

Notes on I Samuel 25 – 31

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Chapter 25 – 26

Samuel's leadership was such that his death warranted national mourning. He had brought stability to the nation. With his death, further attention focussed on David. Was he ready for his task? He had avoided taking vengeance on Saul, but had cut something from his coat. Now, when peeved by Nabal's refusal to acknowledge indebtedness to him, he came close to avenging himself.

Nabal had means to help David, the occasion to do so was a feast day. He had reason to be grateful to him and the encouragement of his men to share what they had. However, Nabal had decided not to acknowledge David, though so obviously blessed by the Lord. Nabal was somewhat like Saul but not protected from David's vengeance by an anointing. It was good for David that Nabal had a wife of more noble spirit than her husband. She could see that the living God was with David and that he was sure to be king. David's spirit had been raw, but he knew that God had spoken to him through Abigail's wisdom. She believed the living God had raised up David for their salvation and she expressed this in plain, humble words and in good deeds.

Nabal's glory was all self-aggrandisement, and it punctured quickly. When he died, it must have been clear to David that he had no need to avenge himself, against Nabal, or Saul. He gained a wife of good spirit who would share with him the dangerous days ahead.

Ziphites, for a second time, alerted Saul to David's location. Again, Saul hounded the man who was rival to his ambition. Again, he achieved no more than a clear sign that the Lord was with David. Again, David pleaded his case but now with more depth. Were these attempts on his life from God or man? Did Saul have the warrant to drive him from his inheritance and did they want him to worship another god? Why was Saul so concerned with a 'flea'? (See Psalm 54 which is attributed to this occasion.) Again, Saul confessed he was a sinner and a fool. David may have reasoned with Saul, but he entrusted his future to the Lord. So, each man went his way.

In these days, David had dealings with two other men. Abishai shared David's daring and purpose, but had not yet learned to entrust himself to the God who avenged (or justified) his chosen people. Teaching the people of God to do this was as important for Israel's king as defeating their enemies. The second man, Abner, was Saul's army chief. If David had a future in the country, he would have to deal with this man. David revealed, publicly, that he had failed his duty and should die. Perhaps it was because

Saul was temporarily humbled by David's words that Abner was spared. David was responsible for preserving the life of both Saul and Abner.

Prayer

Father, we live in this present evil world where it appears that we must care for ourselves. But you have given us a Saviour and he has taught us to trust in you. Through him, we have been justified. Who is there who can stand against us, or condemn us, or separate us from the love of Christ your Son? Thankyou for all the helps you have placed around us to teach us to entrust ourselves to you. You are the living God, and by you, we also live. All that is needed will be given to us as it is needed. Keep our hearts in peace, through our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Chapter 27 – 28

For a second time, David resorted to the Philistine city Gath where Achish was king. He had escaped from here before by acting madly. David had accused Saul of pushing him away from his inheritance so as to worship another god (26:19). It was because of the false worship of Philistia and other nations that the Lord had required that Israel destroy them. Would David choose another god in coming under Philistine protection? Far from it!

Who could judge the rightness or wrongness of David's actions? What is important is that he gained respite from Saul and was able to continue to destroy Israel's enemies. This was part of his calling and preparation for the day when he would return to Israel as king. The direction of his life had not changed. However, it must have grieved him to be away from Israel and to have to live constantly by deception.

David's situation was now complicated beyond human resolution. He faced a battle against his own king, whom he would not harm, brought about by the need to deceive his enemy. What did David mean by saying to Achish: 'You will know what I can do'? Perhaps he did not know himself but trusted God for a good outcome. Achish was on dangerous ground. If he made David his bodyguard, literally, 'the keeper of his head', what could David be trusted to do with his head (cf. 17:54)?

Saul's situation, on the other hand, was desperate. He had rejected the Lord's word to him through Samuel who was now dead. He needed a word from the Lord to know if he was safe to attack his enemy but the Lord would not answer him (though he would answer David—see 30:8). He had asked Samuel for public friendship to support him before (15:25–31) and hoped for his help once more but he broke his own law, and God's law, and forced a confrontation with Samuel through a medium. He heard that the days of his life and the days of his kingdom were nearly ended. Having rejected a life of hearing and doing the will of God, he only had an outlawed medium for a friend.

Prayer

Father, the trials of the righteous are many, but the trials of those who forget your word are bitter and have no lasting remedy. I thank you for the covenant of grace, the covenant made with the blood of your Son, which teaches us to be faithful to you and to your purpose. Lord, we love your word and will run the way of your commandments, through the strength of your Son, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Chapter 29 – 31

David was skilled in deceiving, but Achish was also gullible. He delighted in having such a prize as David. His men were wiser than their leader, and so, David, still playing his role of eager helper, was sent home (23:16). After days (80 kilometres as the crow flies, one way) of needless travel, it was bitter indeed to find their homes and families gone.

Then David learned of the threat to himself. Perhaps, in his bitterness, he may have remembered Jonathan coming and strengthening him in God (23:16). Whatever, he found strength in God, then sought the guidance he needed from God, and so, was on his way again. Some had to retire with weariness, but the remainder did not have much of a battle anyway because their enemies were prematurely congratulating themselves. The battle and the whole episode was so clearly of God that David could not indulge the arrogant men among his troops who thought they deserved their booty. David had been strengthened in God and he made his men realise where their strength had come from. Then he distributed the good things to local towns that had helped him. He wanted them to know that God was still their Keeper and that he, David, was the servant of the Lord. All would profit from the victory that David knew was a gift of undeserved favour. King Saul's heart had also been widened with the generosity of God in his early days of leadership (I Sam. 11:13), but this had not continued.

Through the period of the judges, including Samuel, Philistia had been Israel's enemy. Now, they had gained a decisive victory and the king whom Israel thought would secure their future had fallen by their sword. Dagon was credited with victory (I Chron. 10:10), but, as surely as the Lord lived, these events fulfilled the word of the Lord and would serve his ends. To the end, Saul had a son alongside him who trusted God, an armour bearer who seemed to understand that he should not touch the Lord's anointed, and grateful subjects who remembered that, in better days, Saul had delivered them (11:1–11). The covenant of the Lord with his people was remembered by some, and certainly remembered by the Lord.

Prayer

Father, we have your Son as our leader in battle and, through him, have gained victories that no sinner ever deserved to win. Grant that our hearts may be enlarged with your goodness and that many in this world may hear of your greatness and savour your bounty. Through our varying fortunes, may we never doubt the covenant sealed with the blood of your Son. Strengthen our hearts now, so that, in this present hour of trial, we may glorify your name, for the sake of your Son Jesus Christ. Amen.