

'GOD RULETH'

INTRODUCTION

Dale Ralph Davis sets the heading 'The Shadow of the Almighty' over a single section embracing both chapters 18 and 19.¹ I took my heading for 1 Samuel 19 from Psa. 59.13; 'Let them know that God ruleth in Jacob, to the ends of the earth', Psa. 59.13. (The title of Psa. 59 informs us that it was written about the occasion 'when Saul sent, and they watched the house to kill him (David)').

To help us grasp the significance of this expression for David at the time we really need to trace two distinct threads through 1 Samuel 19. In the first instance we discover what I call *'the green thread'*. For, at the time, King Saul was held firmly in the grip of envy. The chapter consists of four episodes which speak of Saul's repeated attempts to kill David, vv.1-7, 8-10, 11-17, 18-24, and, although the word 'envy' is not actually used, it was undoubtedly envy and resentment which motivated him throughout.

Saul was certainly not the man he had once been. In his earlier days he had been free from any trace of rivalry, ambition and self-seeking. When Samuel had declared, 'On whom *is* all the desire of Israel? Is it not on thee, and on all thy father's house?', Saul had responded, 'Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? wherefore then speakest thou so to me?', 9.20-21. Again, when the people 'sought him' to acclaim him king, 'he could not be found. Therefore they enquired of the Lord further, if the man should yet come thither. And the Lord answered, Behold, he hath hid himself among the stuff', 10.21-22. But, since those days, Saul had changed very much for the worse, and was now held tightly in the grip of what William Shakespeare called 'the green-eyed monster'.² And this monster's grip was tightening all the time! Indeed, when his previous attempts to kill David had been frustrated, he was prepared to murder him ruthlessly in cold blood – and that when David lay an apparently helpless invalid, 19.14. How true the word, 'Jealousy is as cruel ('as hard', 'as unyielding') as the grave', Song of Songs 8.6. In Saul's case, this particular 'green-eyed monster' had been born when he had brooded on the song which the women of Israel had sung in celebrating Israel's recent victory over the Philistines, 18.7-8.

But then, secondly we cannot help but see – and marvel at – what I can only call *'the golden thread'*. This is the thread of God's providence. For, if Saul was held firmly in the clutches of envy, David was held safe and secure in the grip of God's care and protection. In spite of Saul repeated attempts to kill David, the next chapter commences with the words, 'And David'. And how was this? Simply because, ultimately, it was the King of Kings who ruled and not the king of Israel!

As we might expect, 1 Samuel 19 is littered with the vocabulary of the fugitive: 'abide in a secret place, and hide thyself', v.2; 'he slipped away ... fled, and escaped that night', v.10; 'if thou save not thy life to night', v.11; 'he went, and fled, and escaped', v.12; 'he is escaped ... he said unto me, Let me go', v.17; 'fled, and escaped', v.18; and compare, immediately after, 'fled', 20.1.

CHAPTER DIVISION

Verses 1-7	Saul says, 'Kill David', v.1 Saul's son saves David – with his words
Verses 8-10	'The evil spirit ... was upon Saul', v.9 David avoids Saul's spear – again
Verses 11-17	Saul says, 'Kill ('slay' AV) him', v.11 Saul's daughter saves David – with her actions
Verses 18-24	'The Spirit of God was upon him', v.23 Saul joins the prophets – again

EXPOSITION

Verses 1-7 Saul says, 'Kill David', v.1. Saul's son saves David – with his words.

Verse. 1. 'Saul spake to Jonathan his son, and to all his servants, that they should kill David'. Following a further example of David's military competence, 18.30, Saul was growing even more desperate, and now came out into the open about his sinister intentions. Abandoning his cloak and dagger tactics, he 'went public'. Delitzsch claims that the text should be translated, 'Saul spoke to Jonathan and all his servants about his intention to kill David (i.e. not that *they* should kill David, but "that *he* intended to kill him")' – emphasis mine. It may be therefore that Saul simply

announced his purpose, rather than instructed Jonathan and his officials to carry it out for him. If Saul had only expended as much energy in killing the enemies of his people as he did in his attempts to kill loyal members of his people (such as David, Jonathan, and Ahimelech), he would have proved a great king.

Verses 2-3. *'But Jonathan'*. Jonathan was placed in a difficult position. His father and king had made known his intention of killing David but he (Jonathan) had only love for David, and had on his own initiative entered into solemn covenant with him. But Jonathan's recognition that David was God's choice for Israel's next king clarified everything for him. His way was clear. In such circumstances, his attitude must be that of the apostles when they were told to stop preaching the gospel; 'We ought to obey God rather than men', Acts 5.29.

'Jonathan Saul's son delighted much in David'. Solomon wrote that 'A king delights in a wise servant, but a shameful servant incurs his wrath', Prov. 14.35. But, although David had proved himself to be Saul's 'wise³ servant', he was certainly not now the object of Saul's 'delight'! But, if this 'king' didn't 'delight' in his 'wise servant', his son Jonathan did – and that 'much' ('exceedingly')!

'Jonathan told David'. The Lord had his man – the right man – in the right place at the right time – and Jonathan was quick to alert David to his danger. The verb '*told*' links Jonathan's concern for David to that of his sister Michal's concern for him later in the chapter. For, when Saul sent his messengers to kill David, Michal 'told him', v.11. Jonathan warned David 'to hide until *the morning*'; Michal warned him to flee before '*the morning*'! There is an irony, bordering on humour, here, in that, on the two occasions in the chapter where we are told of Saul's intention to 'kill' David, the life of David is preserved by Saul's own family. Who counters Saul's plot to eliminate David in v.1? The oldest of Saul's sons! Who counters Saul's plot to eliminate David in v.11? The younger of Saul's daughters!

'Take heed to thyself'. That is, 'Be careful', 'Be on your guard'. It is the word used of Amasa, who '*took no heed* to the sword that was in Joab's hand: so he smote him ... and he died', 2 Sam 20.10 – which incident underlines the danger of ignoring such advice.

Verse 4. *'Jonathan spake good of David unto Saul his father'*. Jonathan courageously took up the matter with Saul. And Jonathan didn't mince matters. He told his father – boldly and bluntly – that to 'kill' David (which Saul had said he intended to do) was 'sin', v.4 – and, indeed, was 'sin against innocent blood', v.6.⁴ But Jonathan was careful to confront the king in private; 'in the field', v.3. Jonathan was too good a son and subject to challenge Saul publicly before 'all his servants'; see v.1. And it is worth noting that the same prince who wouldn't stand back and let disparaging things be said *about his friend by his father* in chapter 19 wouldn't stand back and let disparaging things be said *about his father by his friend* in chapter 20 (vv.1-2). In both instances, he attempted to sort everything out in conversation with Saul.

Verse 5. *'He did put his life in his hand'*. He endangered, jeopardized his life.⁵ For other examples of the idiom see (a) the words of Jephthah to the men of Ephraim, 'when I saw that ye delivered *me* not, I put my life in my hands, and passed over against the children of Ammon', Judg. 12.3; (b) the words of the 'witch' of Endor to Saul, 'thine handmaid hath obeyed thy voice, and I have put my life in my hand', 1 Sam. 28.21; and (c) the words of Job, 'Wherefore do I take my flesh in my teeth, and put my life in mine hand?', Job 13.14.

'The Lord wrought a great salvation for all Israel: thou sawest it, and didst rejoice'. Jonathan words may well have reminded Saul of more or less the same words which he had used himself following his first success on the battlefield; 'Today the Lord hath wrought salvation in Israel', 11.13. For then, soon after his anointing as king, Saul had, under God, delivered Jabesh-Gilead from the Ammonites. Now Saul has witnessed again that '*The Lord wrought a great salvation for all Israel*' – this time through David, who had similarly been successful on the battlefield, and that soon after his anointing, and had, under God, delivered Israel from the Philistines. Back in chapter 11, 'Saul ... rejoiced', as well he might, v.15. Following David's victory also, Jonathan pointed out, 'thou ... didst rejoice'. But back in chapter 11, Saul had then generously refused to have those who had opposed him put to death, v.13. Perhaps the memory of that moment helped move him to promise Jonathan that the one he had regarded as his opponent (David) would not now be put to death. (The Hebrew word translated 'slain', 19.6, is the same as that 'put to death', 11.13.) That is, perhaps with that earlier occasion in mind, Saul repeated his ruling that his seeming opponent(s) should not be 'killed'.

Verses 6-7. *'Saul hearkened unto the voice of Jonathan: and Saul sware, As the Lord liveth, he shall not be slain'*. Saul was convinced by Jonathan's arguments, and convicted for the present that he was wrong in seeking the life of David. With characteristic impetuosity, Saul took a solemn oath that David's life would be spared. But we must surely recognise that, unknown to Saul, God was at work – inclining the king's heart as well as his ears to listen to Jonathan's 'voice'. Is it not written, 'The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord. It is as rivers of water. He turns it whithersoever he will', Prov.21.1? And, in passing, we note that there are times when parents need to accept advice from their children!

'Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence, as in times past'. What a splendid achievement. Happy Jonathan! For '*blessed are the peacemakers*', Matt. 5.9.

Verses 8-10 '**The evil spirit ... was upon Saul**', v.9.

David avoids Saul's spear – again.

Verse 8. *'There was war again: and David went out, and fought with the Philistines, and slew them with a great slaughter; and they fled from him (from his face)'*. No mention is made of any part played by the king, if any, but it was another 'great' military success for David – which it seems reopened Saul's own wounds and revived his envy and malice.

Verse 9. *And the evil spirit from the Lord was upon Saul, as he sat in his house with his javelin (spear) in his hand'*. This is the third reference to 'the spirit of distress' afflicting Saul; compare 16.14; 18.10. There was nothing about

Saul's holding his spear to arouse David's suspicions or cause him any concern. As one of the main symbols of his royalty, it never left him— see the note to 18.10.

'David played with his hand'. When we considered David doing the same back in 18.10, we commented, 'What a truly humble and unassuming man David was!' How much more now – with two further impressive military successes behind him, 18.30 and 19.8.

Verse 10. *'And Saul sought to smite David even to the wall with the javelin'*. Fuelled by David's fresh victory, and influenced by 'the spirit of distress', Saul broke his recent vow, made in the Lord's name. 'He that but the other day had sworn by his Maker "that he shall not be slain", now endeavours to slay him himself', Matthew Henry. Saul's oath was thrown away as easily as his spear was thrown. But David evaded Saul's spear and 'fled'. There is a sad twist to vv.8-10. David had 'struck' ('slew', AV) the Philistines so that they had 'fled', v.8. Saul now attempted to 'strike' ('Smite', AV) David so that he was forced to 'flee', v.10 – the same verbs on both occasions. But again Saul failed to 'strike' David and so succeeds only in leaving another hole in his wall!

Who can question God's hand in all this. It was another unmistakable case of a directed spear; compare 18.11. *'And David fled, and escaped that night'*. David was not short on courage but neither was he short on sense! There was nothing foolhardy or reckless about David. Faith in God's power to preserve and protect doesn't presume on that power. To do so would be, not to 'trust' God, but to 'tempt' Him – and, as David's 'Son' demonstrated in the wilderness, faith will never do that; Matt. 4.5-7. Though there are certainly times when it is our duty to withdraw when men seek our harm; 'when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another', Matt.10.23. It is for God's servants to determine before Him when they should pull back in the face of danger and threats, and when they should stay - compare Nehemiah's 'Should such a man as I flee?', Neh. 6.11.

'David fled'. This was to be the keynote of David's life for many years. This is the first of seven times it is said that he 'fled' from Saul; see also 19.12, 18; 20.1; 21.10; 22.17; 27.4. Note that it occurs following each of the last three episodes in this chapter. David's days as an outlaw, which began here, would continue until Saul died.

Verses 11-17 Saul says, 'Kill ('slay' AV) him', v.11. Saul's daughter saves David – with her actions.

As noted earlier, this section has clear connections with the first section of the chapter (see the note on *'Jonathan told David'* in v.2). In both sections it was one of Saul's own children who came to David's rescue. Jonathan *alerted David to his danger and protected him from Saul* by telling Saul *the truth about him* - that he was *a man of integrity and proven courage*. Michal *alerted David to his danger and protected him from Saul* by telling Saul and his messengers *lies about him* – not only that he was 'sick', but that he was *a man of brutality and violence*.

Verse 11. *'Saul sent messengers ... to slay him in the morning'*. Saul's men were to watch the door of David's house until daylight, and then murder David. Possibly they weren't to enter the house during the night either for fear of killing the wrong person or because it may have enabled David to escape during the confusion and darkness.

'Michal David's wife told him'. Possibly Michal had spotted Saul's hit men in their positions. It seems she was a keen observer out of windows; compare how, when 'the ark of the Lord came into the city of David, Michal Saul's daughter *looked through a window*, and saw king David leaping and dancing before the Lord; and she despised him in her heart', 2 Sam. 6.16.

And who, we ask, was the instrument in saving David's life? It was 'David's wife'. And who had given him his wife? It had been Saul himself. And why had he given her to him? So that she should 'be a snare to him', 18.21. But, in God's over-ruling providence, Saul's cunning and crafty scheme totally backfired. For it is Michal – and none other – who now warned David of his danger and helped him escape. And the one who Saul had intended should be 'a snare' to David, in the event became a snare for Saul! What David once wrote of another Benjamite (Cush) was in a sense also true in the case of Saul, 'He made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made', Psa. 7.15.

In the book of Job, Eliphaz once said that God 'disappointeth the devices of the crafty ... *He taketh the wise in their own craftiness'*, Job 5.13 – a point picked up by the apostle Paul; 'the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness', 1 Cor. 3.19. We discover, in God's over-ruling providence in 1 Sam. 18-19, yet another demonstration of His ability to turn 'the curse into a blessing', Neh. 13.2.

'If thou save not thy life to night, tomorrow thou shalt be slain'. Michal had no doubt how desperate David's situation was. Josephus paraphrases Michal's words rather quaintly – but graphically – 'She said, Let not the sun find thee here when it rises, for if it do, that will be the last time it will see thee'.⁶

Verse 12. *'Michal let David down through a window'*. If she had spotted Saul's men through a window, v.11, in all probability she chose another window for David's big 'let-down'. Possibly David's and Michal's house was built into the town wall like Rahab's; of whom scripture says, 'her house was upon the town wall, and she dwelt upon the wall', Josh. 2.15. We have no way of knowing. What we do know is that David made good his escape.

It was then in similar manner that the two spies sent by Joshua to Jericho also escaped from the servants of a king (in that case of the king of Jericho, Josh. 2.2) – and again with the aid of a woman. And it was in similar manner that the newly-converted Paul escaped, not only from the Jews, but the servants of a king (in that case of the king of the Nabataeans⁷); when 'the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket', Acts 9.25; compare 2 Cor.11.31-33. As Paul noted in 2 Corinthians, it was hardly the most dignified of retreats!

Verse 13. *'Michal took an image, and laid it in the bed'*. Michal now played for time for David. The word 'image' translates the Hebrew word '*teraphim*', which, as in this case, is always in the plural.⁸ The '*teraphim*' were the images of household and family deities.⁹ From other references, the '*teraphim*' seem to have been quite small in size. Constable claims that they were 'three or four inches high', adding, 'Archaeologists have found many such images in Palestine'. The '*teraphim*' were either set up in homes or carried around by people as 'good luck' charms.

It seems therefore that Michal wasn't using a single life-sized idol to act as some kind of human dummy. In all likelihood, for that purpose she simply piled some of David's clothes on the bed, then covered them with David's every-day outer garment (AV 'cloth' is the normal word for 'garment'), which would usually be used for warmth at night as well as protection by day. I note that, in his old age, David was covered by 'clothes' (the same word in Hebrew) to keep him warm in bed, 2 Kings 1.1. Finally, Michal added a 'pillow' (or 'quilt') of goat's hair where David's head would have been, to give the impression from a distance that it was a man's hair.

The '*teraphim*' would therefore have been placed alongside the bed rather than 'in' it. (The preposition '*el*' often has the meaning 'at' or 'beside' rather than 'on' or 'in'.) Their presence there was to convince Saul's messengers – and through them, Saul – that David was seriously ill. 'The poor man needed all the lucky charms he can get!'

But why did Michal have the '*teraphim*' in the first place? In ancient Israel, '*teraphim*' appear to have been regarded, by some at least in Israel, as part and parcel of the worship of the true God – rather than as foreign gods. Hence the fact that, not only did Jacob's Rachel take Laban's '*teraphim*' ('Rachel had stolen the images that were her father's', Gen. 31.19), but we find that, as late as the 18th year of the reign of godly Josiah, 'the workers with familiar spirits, and the wizards, and the images ('*teraphim*'), and the idols, and all the abominations that were spied in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, did Josiah put away', 2 Kings 23.24. But at the very least Michal's use of '*teraphim*' betrays ignorance of the law of God – which forbade the making of any form of image – on her part.

In the Ancient Near East, the one who possessed the '*teraphim*' was often the heir of the family. Michal may therefore have kept the '*teraphim*' for inheritance purposes (if anything happened to her brothers ...) as well as because of her uncritical acceptance of pagan superstition.

There is also some evidence that '*teraphim*' were associated with the treatment of barrenness and that they served as supposed aids to conception and child-birth. This would explain Rachel's theft and also Michal's possession. At the time she left her father's house, Rachel was still barren and so too was Michal.¹⁰

There is in fact a fascinating parallel between the cases of Michal and Rachel. Both were the second daughters of their fathers, both protected their husbands by deceiving their fathers with the use of '*teraphim*', and both later proved to be something of a disappointment to their husbands. It is quite likely that both these 'barren' wives employed the '*teraphim*' for fertility purposes. See Gen. 31.19, 34-35.

Verses 14-15. *When Saul sent messengers to take David, she said, He is sick*, v.14. Michal adopted a very clever ruse as a delaying tactic to give David time to make good his escape. And she pulled it off in a masterly fashion – even though it did later earn her the wrath of her father. Needless to say, Michal knew that sooner or later the cat would be out of the bag – and then, knowing her father, as she undoubtedly did, there would be trouble! And trouble there certainly was!

But, meanwhile, to buy David time, Michal lied. It seems that Michal had not a little of her father's trickery in her. I note that, even at a much later stage in her life, she is spoken of consistently as 'the daughter of Saul' and not the wife of David, 2 Sam. 6.16, 20, 23; 21.8; 2 Chron. 15.29.

'Saul sent the messengers again to see David, saying, Bring him up to me in the bed, that I may slay him', v.15. In effect Saul was telling his men, 'As it seems I can't trust any of you to do the job properly, I will do it myself'. It says much about the depth of Saul's hatred for David that he was prepared at this point to deliver the death-blow himself. It was little short of barbaric to vow the death at his own hand of one who, to all intent and purpose, was that very moment dying by the hand of nature. Is it too much to claim that Saul was being spurred on by him who is 'a murderer from the beginning', John 8.44? Who knows, perhaps Satan had paid more attention to the significance of David's anointing than Eliab had!¹¹

Verses 16-17. *'Saul said unto Michal, Why hast thou deceived me so'*. In the ancient world a daughter's loyalty to her father normally remained firm even after her marriage.

'And sent away mine enemy, that he is escaped?' For his part, Saul had now come to consider David as his 'enemy'. For their part, David's men regarded Saul as David's 'enemy'; see 'God hath delivered thine enemy into thine hand', 26.8; cf. 24.4. But, for his part, David did *not* view Saul as his 'enemy' – anything but! David addressed Saul as 'my master', 24.6; 'my father', 24.11; and 'my Lord', 26.17. In David's eyes, in spite of Saul's atrocious behaviour toward him, Saul remained 'the Lord's anointed' – right up to that day of his death, and indeed beyond, 2 Sam. 1.14.

'Michal answered Saul, He said unto me, Let me go; why should I kill thee?' A second blatant lie; cf. 'he is sick', v.14. Although Michal's fear of her father wasn't greater than her love for David, it was clearly greater than her love for truth! Michal was faithful to David with her actions, but she wasn't faithful to him with her words! For the David she described to her father was the kind of monster who, to save his own skin, would have cold-bloodedly murdered his own wife. The grim portrait she painted of David was hardly calculated to endear to Saul the man he already regarded as his 'enemy'.

'Michal is not so careful of her husband's reputation as she had been of his person', Matthew Henry. Although Michal shared her brother Jonathan's love for David, and Jonathan's determination to protect David from their father's wrath, alas, she didn't share Jonathan's love for truth, or his determination to convince Saul of David's integrity. Michal made no attempt to vindicate David from the charge of being in some way an 'enemy' to Saul.

Whereas 'Jonathan spake good of David unto Saul his father', v.4, Michal spoke only ill of him. In the well-chosen words of John Gill, 'She was concerned for the preservation of her husband, yet not for his honour'.

Whether or not Saul believed his daughter – and, knowing her love for David, Saul may well have entertained some doubt about the honesty of her answer – Michal had certainly now given him ammunition for him to use in publicly justifying, at least in part, his actions against 'David the desperado'.

The command not to 'lie' can be traced to the very origins of the nation of Israel; for example, 'Ye shall not steal, neither deal falsely, *neither lie one to another*', Lev. 19.11 – commands which were underpinned by the solemn

consideration, 'I am the Lord', v.12 – and which sprang directly from the principle, 'Be ye holy: for I the Lord your God am holy', v.2. In the light of such plain teaching, it is hardly possible for us to justify Michal's deceit. And yet the Lord was clearly pleased to catch it up into His own purpose and over-rule it in delivering David from Saul's scheme.¹²

It is perhaps instructive to compare the case of Rahab¹³, who also lied to a king when covering up what was soon to become a dangerous escape through a window; 'The king of Jericho sent unto Rahab, saying, Bring forth the men that are come to thee, which are entered into thine house: for they be come to search out all the country. And the woman took the two men, and hid them, and said thus, There came men unto me, but I wist not whence they were: And it came to pass about the time of shutting of the gate, when it was dark, that the men went out: whither the men went I wot not: pursue after them quickly; for ye shall overtake them. But she had brought them up to the roof of the house, and hid them with the stalks of flax, which she had laid in order upon the roof', Josh. 2.3-6.

It is no doubt significant that – when speaking of the faith of Rahab, and how this faith demonstrated its reality through her actions – the Holy Spirit through James says nothing to condone her lie, and focuses entirely on her faith; 'Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?', James 2.25.¹⁴ Note the comment of one of the Puritans – 'God hides His eyes from the evil that is in our good actions. Here is mention made of receiving the messengers, but no mention of the lie'.¹⁵ Perhaps we could apply Manton's approach with Rahab to the case of Michal, and conclude that we ought to commend Michal's action in helping David escape but not her lie.

David's circumstances in vv.11-12 provide the setting for Psa. 59 – the title of which includes the words, 'of David; when Saul sent, and they watched the house to kill him'. Psa. 59 – possibly the first psalm written by David which has come down to us – gives us an invaluable insight into David's feelings at the time.

This is not the place to deal with the psalm in any detail but our consideration of David's escape from his house would be incomplete without noting a few key points. We confine ourselves to just three:

(a) *David's exposure of the troublemakers in Saul's court.*

Although the book of Samuel concentrates on Saul's own actions and personal hostility towards David, clearly there were other men who lurked in the background – who (out of their own motives) spurred Saul on and were constantly poisoning his mind against David. A few verses of the psalm pull back the curtain on such men: 'Deliver me from mine enemies, O my God: defend me from them that rise up against me. Deliver me from the workers of iniquity, and save me from men of blood. For, lo, they lie in wait for my soul: the mighty are gathered against me ... they belch out (pour forth) with their mouth: swords are in their lips ... For the sin of their mouth and the words of their lips, let them even be taken in their pride; and for cursing and lying which they speak', Psa. 59.1-3, 7, 12.

We do find some – but only occasional – allusions to such men in the book of Samuel – for example: (a) in Saul's words to the men of Ziph, 'Go ... see his place where his haunt is ... for *it is told me* that he dealeth very subtly', 1 Sam. 23.22; and (b) in the words of David to Saul, '*Wherefore hearest thou men's words*, saying, Behold, David seeketh thy hurt? ... If the Lord have *stirred thee up against me*, let him accept an offering: but *if they be the children of men*, cursed be they before the Lord', 1 Sam. 24.9; 26.19.

These men may well have envied and begrudged David his success and rapid rise to prominence. We note that the claim that 'all' Saul's servants loved David, 18.22, was made before some of David's great military successes, 18.30; 19.8. Also there were some, no doubt, of those with responsible positions in Saul's court who could see, as clearly as Saul himself could see, that, if David ever became king, they would soon be looking for jobs, 22.7! (Note David's reference to 'the mighty' in 'the mighty are gathered against me', Psa. 59.3.)

(b) *David's declaration of his own integrity.*

David pleaded that he had done nothing to merit the hatred and hostility of the men he labelled 'mine enemies' in v.1. Their plots and actions were 'not for my transgression, nor for my sin, O Lord. They run and prepare themselves without my fault ('for no fault of mine', ESV)', vv.3-4. David's conscience bore him witness before God that he had done nothing to deserve such treatment. These same protests of innocence echo in the book of Samuel, where David protested to Jonathan, 'What have I done? what is mine iniquity? and what is my sin before thy father, that he seeketh my life?', 20.1, and to Saul himself, 'know thou and see that there is neither evil nor transgression in mine hand, and I have not sinned against thee ... The Lord therefore be judge, and judge between me and thee, and see, and plead my cause ... what have I done? or what evil is in mine hand?', 24.11, 15; 26.18.

(c) *David's expression of confidence in God and His power.*

David sang of God as his strength and his defence; 'Scatter them by thy power ... I will sing of thy power ... for thou hast been my defence and refuge in the day of my trouble. Unto thee, O my *strength*, will I sing: for God is my defence', vv.11,16-17. All right, David was saying, his enemies may have 'swords ... in their lips', v.7, but God (no less!) is his shield! – so 'bring them down, O Lord our shield', v.11.

Saul had his own plans laid about what was to happen to David 'in the morning'; 'Saul also sent messengers unto David's house, to watch him, and to slay him *in the morning*', 1 Sam. 19.11. But David had very different ideas. He had every confidence that he would 'sing aloud' of God's loving-kindness ('steadfast love'; 'mercy', AV) '*in the morning*', Psa. 59.16. David fully expected that God would change Saul's planned morning of death into a morning of praise! David foresaw, not a funeral, but a worship meeting!

And who was it that God used to save David from Saul? Why, it was Michal, Saul's own daughter – given by Saul to David to be a snare to him. Small wonder then that, as David considers all those who conspired against him, David expresses his firm conviction, 'But thou, O Lord, shalt laugh at them', Psa. 59.8.

It is interesting that David makes no reference to Michal anywhere in the psalm. It is not, I am sure, that David was ungrateful to her for her timely warning and assistance, but in his psalm David has his eyes focused, not on the

means or instrument which God used to deliver him, but on the ultimate source of his deliverance – on God Himself. Hence his last verse – ‘Unto thee, O my strength, will I sing’, v.17. David may be weak, but David's God is strong. And I note that the New Schofield Bible very aptly heads the Psalm, 'Help of the helpless'!

Verses 18-24 **‘The Spirit of God was upon him’, v.23.** **Saul joins the prophets – again.**

This section has some features in common with what has gone before. As in the previous section, Saul ‘sent messengers’, vv.14-15 and vv.20-21, and, as in the previous section, he decided, when his messengers failed him, to resort to a bit of DIY ('Do-It-Yourself'), vv.15, 22 – but with no more success!

Verse 18. *‘David fled, and escaped, and came to Samuel to Ramah, and told him all that Saul had done to him’.* David didn't head for Bethlehem – though his home and family were there. He probably felt that Bethlehem would offer him no more protection from Saul than Samuel had once felt it would have offered him, 16.1-2.

Apart from which, what more natural than to go to God's prophet – who, having anointed David in the first place, was best placed to counsel him about what he should now do – and in whose presence he would likely find asylum and safety. And so 'David fled ... to Samuel' – whose base at Ramah lay only an hour or so from Saul's headquarters at Gibeah.

‘He and Samuel went and dwelt in Naioth’. The word ‘Naioth’ comes from the Hebrew word for ‘habitations/residences’. It is possible, of course, that ‘Naioth’ simply refers to Samuel's home – which may even have had ‘Naioth’ as its name. But the fact that Samuel then ‘went’ with David to Naioth suggests that it wasn't his own personal dwelling.

Yet it was ‘in Ramah’, 19.19, 2, 23; 20.1. The Jewish Targum paraphrases it, ‘He and Samuel went and dwelt in the house of doctrine’, John Gill. If there are any grounds for this paraphrase, Naioth, the ‘house of instruction’ was probably a compound of dwellings in Ramah where Samuel's ‘company of prophets’ lived.¹⁶

Verses 19-21. *‘It was told Saul, saying, Behold, David is at Naioth in Ramah. And Saul sent messengers to take David’.* No-one needed to tell Saul why David had headed for Ramah. Everyone knew that Ramah was Samuel's home-town. It was also the place to which Samuel went following the last meeting between him and Saul, 15.34.¹⁷

Evidently Saul also knew that Samuel was at Ramah at the time, ‘Then went he also to Ramah ... and he asked and said, Where are Samuel and David?’, v.22. But, sadly, Saul was not prepared to grant David sanctuary even in Samuel's presence. Presumably Saul didn't have sufficient regard and respect for Samuel and his prophetic office. This stands in marked contrast to the respect shown by even a Philistine garrison, which at an earlier time, hadn't interfered with the activities of the company of prophets who, under Samuel's leadership, were in their area, 10.5¹⁸.

‘When they saw the company of the prophets prophesying, and Samuel standing as appointed over them, the Spirit of God was upon the messengers of Saul’, v.20. This time the Lord chose to deliver David, not by means of any human instrument, as he had recently chosen to do through both Jonathan and Michal, but rather through intervening directly by His Spirit. By placing the expression ‘on the messengers of Saul’ in an emphatic position in the sentence, the Hebrew text emphasises the altogether unexpected effect upon Saul's messengers.

‘They also prophesied’. On occasions, ‘prophesying’ in the Old Testament focused upon praising God – probably through ecstatic utterances and songs – under the inspiration and influence of the Spirit of God – and accompanied by the playing of musical instruments. Note how ‘David and the captains of the host separated (some) to the service of the sons of Asaph, and of Heman, and of Jeduthun, who should prophesy with harps, with psalteries, and with cymbals ... to give thanks and to praise the Lord’, 1 Chron. 25.1-3. The ‘sons of Asaph, and of Heman, and of Jeduthun’ (belonging, respectively, to the Levitical clans of Gershon, Kohath, and Merari) were the singers, ‘instructed in the songs of the Lord’, vv.6-7. ‘Their singing is a particular variety of prophesying, namely a prophesying *with* harps, etc’.¹⁹ As I understand the text it means that the prophesying in song was accompanied by the playing of the harps etc, rather than that the prophesying was itself ‘on’ the harps etc. Note the description of one of the chief singers, Heman, as ‘the king's seer *in the words of God*’, 1 Chron. 25.5.

Compare also Saul's own earlier experience. Samuel had informed him, ‘thou shalt meet a company of prophets coming down from the high place *with a psaltery, and a tabret, and a pipe, and a harp*, before them; *and they shall prophesy*’, 10.5. ‘When they came thither to the hill, behold, a company of prophets met him; and the Spirit of God came upon him, and *he prophesied among them*’, 10.10. On that occasion, it seem that, as here, the prophesying was not only accompanied – perhaps fostered – by music, but that it was a group activity, and could be, as the Spirit willed, in a manner contagious.

Needless to say, the Spirit of God came upon Saul's messengers as the Lord's chosen means of protecting David from Saul's malice. The Spirit's power effectively disarmed those who came to ‘take’ David, v.20.

Saul sent messengers again the third time, and they prophesied also’. Three separate companies were sent with the stated mission of capturing God's servant, David. In some ways, history would repeat itself some 170 years later, when another king, Ahaziah of Israel, sent three companies to capture God's servant, Elijah, 2 Kings 1.9-14. On that later occasion, God's prophet caused fire to come down from heaven to consume two of Ahaziah's three companies! But here in 1 Samuel 19, the prophet Samuel had no need to call down fire from heaven to deal with any of the companies sent by Saul. The Lord intervened by His Spirit to deal with them Himself. He simply *overpowered* them by sending sent forth His Spirit *in power* to deprive the three sets of messengers of *their power*. *They* had come to lay hold on David – but it was *God* who laid hold on them!

Verse. 22. *‘Then went he also to Ramah’.* Saul was painfully slow in getting the message! Probably muttering (much as in v. 15) something to the effect, ‘If you want a job done properly, you are better doing it yourself’, he set off himself to Ramah. Note that *the three-fold ‘they also’* of vv.20-21 (*‘they also prophesied ... Saul ... sent other messengers, and they also prophesied. And Saul sent messengers again the third time, and they also prophesied’*,

lit.) becomes *the three-fold 'he also'* of vv.22-24 ('Then went *he also* to Ramah ... *he also* stripped off his garments ... *he also* prophesied before Samuel', lit.).

Verse 23. *'The Spirit of God was upon him also, and he went on, and prophesied, until he came to Ramah'*. As far as we know, Ramah was the only place where, and this was the only time when, Samuel, Saul and David ever met together. But, more importantly, there was 'Another' present there with them who was infinitely greater than all three – and who, though unseen, displayed His power in a most remarkable manner. I say 'remarkable' because this time the Spirit of God came, not on Saul's messengers, but on Saul himself. And that is 'remarkable' because, although the Spirit of the Lord had come on Saul on previous occasions, such experiences had ceased after 'the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul', 16.14. But, on this one last occasion, the Spirit of God came upon the king – to overpower him. And we note that Saul was struck down by God's all-subduing Spirit in a more striking manner than had happened to his messengers. For Saul appears to have been thrown into some kind of ecstatic trance, in which he continued all day and night, lying prostrate and helpless at Samuel's feet – and affording David ample time to escape.

'The Spirit of God was upon him ... and ... prophesied'. More or less identical words had been used about Saul once before in 1 Samuel. This was in chapter 10; *'the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied'*, v.10. On both occasions, 'a company of prophets' had been present, 10.10; 19.20. And, on both occasions, the popular response was to say, 'Is Saul also among the prophets', 10.12; 19.24.²⁰ Clearly scripture is linking together the first and last times that God's Spirit is said to have come on Saul (together with all the other details) to draw our attention to the striking contrast between the contexts. The first occasion (chapter 10) is associated with Saul's *ascent* from obscurity to kingship; the last marks a key stage in his *descent* from his kingship into madness and finally death.

It is possible that Saul himself looked back later on the events of 1 Sam. 19.23-24, spotted the obvious connection with what he had experienced back in 10.10-12, and recognized it as God's reminder to him of that former occasion when God's Spirit had first come upon him – to fit and equip him for the office of king – in which he had so conspicuously failed.

Verse 24. *'He stripped off his clothes also, and prophesied before Samuel in like manner, and lay down naked all that day and all that night'*. Psa. 76.10 says, 'Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain'. God had made Saul's wrath against David (which had moved him to offer Michal to David in marriage) to 'praise' Him – in that He had exalted His sovereign over-ruling providence in using that self-same Michal to save David from Saul's own murderous scheme, vv.11-12. Now the 'remainder' of Saul's wrath God restrains! Saul found to his cost that God's limit/less power is also a limiting power.

Interestingly, the word translated 'lay down' is the same translated 'fell' in 17.49; 'the stone sunk into his (Goliath's) forehead; and he *fell* upon his face to the earth'. That is, David saw two big men bite the dust – but this time he needs to propel no stone to bring it about! It was the irresistible power of God's Spirit which 'felled' Saul.

And there is yet another contrast which we should note – that between the effect of the Spirit of God coming on Saul on this occasion and the effect of the Spirit of God coming on Saul back in 11.6; 'the Spirit of God came upon Saul when he heard those tidings'. In chapter 11, the Spirit came on him to empower him to perform a great exploit for God and for Israel. Here in chapter 19, the Spirit came on him to dis-empower him and to leave him altogether helpless.

'He stripped off his clothes also'. The 'also' implies that the three groups of his messengers had previously done the same.

'Lay down naked'. The word 'naked' does not necessarily mean that Saul was without any clothing at all.²¹ It probably signifies that he 'disrobed' himself – that is, that he removed his outer garments – his royal robes which declared his kingly status and position – and lay down in his plain undergarments. But the very fact that, under the Spirit's control, Saul 'stripped himself' in this way was itself loaded with significance.

For Saul to put off his royal robes in the manner described was effectively and symbolically for him to acknowledge that he was forfeiting his right to be Israel's king. (Just as, when Jonathan had 'stripped himself' (the same word as here) of his princely robe etc, 18.4, he was symbolically renouncing all claim to the throne – see the note to 18.4.) When God's Spirit moved Saul to do this, He was saying, in effect, 'Saul, you are no longer My king; you are hereby stripped of your royal glory'. That is, Saul's disrobing probably symbolised the loss of his *royal* dignity as well as his *personal* dignity.

But Saul's stripping himself suggests one further connection. From Ramah, Saul moves forward to keep his appointment with death – to his tragic end at the hands of the Philistines – when he will be 'stripped' of his garments for one last time; 'when the Philistines came to *strip* (the same word as in 19.24) the slain ... they found Saul and his three sons fallen in mount Gilboa. And they ... *stripped off* (the same word again) his armour', 31.8-9. Is it altogether fanciful for us to see his lying stripped later on Gilboa prefigured in his lying stripped now at Ramah?

What profound messages were being preached here at Ramah!

'All that day and all that night'. This afforded David ample time to escape. The irresistible power of God's Spirit which came on Saul at Ramah should have told him, not only that in fighting against David he was fighting against God, but that he had absolutely no prospect of winning such a fight! – that his most determined efforts were doomed to failure.

Saul needed to learn that a man can *pit his wits against omniscience* if he must – he can *bash his head against omnipotence* if he must – but heaven just laughs at such stupidity. Why, I can almost hear David singing, 'Thou, O Lord, shalt laugh at them', Psa. 59.8.

It was in that very psalm that David prayed, 'Deliver me from mine enemies, O my God ... let them know that God ruleth', Psa. 59.1, 13. How thrilling to observe the variety of ways – both 'natural' and 'supernatural' – in which, in our chapter, God answered such prayers. We have noted :

- (a) a loyal friend, vv.2 -6;
- (b) a directed spear, v.10;
- (c) a loving wife, vv.11-17; and
- (d) the irresistible power of God's Spirit, vv.20-24.

El Shaddai's shadow was over David from v.1 to v.24! I may not share any of David's dramatic and chequered experiences – but then I don't need to. It is enough for me that David's God is my God too! So, when all seems against me – when I am cast down and tempted to feel that everything is hopeless – then let me take heart from the confident assertion of young David – 'God rules'. For He most certainly does!

End-notes

¹ 'Dale Ralph Davis, '1 Samuel - Looking on the Heart', Baker Book House, 1996, page 155.

² In Shakespeare's Othello, Iago warns Othello to beware of jealousy - 'It is the green-ey'd monster which doth mock the meat it feeds on', Shakespeare's Othello III, 3, line 170. (With reference to the way a cat plays with a mouse before killing it.) I considered as a title for these notes on 1 Samuel 19, 'Saul in the grip of the green-eyed monster'. But, although it would have made an arresting title, I preferred to focus rather on the sovereign providence of God which delivered David from Saul's several attempts on his life.

³ The Hebrew root translated 'wise' is used frequently to describe David; see 18.5, 14-15, 30.

⁴ It is a sad day indeed when people refuse to name 'sin' for what it is. And we too need to be careful that we don't water down our own sins by labelling them 'weaknesses' or 'shortcomings' or the like - whether in conversation with others or in confession to God; see 'our sins', 1 John 1.9.

⁵ We may be reminded of another biblical picture with much the same meaning - that of 'laying down one's neck'; 'Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus: who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles', Rom. 16.3-4. And yet the willingness to do just this is what the Lord expects of each of us; 'He laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren', 1 John 3.16. Of course, occasions are rare when Christians are called on to do this literally - but John is onto this and covers the point immediately by adding, 'But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?' That is, although I may not be called on to save a brother's life by dying in his place, I can and should help sustain his life when I am aware he has needs. Now that comes nearer home!

⁶ Antiquities of the Jews, Book VI, chapter XI.4.

⁷ See Ralph P. Martin, '2 Corinthians', Word Biblical Commentary, 1986, page 385.

⁸ See Gen 31.19, 34-35; Judg 17.5; 18.14, 17-18, 20; 2 Kings 23.24; Ezek 21.21; Hos 3.4; Zech 10.2.

⁹ The would-be priest Micah used 'teraphim' in his corrupt worship of God, Judg.17.5. When in 1 Sam.15.23, Samuel said to Saul, 'rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry', the word 'idolatry' is the word 'teraphim'.

¹⁰ We know this because, on account of her profane attitude to David's enthusiastic dance of joy when bringing up the ark from the house of Obed-Edom, Michal remained barren until the day of her death, 2 Sam. 6.16, 20-23.

¹¹ God had revealed centuries before that the coming Deliverer - the Woman's Seed, the 'Serpent-crusher', the 'Dragon-slayer' - would come, not only through the patriarchs, but specifically from the tribe of Judah; 'The sceptre shall not depart from *Judah*, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be', Gen. 49.10. Had Satan, aware of this prophecy, carefully observed the anointing of a young man to be God's chosen king over Israel, who, unlike Saul, came 'from Judah'? Had he put two and two together and made four? If he had, his course of action was clear to him - in a word 'Devour!' Compare 'the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for *to devour* her child as soon as it was born', Rev. 12.4; see the section Rev. 12.1-5.

¹² Something similar arises with the words with which the Hebrew midwives deceived Pharaoh (though then, of course, before the Law was given); 'The midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive. And the king of Egypt called for the midwives, and said unto them, Why have ye done this thing, and have saved the men children alive? And the midwives said unto Pharaoh, Because the Hebrew women *are* not as the Egyptian women; for they *are* lively, and are delivered ere the midwives come in unto them. Therefore God dealt well with the midwives: and the people multiplied, and waxed very mighty. And it came to pass, because the midwives feared God, that he made them houses', Exod. 1.17-21.

¹³ See the earlier reference to Rahab in the note to v.12.

¹⁴ The writer to the Hebrews speaks only of Rahab's faith in receiving the spies - not of anything she said by way of cover-up; 'By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace', Heb. 11.31.

¹⁵ Thomas Manton, 'An Exposition on the Epistle of James', Banner of Truth, page 268.

¹⁶ That 'the sons of the prophets' lived together in some such compounds seems clear from 2 Kings 6; 'the sons of the prophets said unto Elisha, Behold now, the place where we dwell with thee is too strait for us. Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan, and take thence every man a beam, and let us make us a place there, where we may dwell. And he answered, Go ye', 2 Kings 6.1-2.

¹⁷ See 1 Sam. 1.19; 2.11; 7.17; 8.4; 15.34.

¹⁸ Samuel told Saul, 'After that thou shalt come to the hill of God, where is the garrison of the Philistines: and it shall come to pass, when thou art come thither to the city, that thou shalt meet a company of prophets coming down from the high place with a psaltery, and a tabret, and a pipe, and a harp, before them; and they shall prophesy'.

¹⁹ Vern S. Poythress, 'Westminster Theological Journal', V37 #2 - Winter 1975.

²⁰ Clearly this became a popular proverbial expression.

²¹ See Isa. 20.2; Micah 1.8; John 21.7.