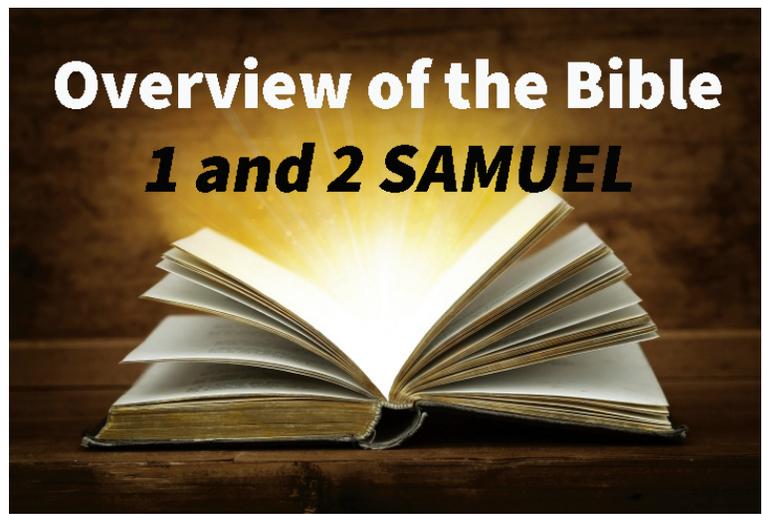


THE “NINE LIVES” OF DAVID

1 Samuel 19 *Lesson 60*

Wednesday, October 6, 2021
Pastor Blake Gideon



Big Idea *Whether by divine providence or direct intervention, God is capable of protecting his chosen servants from those who seek to destroy them.*

The Text in Context

In chapter 18 Saul used different methods to try to kill David on three separate occasions (18:10–11, 17, 25). The pattern continues in chapter 19: (1) Saul orders Jonathan to kill David (19:1), (2) he again throws a spear at David (19:10; cf. 18:10–11), (3) he orders his henchmen to arrest David and bring him to the royal palace for execution (19:11–15), (4) he sends three separate companies of soldiers to Ramah to capture David (19:20–21), and (5) he himself goes to Ramah to arrest David (19:22–24). Saul’s efforts to kill David continue in chapter 20, forcing David to flee for his life.

In this chapter (as well as chap. 20) the narrator continues to mount his case that David is God’s chosen king. The Lord continues to protect David and to foil Saul’s attempts to murder him, whether by Jonathan’s intercession, David’s agility in dodging Saul’s spear, Michal’s cunning in helping David escape, or the Spirit’s supernatural intervention.

The narrator emphasizes David’s innocence, primarily through the verbal testimony of Jonathan, who protests his father’s attempt to kill David (19:4–5; cf. 20:32). Jonathan depicts David as a humble servant of Saul (19:4), a claim that is subsequently supported by David’s submission to Jonathan’s authority (cf. 20:7–8, 41).

Historical and Cultural Background

As part of her scheme to help David escape from her father, Michal puts an idol in David’s bed to make Saul’s servants think that he is ill and sleeping. The fact that an idol is in Michal’s home, or at least readily accessible to her, is alarming. This particular kind of idol (*terapim*) is referred to in a handful of other contexts (Gen. 31:19, 34–35; Judg. 17:5; 18:14, 17–18, 20; 1 Sam. 15:23; 2 Kings 23:24; Ezek. 21:21; Hosea 3:4; Zech. 10:2). *Terapim* are used in divination (Ezek. 21:21; Zech. 10:2). They may be “ancestor figurines used in necromancy” (communication with the dead). The image is probably not an object of worship, but rather a means of acquiring information.

In these chapters Saul prophesies three times. In two instances he seems to exhibit ecstatic behavior. In 10:6 Samuel informs Saul that he will be “changed into a different person” as he prophesies; according to 19:24, Saul “stripped off his garments” while prophesying and “lay naked” on the ground all night and day.

Let’s look at the context. Saul sends out a group and before they could initiate a search for David within the group, they were captured by God’s Spirit and compelled to join the prophets. This activity so absorbed the men that they were unable to continue with their royal mission. God’s Spirit, which had previously marked David for kingship over Israel, now acted to preserve David for that task.

But Saul was not to be deterred from his goal of eradicating David. As a second group entered that stronghold of the Spirit, they too were overcome and failed to apprehend David. Increasingly more desperate, Saul sent a third group of men into this mismatched clash between flesh and Spirit, with identical results. The Spirit of God was gently invincible; those who had entered into Naioth under the influence of the ruler of Israel now found themselves under the infinitely greater influence of the ruler of the universe.

19:22–24 As a last resort Saul “himself left for Ramah” (v. 22), ordinarily about a ninety-minute journey. On the road he passed by a major regional water source, “the great cistern at Secu.” He asked people who had come there to fill their water jars, some of whom probably were from Ramah (cf. 9:11), where he might find Samuel and David. Having received the answer, he proceeded to Naioth (v. 23).

But in a climactic tour de force, the Spirit of God made a mockery of the most ardent efforts of David’s opponent. Saul’s first servants had not begun prophesying until they arrived at Naioth; however, Saul began prophesying as “he walked along” some distance from Naioth. Then when he actually arrived at his destination, the Spirit of God so overwhelmed him that “he stripped off his robes” (v. 24) as he continued to prophesy “in Samuel’s presence.” The triple employment of the Hebrew phrase *gam hû’* (lit., “even he”; not fully noted in the NIV) in vv. 23–24 emphasizes the fact that Israel’s most powerful citizen was subjugated by the power of God.¹

Interpretive Insights

19:1 *to kill David*. Five times in this chapter reference is made to Saul’s intending to kill David (vv. 1, 2, 5, 11, 15). Initially his command to kill David appears in an indirect quotation (v. 1). Then his intention to kill is described by his son (vv. 2, 5) and the narrator (v. 11). But in the end, we hear Saul himself state his intention in no uncertain terms (v. 15).

Jonathan had taken a great liking to David. This same expression is used in 18:22 in Saul’s message to David, sent via his servants. Of course, in that case Saul is lying and attempting to deceive David into seeking marriage to Michal, at the peril of his life (vv. 21, 23–25). In contrast to Saul’s deceptive claim, the narrator here affirms Jonathan’s genuine fondness for David. The contrast contributes to the narrator’s presentation of Jonathan as a literary foil to his father. Jonathan fully supports David, while Saul tries to murder him. Jonathan’s loyalty to David also supports the narrator’s presentation of David as one who is not seeking to usurp Saul’s throne, for Jonathan would not favor a traitor.

Key Themes of 1 Samuel 19

- As God’s chosen servant, David is not insulated from danger.
- The Lord delivers him from Saul’s repeated attempts to kill him.

19:4 *Let not the king do wrong to his servant David*. Jonathan’s words testify to David’s innocence and Saul’s guilt; as such they contribute powerfully to the narrator’s agenda of exonerating David and indicting Saul.

What he has done has benefited you greatly. In this context more than simple beneficial action is in view. Jonathan counts David as Saul’s “servant” and stresses that he has done no wrong against Saul. Consequently, David’s good deeds can be viewed as loyal actions on Saul’s behalf.

19:5 *The LORD won a great victory for all Israel, and you saw it and were glad*. Jonathan’s view of the battle as ultimately the Lord’s victory is consistent with David’s interpretation of it (17:47) and with his interpretation of his own heroic action on an earlier occasion (14:6, 10, 12). By reminding his father of this theological reality, Jonathan casts David in the role of the Lord’s instrument of victory, which Saul readily accepted on that occasion. Why now does Saul want to kill one who has served the king and the Lord so effectively?

¹ Robert D. Bergen, [1, 2 Samuel](#), vol. 7, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 210.

There is irony here. The heroic acts of both Jonathan and David have been the catalyst for the Lord's intervention, which has resulted in a military victory for Israel. But after both occasions, Saul tries to kill the hero (14:44; 18:11; etc.). Following his victory over the Ammonites, Saul refused to execute his detractors, even though some of his supporters urged him to do so (11:12–13). His reason for showing mercy was that the Lord had “rescued Israel” (or “won a victory in Israel,” the same expression used by Jonathan in 19:5). As in Saul's case, the Lord has won a victory for Israel through David. The proper response, as earlier, is celebration, not murder.

19:6 *As surely as the LORD lives.* This is not the first time Saul makes an oath that he does not keep (14:44). Saul swears that David will not die but then seeks to kill him on several occasions, only to be foiled in his efforts. The narrator depicts Saul as one who foolishly seeks to keep a misguided oath and as one who breaks a proper one. An oath should be indicative of one's highest priorities, but Saul's are misplaced.

19:9 *But an evil spirit from the LORD came on Saul.* In 16:14 the evil spirit began to torment Saul in conjunction with the departure of the Lord's Spirit. In 18:10 it came upon him with force in conjunction with his anger and jealousy (see vv. 8–9). Here it takes him over after he has promised not to harm David (19:6). But there is also a reference to David's continued success (v. 8), which apparently is the catalyst for renewed jealousy and fear on Saul's part, though this is not stated. What is shocking is that the spirit undermines a proper action by Saul. It seems as if the Lord, through this spirit that is sent by him, refuses to let Saul do right, for the Lord regards Saul as his enemy (cf. 28:16–18). (For more on this issue, see “Theological Insights” below.)

19:10 *Saul tried to pin him to the wall.* The use of the verb “pin” (*nakah*) sets up a vivid contrast between Saul and David that facilitates the narrator's pro-David agenda. In verses 5 and 8 this same verb is used to describe how David strikes down the Philistine champion and armies. While David is striking down the enemies of Israel, Saul is trying to strike down the Lord's chosen servant.

19:17 *Why did you ... send my enemy away?* Saul casts David in the role of his enemy. This is ironic since on two earlier occasions Saul refers to the Philistines as his “enemies” (14:24; 18:25). In his warped perspective, David is no different than they are.

19:24 *He stripped off his garments, and he too prophesied in Samuel's presence.* Saul's prophesying is tragically ironic. On an earlier occasion the Lord's Spirit caused him to prophesy, prompting observers to ask: “Is Saul also among the prophets?” (10:10–13). The prophesying was a sign to Saul that he had been chosen by God to be king (cf. 10:1–8). The Lord energized Saul with his Spirit so that he might attack Israel's enemy, the Philistines (see the comment on 10:7). But now Saul's prophesying has a different purpose: it thwarts his murderous plan and incapacitates him, preventing him from attacking David, so that God's new chosen one can escape (20:1). There is also a contrast with the second episode of Saul's prophesying, recorded in 18:10–11. On that occasion an evil spirit prompts Saul to try to murder David. But in this most recent episode, God's Spirit reduces Saul to a harmless ecstatic to *prevent* violent action against David.

Theological Insights

This account is a reminder of what can happen to those like Saul, whom God rejects as a result of blatant disobedience. The prospects are indeed frightening. In response to Jonathan's convincing defense of David's loyalty, Saul agrees to make peace with David (19:6). But then, as David experiences even more success, the evil spirit from the Lord overcomes Saul and prompts him to try to kill David (19:9–10), igniting another series of attempts on David's life. This leaves Saul so obsessed with destroying David that he is ready to kill anyone he perceives to be David's ally, even his own son and heir apparent (see 20:33). The Lord's treatment of Saul is reminiscent of how he hardened Pharaoh's heart as a judgment upon Pharaoh, who time after time refused Moses's ultimatum that he release God's enslaved people. In the end the divine hardening even caused Pharaoh to reverse his decision once he had responded properly (Exod. 8:8–15; 9:27–10:1; 10:16–20, 24–29; 14:4, 8). Surely the divine hardening brought Pharaoh's deep-seated motives and desires to the surface (cf. Exod. 9:30). Perhaps that is the case with Saul as well. Before he came under the influence of the evil spirit, he blatantly disobeyed the Lord and displayed pride and jealousy (15:12; 18:8–9).

Furthermore, following the initial spear-throwing incident (18:10–11), Saul’s murderous and deceptive actions are attributed to his fear, not the evil spirit (18:12, 15, 29). To the exiles, Saul’s experience is a warning of the consequences of disobedience and divine rejection. Disobedient servants of God can end up being the enemies of God.

Teaching the Text

God does not insulate his chosen servants from trouble and danger, but he does protect them. In these chapters the narrator continues to develop an important theme from chapter 18: God’s protection of his chosen servants. This surely presupposes that they need protection. Indeed, God’s chosen servants inevitably face danger in a hostile world. One need only read the psalms to be convinced of this. The lament psalms in particular, often speak of enemies and implore God for his protection and deliverance (see, among others, Ps. 3; 5; 7; 9; 11; 13; 22; 25). In Psalm 23 David expresses his confidence in God as his provider and protector. He recognizes that sometimes God must lead his people through a dark ravine, where predators may lurk. But God’s presence assures his people and vindicates them in the presence of their enemies. In Isaiah 43:1–2 the Lord, speaking to the exiles, assures them that he is their Creator and Redeemer and promises them that he will protect them from even the most dangerous threats, symbolized by water and fire. Jesus warns his followers that they will have trouble in this world (John 16:33). Recognizing that the world will hate them, he asks the Father to protect them from the evil one (17:14–15) and eventually to take them to heaven to live with him (17:24). Though God’s people may suffer persecution and martyrdom, in the end nothing, even physical death, can separate them from God’s enduring love (Rom. 8:28–39).²

Illustrating the Text

God’s people are not insulated from danger

Christian Autobiography: *Living Sacrifice*, by Helen Roseveare. Dr. Helen Roseveare (b. 1925) was an English missionary to the Congo from 1953 to 1973, where she practiced medicine and taught the nationals how to do medical work. She remained in the Congo even as the political situation was becoming very threatening in the 1960s. Taken prisoner by hostile forces, she remained in their custody for a number of months, during which she was subject to cruel beatings and raped repeatedly. After being released from prison, she returned to England for a short time but then went back to the Congo to fund a medical school and hospital facility. Her legacy of aiding the peoples of many different countries who needed not only basic provisions, but also medical care has been recorded in her books and in articles.

About her multiple hardships on the mission field, including the treatment by rebels, she recounts,

Beaten, flung on the ground, kicked—teeth broken, mouth and nose gashed, ribs bruised—driven at gunpoint back to my home, jeered at, insulted, threatened, I knew that if the rebel lieutenant did not pull the trigger of his revolver and end the situation, worse pain, and humiliation lay ahead. It was a very dark night. I felt unutterably alone. For a brief moment, I thought God had failed me.... And in desperation, I almost cried out against Him: “It is too much to pay.”³

² Robert B. Chisholm Jr., [1 & 2 Samuel](#), ed. Mark L. Strauss, John H. Walton, and Rosalie de Rosset, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 132.

³ Robert B. Chisholm Jr., [1 & 2 Samuel](#), ed. Mark L. Strauss, John H. Walton, and Rosalie de Rosset, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 128–133.