

1 Samuel 19: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] 1 Samuel chapter 19 And Saul spoke to Jonathan his son and to all his servants, that they should kill David. But Jonathan Saul's son delighted much in David.

And Jonathan told David, Saul my father seeks to kill you, therefore be on your guard in the morning, stay in a secret place and hide yourself, and I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where you are, and I will speak to my father about you.

And if I learn anything, I will tell you. And Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father, and said to him, Let not the king sin against his servant David, because he has not sinned against you, and because his deeds have brought good to you.

For he took his life in his hand, and he struck down the Philistine, and the Lord worked great salvation for all Israel. You saw it and rejoiced. Why then will you sin against innocent blood by killing David without cause?

And Saul listened to the voice of Jonathan. Saul swore, As the Lord lives, he shall not be put to death. And Jonathan called David, and Jonathan reported to him all these things.

[1 : 0 4] And Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence as before. And there was war again. And David went out and fought with the Philistines, and struck them with a great blow, so that they fled before him.

Then a harmful spirit from the Lord came upon Saul, as he sat in his house with his spear in his hand. And David was playing the lute, and Saul sought to pin David to the wall with the spear.

But he eluded Saul, so that he struck the spear into the wall. And David fled and escaped that night. Saul sent messengers to David's house to watch him, that he might kill him in the morning.

But Michal, David's wife, told him, If you do not escape with your life tonight, tomorrow you will be killed. So Michal let David down through the window, and he fled away and escaped.

Michal took an image, and laid it on the bed, and put a pillow of goat's hair at its head, and covered it with the clothes. And when Saul sent messengers to take David, she said, He is sick.

[2 : 0 1] Then Saul sent the messengers to see David, saying, Bring him up to me in the bed, that I may kill him. And when the messengers came in, behold, the image was in the bed, with the pillow of goat's hair at its head.

Saul said to Michal, Why have you deceived me thus, and let my enemy go, so that he has escaped? And Michal answered Saul, He said to me, Let me go, why should I kill you?

Now David fled and escaped, and he came to Samuel at Ramah, and told him all that Saul had done to him. And he and Samuel went and lived at Nioth. And it was told Saul, Behold, David is at Nioth in Ramah.

Then Saul sent messengers to take David. And when they saw the company of the prophets prophesying, and Samuel standing as head over them, the Spirit of God came upon the messengers of Saul, and they also prophesied.

When it was told Saul, he sent other messengers, and they also prophesied. And Saul sent messengers again the third time, and they also prophesied. Then he himself went to Ramah.

[3 : 00] And came to the great well that is in Seku. And he asked, Where are Samuel and David? And one said, Behold, they are in Nioth in Ramah. And he went there to Nioth in Ramah.

And the Spirit of God came upon him also. And as he went, he prophesied until he came to Nioth in Ramah. And he too stripped off his clothes, and he too prophesied before Samuel, and lay naked all that day, and all that night.

Thus it is said, Is Saul also among the prophets? In 1 Samuel chapter 19, Saul's violent hostility to David rises to a level that forces David to flee from him and his house.

He is assisted by Saul's son Jonathan, and Saul's daughter Michael. The chapter begins with Saul either telling Jonathan and his servants to kill David, or, according to other commentators, informing them of his personal intention to do so.

Saul is gradually descending into the most violent folly, while David is growing in strength and wisdom. Jonathan tells David that Saul seeks to kill him, and instructs him to hide in a place where he could witness Jonathan talking with his father concerning him.

[4 : 08] Jonathan wants to assure David that he need fear no betrayal from his quarter, so he wants to give him the opportunity to witness the conversation. Jonathan emphasises the blood guilt that Saul would incur by killing David.

Not only was David innocent, he was also someone through whom God had brought about a great deliverance for his people. Jonathan's life had previously been saved from Saul under different circumstances by just such an appeal, when Saul was going to kill him, even though he had been part of a great deliverance for God's people.

Saul swears that he won't proceed with his intentions, and then David returns. However, after David wins another great victory over the Philistines, Saul tries to pin David to the wall with his spear for a third time.

Saul's military skill seems to be forsaking him, is one thing we can notice here. The other important thing to observe is what occasions Saul's assaults upon David. It is David's heroic deeds and deliverances of Israel that occasion Saul's violence.

Saul is angry with David for his saving of Israel. It is envy and fear that drives him. As James Jordan observes, the contrast between David and Saul at this point is also striking.

[5 : 18] There is no evidence that Saul goes out to fight. However, while sitting in his house, where he should be at rest, he is clutching his spear. Saul's relationship with his weapon reveals truths about his character.

It associates him with Goliath, as we have already seen. Also, his seeming inability to let go of his spear is probably a sign of his increasingly perverse relationship with power.

Saul gradually ceases to wield his spear and becomes defined by it, as if it were glued to his hand. By contrast, David is a man who is remarkably versatile and able to be at rest.

One moment he is carrying food, the next he is using a slingshot, the next he is wielding a sword, the next he is playing a liar. He defends people, provides food for them, shepherds.

He brings delight, glory and joy. He is very clearly royal material. After David escapes, Saul sends men to David's house to watch him, so that he might be killed in the morning.

[6 : 19] However, Michael, David's wife and Saul's daughter, lets David down through a window and uses cunning to cover up the fact. She delays the pursuit of David by telling the messenger sent to take him that David was sick.

By the time her deception was discovered, it was too late and David had made his getaway. David speaks of this particular event in Psalm 59. Laban comparisons continue here.

Like Jacob escaped from Laban, David escaped from Saul. Like Jacob, he is pursued by his father-in-law. Rachel lied to her father Laban about the teraphim in Genesis chapter 31, verses 33 to 35.

Michael lied to her father using the teraphim in this chapter. Both of the fathers-in-law ask why they were deceived. If we have been paying attention to this particular story, it should remind us of a number of other stories from elsewhere in the scripture.

Saul is like Isaac. Even though God has made clear that he wants the kingdom to be established through David rather than Jonathan, Saul is determined to resist this, much as Isaac resisted God's word that his oldest son Esau would serve his youngest son Jacob.

[7 : 26] Like Rebecca, Michael is a righteous and shrewd woman who uses goat's hair to create a disguise so that Saul would be deceived about identities and God's will might be established.

Saul is like Laban. Saul takes a new son into his house. As Laban treated Jacob unjustly by giving him Leah rather than Rachel, Saul gave David Michael instead of Merab.

Like Laban, Saul finds himself steadily dispossessed as God gives his household into the hands of his son-in-law. Like Laban, Saul responds with hostility and his son-in-law has to flee from him.

Like Rachel who sat on Laban's household gods during her period when escaping, Michael deceives her father, exposing his idolatry and humiliating the household god by treating it in an inappropriate way.

Saul is also like Pharaoh. He tries to kill the promised seed. Michael is like Pharaoh's daughter who resists the evil will of her father, protects and delivers the one who will deliver the people and establish the nation.

[8 : 26] Saul is also like the king of Jericho who sent men to the house of Rahab to capture the spies. Michael is like Rahab who deceived the wicked men of her people, hid the spies, let them down through a window and aided and abetted their escape.

Saul is clearly in bad company then. His court has become like the house of Laban, Egypt and Jericho. And there are Passover themes here as well. There is a threat to the sun at the doorway and a night-time escape from a pursuing king.

As he flees from Saul's house, we have the beginning of David's wilderness wanderings, which only come to an end after the death of Saul. Behind all of these figures, once again, we see the shadowy agency of the serpent.

King Saul is a new Goliath-like figure, someone who acts as the seed of the serpent. The tyrant is outwitted by the woman, his daughter, as once again Eve gets poetic justice against the one who first deceived her.

David fled to Samuel at Ramah and informed him of what Saul had done. Saul sent three successive groups to capture David, but the Spirit of God came upon each group in succession and they ended up prophesying with the prophets rather than fulfilling their missions.

[9 : 38] Eventually Saul himself goes to do for himself what all of his messengers had failed to do. Back in chapter 10, verses 10 to 13, we read, When they came to Gibeah, behold, a group of prophets met him, and the Spirit of God rushed upon him, and he prophesied among them.

And when all who knew him previously saw how he prophesied with the prophets, the people said to one another, What has come over the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets? And a man of the place answered, And who is their father?

Therefore it became a proverb, Is Saul also among the prophets? When he had finished prophesying, he came to the high place. Here that saying that we first heard in chapter 10 is repeated again, but with a rather more ironic sense.

Saul is now alienated from Samuel. He presumably doesn't have any personal audience with Samuel here, as we were told at the end of chapter 15 that he didn't see Samuel again until the day of Samuel's death.

In this incident, Saul replays the story of his call, but in a very tragic way. He goes to Rama, searching for the prophet. He is directed by people at a well. The Spirit of God comes upon him and he prophesies.

[10 : 48] And the saying concerning his relationship to the prophets is related. However, at the end of the chapter, Saul is left naked, symbolically stripped of his office by the Spirit of God.

Meanwhile, David is with the prophet Samuel. He is counted among the prophets now. A question to consider. What cautionary lessons about the ways of sin might we learn from the occasions of Saul's anger towards David?

What might Saul's relationship with his spear reveal about the effects of sin in people's lives?■■■■■