular the jealousy of King Saul. Saul, in a rather cunning way, deliberately put David into danger, by instructing his own servants to tell David he could marry Saul's daughter Michal if he killed 100 Philistines. Saul's intention was that the Philistines would kill David. However, the Lord helped David and his men to kill 200 Philistines and he was not harmed at all himself! And this is a reminder of something Paul wrote much later in Romans 8,31:

"If God is for us, who can be against us?"

Clearly the Lord was with him and David therefore married Saul's daughter Michal. Not only that, Saul himself acknowledged the Lord was with David (1 Samuel 18,28), but tragically instead of accepting that and seeking David's

help he grew more afraid of David. Chapter 18 ends with two statements:

- i. Saul remained David's enemy for the rest of his life
- ii. David knew increasing success against the Philistines, far more than the rest of Saul's commanders, with the result he became very well known.

What a sad state of affairs this was. God had clearly blessed David but Saul rebelled against that and refused to submit to the Lord. He was evidently a man far from God, even though he was still the King. His position in the eyes of men did not mean he was in the favour of God, and the root of all this was his disobedience to God which we saw in earlier chapters. This is a reminder that sometimes those whom God has used in the past do forsake him, and we need constantly to be examining our own hearts to ensure we are walking close with God all of the time. There was also the great temptation to gloat over Saul's downfall because he had got into this position by his own actions, but significantly David never did that, even when Saul eventually died. The lesson for us from this is plain: godly people cannot rejoice over the sins of others nor about the trouble they fall into as a result. We need to remember the instruction of the New Testament about details such as Saul's life.

1 Corinthians 10, 11 & 12: *"These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for*

us, on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!"

Returning to 1 Samuel 19 it is not surprising that as we come to chapter 19 we discover Saul venting his anger against David again.

1) Jonathan defends David. (1 Samuel 18,1-7)

a. Saul wants David killed.

Saul, having failed to get rid of David by subtlety – sending him to fight against the Philistines – now becomes more blatant and open. There is clearly a hardening of his heart that cannot be hidden any longer, and Saul's true spiritual state is becoming more and more obvious.

1 Samuel 19,1 *"Saul told his son Jonathan and all his attendants to kill David."*

What a solemn and tragic statement this is! How far Saul had gone away from the Lord. If only Saul had repented of his sins. If only he had pleaded with God for mercy. If only he had accepted the Lord's choice of David as the next king. But sadly he did none of these things. We are again reminded that sin, if it is not repented of, will increase and grow worse and worse. In the previous chapter we noted that James warns us about the temptations that can befall us on this earth, and he does so in order to encourage us to resist them – something Saul failed to do. (See James 1,13-15.)

We need to remember at this point that none of this was happening to David because David had sinned, or grieved God in some way. David had served Saul faithfully and served God faithfully. He was not suffering this hostility from Saul because God was displeased with him. In fact the opposite was the case. It was because the Lord was with him that Saul reacted against him so strongly. It was a trial that came because of David's loyalty and commitment to the ways of God. And that is something that happens to godly believers still today. Only recently I received an e-mail with an urgent request to pray for a man and his wife because a relative had turned against them because they had become followers of Jesus. Their lives were under threat, and all they had done was to respond positively to God's good news. We need to pray for all such faithful believers, and must avoid concluding that they must have done something wrong; as to do so would be to have the wrong conclusion.

b. Jonathan intervenes.

Although his father was the king and had commanded him to kill David, Jonathan refused to do so. He was a spiritually minded man and could see the sin of his father and wanted nothing to do with it. His special friendship with David moved him to do a number of things. First, he warned David of Saul's malice and urged him to be on his guard until the next morning. Then he advised David to go into hiding while he would speak with his father Saul and promised to let David know the outcome. Then at considerable risk to his own life he went to plead David's case with Saul, aligning himself with the man Saul hated.

What a good and godly friend Jonathan was to David and his approach to his father took considerable courage and was very direct.

1 Samuel 18,4-5: *“Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father and said to him, ‘Let not the king do wrong to his servant David; he has not wronged you, and what he has done has benefited you greatly. He took his life in his hands when he killed the Philistine. The Lord won a great victory for all Israel, and you saw it and were glad. Why then would you do wrong to an innocent man like David by killing him for no reason?’”*

Jonathan faithfully warned his father of the wrong he was planning to do and also how unreasonable it was for him to take this approach with David who had only ever done him and the nation good. He was careful to remind Saul that it was the Lord who had granted these victories, and by implication it was the Lord Saul would be sinning against if he destroyed David. If David had been guilty of some underhanded behaviour; if he had tried to attack Saul and grab the throne for himself, then Saul’s suspicions of him would be understandable, but none of these things was true. In the mercy of God Jonathan prevailed and Saul relented, promising not to kill David. The outcome is that Jonathan went to fetch David and so he was with Saul as previously, to play his harp when Saul was distressed by the evil spirit from the Lord.

2) Saul attempts to kill David. (1 Samuel 19,8-24)

All seemed to be well and David appears to be secure. Then that perpetual sore in Israel’s side – the Philistines – came to war again and David went out against them and again won a decisive victory so that they fled. A cause for much rejoicing, or so you would have thought. But very soon afterwards an evil spirit from the Lord came on Saul. As David played his harp to soothe Saul, he threw his spear at David again, trying to pin him to the wall. Saul demonstrated himself to be a liar which is clear if you compare v6 and his oath not to do this. We see something of the fickleness of the human heart in the wickedness of Saul’s behaviour. How inconsistent he was!

Mercifully, David eluded him, but the spear penetrated the wall. David knew that he was no longer safe in Saul’s company so that night he made good his escape. David acted with much wisdom here. It would have been spiritual folly to have stayed in Saul’s presence now that he was so determined to kill him. Saul was not yet finished with his evil desires for he sent men to watch David’s house with the instruction to kill him in the morning. However, the Lord had not forsaken David, for Michal his wife warned him of Saul’s intentions and let him down through a window so that he escaped. Michal then tried to disguise the situation by taking an idol (sometimes called a teraphim which was one of the old household gods) which she covered with a garment and put some goats hair on its head. When Saul’s men came to kill him Michal told them he was ill. On returning to Saul he commanded them to bring David to him and he would kill him himself. On reaching the house Michal’s disguise of the idol was

discovered and Saul angrily asked her why she had deceived her own father. Instead of telling the truth, like her brother Jonathan had done earlier and telling her father he was wrong in God's eyes for his plan, she lied and said David had threatened her life, which of course he had not. There was clearly less spirituality about Michal compared with Jonathan and David, and we shall see this further again a little later in David's life.

3) David goes to Samuel. (1 Samuel 19,18-24)

On his escape, David went to find Samuel at Ramah and told him everything about Saul, and they both went to Naioth, a section of Ramah which is where the company of prophets resided. Saul heard about this and sent some of his men to capture David, but when they arrived they began to prophesy just like the other prophets were doing as God's Spirit came upon them and they did not capture David. It was obvious the Lord was protecting his servant and neither Saul nor his men would be able to harm him.

Again we would expect Saul to have taken notice of what God was doing, but his hardened heart did nothing of the sort. He sent men a second time and they also began prophesying, so he sent a third group with the same result, and David was safe through it all. Saul was still determined to get rid of David so he decided to go after him himself. At the water cistern at Secu he enquired where Samuel and David were, and was told at Naioth in Ramah. As he walked along the Spirit of God even came on him rendering him helpless and he began prophesying too. The effect of it all was that he took off his robes and

prophesied in Samuel's presence, and lay that way all that day and night. He was utterly humiliated and was no match for the Lord, yet still he refused to repent of his wickedness. The Spirit of God prevented Saul from his evil intentions and protected and preserved David. Saul's plans were utterly frustrated, and God had sovereignly intervened to show his disapproval of Saul's evil intentions against David. The people asked the question

"Is Saul among the prophets?"

This was a rhetorical question and was really one of scorn poured on Saul, as there was no blessing for him in this experience at all! This showed that Saul's spirit was in actual fact so contrary to that which characterised the true prophets of God as they had a zeal for the Lord which Saul evidently did not possess. The result as we shall see in chapter 20, was that David was able to escape again.

Conclusion.

For David these were very troublesome times, and they were to continue like this for some time, but the great lesson this chapter teaches us is that God really is the security of his people. The Bible commentator Dale Ralph Davis has written:

"Sometimes the clearest evidence that God has not deserted you is not that you are successfully past your trial but that you are still on your feet in the middle of it."

This was certainly true for David. The truth of Proverbs 18,10 became a reality for David:

“The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.”

David had done this long before this episode in his life. His trust was in the Lord who surrounded him with his protecting mercy. At this time David wrote Psalm 59 which is both a fervent prayer from his heart to the Lord to deliver him from such bloodthirsty men, and a wonderful declaration of his confidence in the Lord. He makes two statements which are almost identical and which show where David’s trust was anchored. They are found in Psalm 59 and verses 9 and 17:

“O my Strength, I watch for you; you, my God, are my fortress, my loving God...O my Strength, I sing praise to you; you, O God, are my fortress, my loving God.”

What a spiritual man David was. Significantly there is no complaining against God, and no blaming him for the circumstances he found himself in. Many have done that when they were in difficulties, but not David, even though attempts had been made on his life and he was in very great danger still. There was simple trust in the Lord his God, and even with these adversities he is still able to describe the Lord as *“my loving God”*. David displayed true saving faith, a faith that endures in spite of the trials and pressures of life, even when they are life threatening. Those whom God saves he keeps, through this life with all its

difficulties, and on into eternity. The believer’s strength is the Lord: not self, not others, but God alone. It is in complete contrast to the unbeliever’s position, because he or she is without God in this world (Ephesians 2,12) and is utterly alone when such trials and difficulties come into his or her life. This does not mean that the believer does not face difficulty as David was in deep trouble, but the Christian believer does not face it alone - the Lord is with us. The unbeliever is without Christ, and without Christ they are without the only true source of meaning and purpose and are utterly alone, desolate, bankrupt. Further, the believer knows that all the hardships and knocks and adversities which come into their lives in this world are being used by God in his sovereign providence to work for our good (Romans 8,28). The unbeliever cannot look at such adversities like this, but the Christian believer knows that even when he faces death itself, he is safe for there is heaven to come, being with Christ which is far better.

Isn’t it significant that the Lord used members of Saul’s own family, his son and daughter, to aid David’s escape? Truly the Lord’s ways are past finding out. And how further this shows Saul’s utter folly for continuing to behave as he did. If only Saul had learned this lesson – if only!

Again we learn that no one can attempt to resist the purposes of God and succeed – no one. And for David and every believer today we can rest secure.

Psalm 125,2 *“As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people both now and for evermore.”*

Chapter 7: David and Jonathan (1 Samuel 20)

At the beginning of the Bible in Genesis 4,9 we read these words:

“Am I my brother’s keeper?”

They came from the lips of Cain who had just killed his brother Abel. When God asked Cain where his brother was he denied any knowledge of him and came back with the retort, *“Am I my brother’s keeper?”* Cain was attempting to excuse himself from any responsibility of care to his brother Abel. As that Bible passage unfolds it is clear that God’s answer to his question was a firm “Yes”, and Cain did have a responsibility to treat his brother with kindness and due consideration. Sadly it was something he had already miserably failed to do. The reason for mentioning this incident in this book on the life of David is that we come now to a time where David discovered that in his friend Jonathan he really did have one who was his keeper. The chapter before us, 1 Samuel 20, is one that is a mixture of real concern and compassion and trust with hatred, anger and malice. The scene begins with David having escaped yet again from Saul, whom the Lord had stopped from killing him. The chapter in 1 Samuel opens with the record of David fleeing from Ramah and going to where Jonathan was. You will remember that David and Jonathan had a very close and deep friendship because they

were both men who loved and honoured God. Already we have seen Jonathan speaking on David’s behalf and defending him to his father Saul, so he was a man whom David could trust and rely on.

1) David’s inner turmoil. (1 Samuel 20,1-3)

When we think of men of the spiritual and physical calibre of David it is easy to think that they were able to brush off the pressures they faced easily, almost as if they never had any effect on them, but that is quite a wrong conclusion to come to. Even the Davids of our world are but men, and they often feel things very keenly. It is clear that emotionally and mentally David was in considerable distress even though the Lord had protected him thus far. And this is perfectly understandable. To have someone throw a spear at you with the intention of killing you is a worrying experience even though they missed! As David approached Jonathan he was full of the questions that must have gone round in his mind many times and they tumble out of his mouth like a rapid stream.

1 Samuel 20,1: *“What have I done? What is my crime? How have I wronged your father, that he is trying to take my life?”*

We must also say that all these questions were legitimate ones, as David just could not understand why Saul was so aggressively against him. But we must also say that David was also failing to rest completely in the fact that the Lord was protecting him. The shock of Saul’s attack had truly shaken him. It is easy with hindsight to say that, for God

did protect him, but while he was in the heat of the unprovoked hostility of Saul he found it far from easy to do. We are reminded here that such quiet confidence in the Lord at all times is not something that comes easily. David was still a relatively young man and lacked the experience of years of the Lord's grace. Therefore it is not surprising if we find ourselves in similar distress. What we need to do is what David did at a later time.

1 Samuel 30,6: *“But David found strength in the Lord his God.”*

David's questions to Jonathan also show us his own integrity, for he had done nothing to give Saul just cause for his hatred and malice. In fact the opposite was true for David had done much to help Saul and the nation in his victories against the Philistines. There are two lessons we are being taught here. First, we are not always told why the Lord brings us through certain trials, but we can be sure he is using everything to make us more and more holy and like our Saviour. Second, we must not think we have failed God simply because we feel the pressure when we are being opposed, for David felt that same pressure.

Jonathan's reply shows his deep concern for David.

1 Samuel 20,2: *“Never!” Jonathan replied. ‘You are not going to die! Look, my father doesn't do anything, great or small, without confiding in me. Why should he hide this from me? It's not so!’”*

The thought of David being killed was too much for Jonathan to contemplate. He thought so highly of his friend David that he would never want anyone to harm him. But David was not convinced of Jonathan's assessment of his father's plans.

1 Samuel 20,3: *“But David took an oath and said, ‘Your father knows very well that I have found favour in your eyes, and he has said to himself, ‘Jonathan must not know this or he will be grieved.’ Yet as surely as the Lord lives and as you live, there is only a step between me and death.’”*

David's words tell us again how much he was feeling the huge pressure of this onslaught on his life by Saul. He knew his life was still in great danger and peril.

2) Jonathan's gracious help. (1 Samuel 20,4-17)

It is at this point that Jonathan did what Cain failed to do with his brother Abel. Jonathan came to the aid of David and took this responsibility very seriously, as is seen by his question.

1 Samuel 20,4: *“Jonathan said to David, ‘Whatever you want me to do, I'll do for you.’”*

This was quite a commitment. but he genuinely meant what he said. He knew the Lord would not want him to abandon or neglect David at this time of great danger for him, so he was prepared to do whatever David asked of him. Jonathan was a man ready to stand for what was right even

though his father who was wrong was the king: a courageous stand to make. Jonathan was a very special friend to have. The old English proverb ‘a friend in need is a friend indeed’ was certainly true for David with Jonathan.

David suggested a plan of action. The next day was the New Moon Festival. This was when each month of the year was consecrated to the Lord. Instructions about the sacrifices and the blowing of trumpets which took place each month are described in Numbers 28:11-15 & 10:10. It was a reminder to the people that the whole of their times were in the Lord’s hands and that he had sustained them thus far. On these occasions David usually dined with the king and would be expected to do so this time. This time David decided not to go, but to go into hiding in the field until the evening of the day after the feast. Jonathan was to speak for David if Saul missed him.

1 Samuel 20,6: *“If your father misses me at all, tell him, ‘David earnestly asked my permission to hurry to Bethlehem, his home town, because an annual sacrifice is being made there for his whole clan.’”*

David’s words probably imply that it was the practice for families to remember the New Festival together once a year, although we have no other record of such a practice elsewhere in Scripture. The fact that David did not actually do this lays him open to the charge of lying, and of involving Jonathan in deceit as well. However, this was to test Saul’s reaction which would indicate his intentions. If Saul was agreeable, then David was safe, but if he lost his

temper then David was in imminent danger. Then David reminded Jonathan of the covenant between them which we saw back in 1 Samuel 18.

1 Sam 20:8 *“As for you, show kindness to your servant, for you have brought him into a covenant with you before the Lord. If I am guilty, then kill me yourself! Why hand me over to your father?”*

The word translated ‘kindness’ is the Hebrew word ‘*chesed*’ and is a very special term. It has the thoughts of love, compassion and affection but in a deeper way with the added dimension of loyalty, reliability and faithfulness. So instead of just love it is devoted loyal love, instead of kindness it is dependable kindness, and instead of affection it is committed and faithful affection. So David was asking Jonathan to treat him in this special way for he knew he could trust him completely if he agreed to do it. It is not insignificant to note that ‘*chesed*’ is the term the Bible uses to describe God’s lovingkindness towards his people and which we see supremely in Christ who was full of grace and truth. For example, David himself wrote of it in Psalm 13:5

*“But I trust in your **unfailing love** (*chesed*); my heart rejoices in your salvation.”*

Jonathan agreed, although he still found it hard to believe his father would want to kill David. He and David entered into another solemn covenant (v12-17):

“Then Jonathan said to David: ‘By the Lord, the God of Israel, I will surely sound out my father by this time the day after tomorrow! If he is favourably disposed towards you, will I not send you word and let you know? But if my father is inclined to harm you, may the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if I do not let you know and send you away safely. May the Lord be with you as he has been with my father. But show me unfailing kindness like that of the Lord as long as I live, so that I may not be killed, and do not ever cut off your kindness from my family — not even when the Lord has cut off every one of David’s enemies from the face of the earth.’ So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, ‘May the Lord call David’s enemies to account.’ And Jonathan made David reaffirm his oath out of love for him, because he loved him as he loved himself.”

It is a very moving account to read for these two men realised this was a life and death issue and their mutual desire was for the Lord to be with each other. They longed for his blessing which is the greatest thing we can ever desire for anyone, and they pledged they would be kind to each other whatever the outcome.

3) Jonathan’s plan v18-42

Jonathan devised a plan to let David know his father’s response by using a code. David would hide in the field and Jonathan would come out with his bow and fire an arrow. Then he would send a boy to fetch it. If he said to the lad that the arrows were on this side of him then David would know he was safe, but if he said the arrows were

beyond him, then David knew Saul was determined to kill him. So David hid while Jonathan went to the feast.

Saul sat opposite Jonathan and his army commander Joab sat with him, but David’s place was empty. At first Saul thought David had become ceremonially unclean and this accounted for his absence, but the next day he questioned Jonathan about it. Jonathan replied as he and David had agreed saying he had gone to Bethlehem. In an instant Jonathan knew without a doubt that his father intended the greatest harm for David. We read (v30):

“Saul’s anger flared up at Jonathan...”

Then he began to accuse Jonathan (v30-31):

“You son of a perverse and rebellious woman! Don’t I know that you have sided with the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of the mother who bore you? As long as the son of Jesse lives on this earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established. Now send and bring him to me, for he must die!”

Faithful Jonathan immediately begins to defend David by saying (v32):

“Why should he be put to death? What has he done?”

We see here Jonathan’s complete selflessness. He had recognised that the kingdom was not his but the Lord’s. He had recognised the David was God’s choice of king.

He had recognised that he had to deny himself and follow God's sovereign purposes. And that is exactly what he did. He was completely at home with the will of God and completely submissive to the fact that God did not want him to be king, even though he was the prince. There was not a gram of jealousy over David, not a single word of complaint, but happy glad acceptance of the will of God. If he had lived during New Testament days Matthew 6:33 would describe his whole attitude:

"...seek first his kingdom and his righteousness..."

Jonathan put the Lord and his will and purposes first, and was content that God's will was being done and that David was his chosen servant.

Now coming back to 1 Samuel 20 you would have thought as this was done in public that Saul would have at least been restrained by it and made to reconsider, but alas it was not so! He actually threw his spear at his own son, and in an instant Jonathan knew he was determined to kill David. What a dreadful way for a father to treat his own child, yet with the Spirit of God taken from him Saul had no restraint and his true sad spiritual state came to the fore. It is the New Testament that teaches us the fruit of the Spirit includes self-control, something Saul evidently lacked.

Jonathan immediately left in fierce anger, and all that day ate no food because he was grieved at the shameful way his father had treated David. There is time when it is perfectly right and just to be angry, when sin raises its ugly head.

We discover this even in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ himself when he cleansed the temple of the corrupt moneychangers taking a whip to those who had made the house of prayer into a den of thieves (John 2,12-16). Sadly we live at a time when far too often sin is tolerated even in the Church of Christ. How we need to ask the Lord to give us hearts like his which recoil from sin in all its forms.

The next morning Jonathan went to the field with his bow and arrow and the lad as he and David had planned. The arrow was shot; the boy ran after it, and from Jonathan's lips came the solemn words that the arrow was beyond where the boy stood. In that moment David knew what he had feared all along. The lad was sent back by Jonathan not knowing what drama had been played out before him. When it was safe David came out of hiding to meet with his dear friend. We are told when he stood before Jonathan he bowed three times. This was a sign of the deepest respect he had for him and of submission to the king's son. This was a most solemn and sad moment in the lives of these two men. They kissed each other and wept, David weeping most. Jonathan's parting words to David tell it all, that their friendship was a deeply spiritual and faithful one.

1 Samuel 20,42: *"Jonathan said to David, 'Go in peace, for we have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the Lord, saying, 'The Lord is witness between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants for ever.'"*

To the very end their friendship was based upon the Lord and they committed themselves to him. Sadly they were to meet again only one more time as we will see when we come to 1 Samuel 23. The chapter ends:

“Then David left, and Jonathan went back to the town.”

He left as an outlaw on the run, a fugitive, a public enemy – at least that is how Saul considered him. Hardship and suffering were to be the new school he was entering, but God would use it all to shapen his character and prepare him for leadership. How would God provide for him? We shall begin to discover this in the next chapter.

Chapter 8: David on the run (1 Samuel 21)

We left David in 1 Samuel 20 fleeing for his life from Saul. He had said his farewell to Jonathan after they had pledged to each other their unfailing kindness. David knew Saul was after his life so it was a critical and dangerous time for him and he had to get away as fast as he could in order to save his life. Sadly David was to remain in this dangerous position until the day that Saul and Jonathan were killed in battle on Mount Gilboa. That was some time off at this stage but the details are recorded for us in 1 Samuel 31.

1 Samuel 21 tells us that he went to two quite different places, the first being a town north east of Jerusalem and south of Gibeah named Nob where the tabernacle was situated, and the second was Gath an important Philistine city.

1) David at Nob. (1 Samuel 21,1-9)

David went immediately to Ahimelech at Nob where the tabernacle was sited, but not the ark of God as it was in Kiriath Jearim (1 Samuel 7,1). Ahimelech was the high priest and at least 85 other priests were there with him (see 22,18). Although 1 Samuel 21 does not state this it seems David’s purpose for visiting Nob was to enquire of the Lord concerning his future as is reported in 1 Samuel 22,10 & 15. If this was so then his action was the wisest he could have taken. For God knows the end from the beginning and is infinitely wise, therefore to seek his will and guidance is the most important thing we can ever do. However, we also have to say David was not entirely honest with Ahimelech, as we shall see.

On seeing him Ahimelech trembled, no doubt David’s fame and valour contributed to this for he was a mighty warrior and it would have been strange for such an important person to travel alone. It seems he was aware something was wrong as he asked David why he was alone (v1). When he asked David why he was on his own (v1) David was untruthful (v2):

“David answered Ahimelech the priest, ‘The king charged me with a certain matter and said to me, “No-one is to know anything about your mission and your instructions.” As for my men, I have told them to meet me at a certain place.’”

He claimed to be on a top-secret mission for Saul. Why he resorted to deception is difficult to say, and he might have

thought by so doing to have protected Ahimelech from any charge of complicity with him should Saul arrest him. Even if that was his intention he was still untruthful, and in actual fact Ahimelech was to lose his life as we shall see in the next chapter, so it was no protection for him. Was it fear that led him to lie? Was he anxious that perhaps Ahimelech would betray him to Saul? Did he simply panic? We have to say that Scripture is completely silent on the matter, it simply reports what David did without comment. It neither commends him nor justifies him.

Lessons:

- i. Not everything recorded in Scripture is to be followed! There are things it records which are obviously wrong and sinful and we must not copy those who behaved in this way. We are to learn from their mistakes (see 1 Corinthians 10,6).
- ii. We also see the honesty of the Bible here. Even though David was one of its great warriors, it does not hide his mistakes, and we shall see this even more as we proceed through this series. This is a reminder that Scripture is completely reliable in all that it records. This should not surprise us as God is its author and it is impossible for him to lie (see Hebrews 6,18).

David then asked for some food, for five loaves or whatever he had available. Ahimelech informed David he had no ordinary bread, but he did have the consecrated bread which was placed each week on the table in the holy place of the tabernacle. It was a thank offering to the Lord

symbolising his provision of daily bread, something Jesus encouraged us to pray for in the Lord's prayer. Normally this bread was only to be eaten by the priests when it was replaced by fresh hot bread (Leviticus 24,5-9), but Ahimelech sees that this is a case where mercy was to prevail and this did not compromise the normal teaching of the law and was willing for it to be used.

Significantly Jesus used this incident when he was debating with the Pharisees over what was lawful to do on the Sabbath in Matthew 12,1-8. It concerned the disciples eating corn on the Sabbath, which the Pharisees criticised as doing unnecessary work and thus breaking the 4th of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20. Jesus told them that God desired mercy not sacrifice and had they understood this they would not have condemned the innocent. They were so critical and could only see the letter and not spirit of the law. They were rebuked for their hard and callous attitude. Elsewhere Jesus taught that it was always lawful to do good and to save life (Luke 6,9).

Ahimelech, in compassion, was willing, provided David's men were ceremonially clean having kept themselves from women v4 (see Exodus 19,15 & Leviticus 15,18), which David verified (v5). It is at this point in the narrative we are informed that a man named Doeg, who was an Edomite and Saul's head shepherd was also there that day and saw all that was going on. The significance of his presence will become clear when we come to 1 Samuel 22, but we can say that in a sense he acted like a spy. Then David asked Ahimelech if he had a weapon he could take, claiming he

been in such a rush on Saul's business he hadn't brought his own. Again we have to say David was untruthful, and Scripture simply records the fact without comment. Ahimelech informed him there was only the sword of Goliath, whom David had killed with his sling earlier in chapter 17. David was pleased as this was a fine sword so he took it and departed.

In spite of David's deceit we are still compelled to say that the Lord was sustaining his servant for he provided him food just when he needed it and a weapon with which to protect himself. We can only conclude that the grace of God is very great, and how thankful we should be that he is still so gracious. David did not deserve this bread and neither do we deserve any of the Lord's mercies, but God is gracious. For David this provision must have assured him the Lord had not cast him off despite the intense pressure he was under.

2) David at Gath. (1 Samuel 21,9-15)

There is an old proverb which says, 'don't jump out of the frying pan into the fire.' In other words, if you are in trouble do not make the mistake of running away from it into even worse trouble, something it is easy to do when under pressure. But this is exactly what David seems to have done next, for he left Ahimelech and went to Gath, the city of Goliath, and to the Philistine King. He was running from one enemy, Saul, but ended up in the territory of another enemy, Achish. This appears to be running into even more danger. Even though the Lord had assured David he was caring for him, he was suffering from fearful

confusion, as really Achish was the last man he should have run to because he was the enemy of God's people. It was the act of a desperate man and a huge risk, and is a reminder that sometimes even the godliest of people can do silly things. After all, what would these Philistines think of the killer of their Goliath coming into their town while carrying Goliath's sword? And what about the families of the other Philistines David had also killed in battle, would they not want his blood? And he certainly would not have been safer with them than staying in Israel. Further, had not God promised to bless his people in that land, and the Lord had already declared that he would be the next king when he sent Samuel to anoint him and that meant God was going to preserve his life. But all of that seems to have gone from his mind as he makes his journey to Gath. David was just like us and knew the nervousness and panic we can feel at times.

Did he think Achish would welcome him as a defector from Saul? If so any such assumption was short lived. The servants of Achish were certainly quick to oppose David and told their king what they thought.

1 Samuel 21,11: *"But the servants of Achish said to him, 'Isn't this David, the king of the land? Isn't he the one they sing about in their dances: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands"?"*

They certainly were unconvinced that David should be welcomed among them. The result was that David was made to feel even more afraid (v12). In a way the fact that

they called him *'king of the land'* should have been a reminder to him that God's hand was upon him for good, but that does not appear to have been the case. And this drove him to take further drastic action, because he pretended to be mad!

1 Samuel 21,13: *"So he feigned insanity in their presence; and while he was in their hands he acted like a madman, making marks on the doors of the gate and letting saliva run down his beard."*

What a humiliating position David found himself in, and we must say it was a further act of deception because he was not insane at all. We need also to note that by now David was *'in their hands'* so he had been arrested.

However, in the overruling providence of God, Achish was convinced by David's behaviour and did not want him in his house, and thus David was enabled to escape yet again.

3) Blessings out of David's experience.

As so often happens, the Lord does bring good out of so many bad situations, even those we have got ourselves into by our own lack of wisdom. David wrote at least two Psalms at this time, Psalm 34 and Psalm 56, and they are very precious portions of Scripture. They indicate that he turned to the Lord throughout this experience, even though that is not recorded in 1 Samuel. He tells us in these Psalms that he was fearful and he was in trouble, but that he laid the whole situation before the Lord in prayer.

Psalm 34,4: *"I sought the Lord, and he answered me..."*

Psalm 56,3-4: *"When I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust..."*

His trust was in the Lord in spite of all that had happened, and he was very conscious that it was the Lord who had delivered him yet again.

Psalm 34,6: *"This poor man called, and the Lord heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles."*

God had again been merciful to him, even in this situation, and he was very grateful for that fact. Mercifully the Lord has not changed, but continues to overrule the events and circumstances in the lives of his children to bring good out of bad. We really can trust in the Lord at all times with complete confidence. Indeed, David is so aware of the Lord's goodness to him that he urges us to discover the same.

Psalm 34,8: *"Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him."*

David therefore gives thanks to the Lord.

Psalm 34,1-3: *"I will extol the Lord at all times; his praise will always be on my lips. My soul will boast in the Lord; let the afflicted hear and rejoice. Glorify the Lord with me: let us exalt his name together."*

We conclude with this comment by the Bible commentator Gordon Keddie:

“David was a believer, but believers can sometimes be very inconsistent with their own, genuine faith.... The best of men are weak, and remain so, on this side of heaven. But the Lord Jesus Christ is greater than our hearts and his mercy is new every morning. He declares in his Word to every believer, ‘Sin shall not have dominion over you’ (Romans 6,14). He has promised never to leave us or forsake us. He is the guarantor of all our tomorrows until he takes us to glory. And we need to learn with the apostle Paul that as our life here is Christ, even our death will be gain (Philemon 1,21).”

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