

The Saints and the Providence of God

1 Samuel 19

By [Dr. Derek W. H. Thomas](#)

Now turn with me if you would to 1 Samuel once again and to chapter 19. Last week, you remember, we saw Jonathan, Saul's son, making a covenant of friendship and loyalty with David and consequent to that Saul's fit of jealousy, especially when he heard women singing that Saul had killed his thousands but David his tens of thousands. And then we saw on four different occasions in chapter 18, the reinstatement of the principle — verse 5, verse 14, verse 15, and again in verse 30 — that “the Lord was with David.” Now Saul's attempt to take David's life comes into its own now in chapter 19. And before we read it together let's look to God in prayer.

Father, we thank You for the Scripture and we pray tonight again that You would speak to us from out of Your living Word. We pray, O Lord, for lessons that will impact our own lives, that we might as we were reflecting this morning, take up a cross and follow after You. So bless us we pray. Bless this Word to us know. We ask it all in Jesus' name. Amen.

This is God's Word:

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 a 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. 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 lyre. And Saul sought to pin David to the wall with his 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 goats' hair at its head and covered it with the clothes. And when Saul sent messengers to take David, she said, "He is sick." 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 goats' 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?'"

David now 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 Naioth. And it was told Saul, "Behold, David is at Naioth 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 and came to the great well that is in Secu. And he asked, "Where are Samuel and David?" And one said, "Behold, they are at Naioth in Ramah." And he went there to Naioth in Ramah. And the Spirit of God came upon him also, and as he went he prophesied until he came to Naioth 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?"

Well so far God's holy and inerrant Word.

This is a tale about saints and the providence of God. Everything that happens, happens because God wills it to happen and wills it to happen before it happens, and wills it to happen in the way that it happens. I was reading yesterday, just hot off the press, a brand new publication, new translation, of Calvin's treatise on *The Secret Providence of God*. And Calvin, as Calvin could and as Calvin often did, was berating those who thought that providence was mere "permission" on God's part. There are those who like the language of permission because it means that

God doesn't get involved in the details, He just gives a general nod and the details are left to themselves. Well, that's not the doctrine of Christian providence. Thank God that's not the doctrine of Christian providence. The doctrine of Christian providence says that God is involved in the details, the smallest of all details. Not a sparrow falls to the ground but by the decree of Almighty God.

Now this chapter opens with a top secret meeting in the cabinet of Saul's palace. And Saul is there and his son Jonathan are there and so are the servants. And Saul puts out a contract on David, to kill him. No doubt whoever would accomplish this task would gain the favor of Saul and perhaps at the same time be a very wealthy individual. Now, four attempts are made on David's life in this chapter. Two attempts, you remember, were made in the previous chapter when Saul threw a spear in David's direction and happened to miss him.

In verses 1 to 7, Jonathan intervenes and tells David of his father's plot to have David killed. Saul has made an oath - when Jonathan remonstrates with his father and reminds him of all David has done, Saul makes an oath that he will not lay a finger on David's sweet head. Well that's intervention number one.

In verses 8 through 10, we see Saul immediately forgetting the oath that he has just made and he has one of his turns. And apparently in response to David's country music on the lyre and he throws a javelin, a spear, in David's direction, and again happens, in the providence of God, to miss him. That's intervention number two.

In verses 11 through 17, David learns that your home is not your castle. He probably has a home built into the wall of the city and Michal, David's wife, notices spies outside the home, eyeing David. She has perhaps caught wind, through Jonathan, of Saul's intent to have David killed in his own house. He escapes by a basket out the window. It reminds you of the story of the apostle Paul doing something similar in Damascus in Acts chapter 9. She stalls the hit men who knock on the door. She uses these teraphim idols. You may well ask, "What is she doing with these idols in her house?" We'll pass over that for now, but she dresses up these idols, puts them in the bed — there's a dummy in the bed, and she says to the spies to knock on the door and perhaps glance in the direction of the bed, "He's sick," and shuts the door. Saul is not impressed — says, "Bring him to me in the bed that I may kill him." By that time, of course, the ruse is known and once again Michal says to Saul, "I had to let him go because he was going to kill me." That's lie number two from Michal. That's intervention number three.

And then in verses 18 through 24, David is in Ramah and in a place called Naioth with Samuel. Samuel was an old man by now and Saul had his spies in Naioth who inform him of David's presence. Not one group of hit men come, not two, but three, and all three of them end up prophesying. They are caught by the Spirit

and delayed and prevented from doing their dastardly deed. So Saul comes himself and, lo and behold, he too gets caught in this prophesying. That's intervention number four.

Let me say three things. First of all, God is in total control of our lives. He was in total control of David's life. This story is bizarre. It would make a wonderful, rather odd, but a wonderful movie. Who would have thought that the crowned prince of Israel, David, Ruth's grandson, heir to the throne, the one in whose lineage Jesus will be born — who would have thought he would encounter six attempts upon his life and all six of them he is delivered from? God is in complete control of David's life. He's in complete control of your life and my life.

I. God is in total control of our lives.

You know, turn to Psalm 59 because David reflected on this incident in his life. It's rather fascinating that David would reflect on this incident and provide for us a psalm that we may use in our worship. And he generalizes the incident so as to provide us with instruction that will be of value to us. In other words, David is saying about events in his own life, "You can learn from me. You can learn about my trust in the Lord, my trust in providence, my trust in God." You can read David's life, David is saying in this psalm, and say, "Yes, be like David. Act like David acted." You know one of the things that he says in that psalm, it's right at the very end of the psalm, Psalm 59 — he says, "God — God is like a fortress. God is like a fortress."

Now I know you love castles. That's what you talk about when you go to Wales or England or Scotland. There are castles everywhere. There are probably fifty of them in Wales. I grew up next to one, saw it almost every day of my life as a small boy on my way to school — never thought much about it. The fact that it was a thousand years old was not all that impressive to me as a young boy because it was now in some state of disrepair, but it was a fortress. It was a place when enemies came and threatened, you would run into and you would be safe. God is our fortress. He is in complete and absolute and total control.

Imagine if David was an open theist. Imagine for a minute that David was an open theist. Imagine that David believed in what is sometimes called Freewill Theism. In other words, that God hasn't ordered and is therefore not in complete control of the future, that in order to keep what we call human freedom a reality, we have to say that the fact that we have a choice means God doesn't know which way we're going to choose. Therefore, He's not in total control.

You know, if you believe that God is not in total control you would not call Him your fortress. He cannot be your fortress, He cannot be a source of security to you when you pass through trials and tribulations and fears and alarms unless you are absolutely confident as David was, "This is a God in whom we can trust.

This is a God upon whom we can rely.” If there is any risk in the providence of God we can never be certain. And David is saying in Psalm 59, he's saying in Psalm 59 at the end, “I will sing” — verse 16 — “of Your strength. I will sing aloud of Your steadfast covenant love in the morning, for You have been to me a fortress.” That's the first thing I wanted us to see — God is in complete control.

II. God's providence may bring you to a hard place.

Now I don't know where you are tonight and there's a second thing I want you to see and it may be particularly relevant to you — that God's providence may bring us into a hard place. I am unaware that there is a contract out on anyone at First Presbyterian Church, though that may be the case, but I'm unaware of that. Imagine, we watch movies like that don't we, people who have a contract out on them? There is someone out there who is trying to kill you — a sharpshooter, a terrorist, a bomber. Where are your troubles in relationship to that type of scenario? I imagine — forgive me — I imagine that on that scale they're just a little bit below that or maybe the troubles and trials and difficulties you're passing through just now, on the scale of things, they can't be compared to that.

David is being sought as dead by his boss. Now you may not like your boss, but does he actually want you dead? Are you scared to go home to your house tonight in case there are sharpshooters outside the door? It's extraordinary. David finds himself here with his life threatened, his marriage disrupted — he's a refugee. He has to flee. We may not always be able to detect the providence or the direction of providence in our lives.

God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform.
He plants His footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm.
Deep in unfathomable mines of never failing skill,
He treasures up His bright designs and works His sovereign will.
Blind unbelief is sure to err, and scan His work in vain.
God is His own interpreter and He will make it plain.

Don't you think David, when he ran off to speak to Samuel, a wise old prophet Samuel, don't you think they spoke about the providence of God? Don't you think David said, “Samuel, you anointed me as king and there've been six attempts on my life now and one or two of those attempts got really close! What is God doing in my life?” And Samuel would shake his wise old head and say, “David, I cannot tell you son, but I know this — He knows what He's doing. He knows the end from the beginning.”

You know, this is Ruth's grandson. This is Naomi's great-grandson. Naomi, who had had to flee from Bethlehem because her husband decided to leave because of a famine in Bethlehem to go to the land of Moab. And what happened to Naomi in Moab? She lost her husband and she lost her two sons. When she

came back do you remember what she said to the women? You know she had been gone ten years and ten years can do an awful lot of damage, ladies. You remember what she said? “Don't call me Naomi, call me Mara” — meaning bitter. Not that she was bitter. I don't think she was bitter. But providence had been bitter. Providence had been harsh. Providence had dealt her severe blows. God, in His inscrutable providence may have brought you into a hard place as He had brought David into a hard place, but He is in absolute and total control.

Does that mean I can read this story and say, “My life will never be in danger”? No, you can't read this story and say that. But what is it that they say? We are immortal until our work is done. We are immortal until our work is done. We will not die a second earlier or a second later than God has decreed. That's something you do not need to worry about. The day of our passing from this world to the next has been decreed. It is appointed unto man whence to die.

III. God providence may involve questionable ethical situations.

But there's a third thing I want us to see and that is this — that God's providence may involve questionable, ethical situations. God's providence may involve questionable, ethical situations. There are two of them here.

The first one of course is Saul's murderous designs upon David. It is God who sends this harmful spirit. We read it again in verse 9 — “a harmful spirit from the Lord.” There's no attempt here on the part of the Holy Spirit to remove God from His control, from His providential control of this harmful spirit that affected Saul. Even Satan has to answer to God. That's the lesson of the first chapter of Job. Even Satan has to answer and acknowledge, however reluctantly on Satan's part, he has to answer to and acknowledge the absolute sovereignty of God.

But there's a second ethical issue here and that's Michal, David's wife. And the two, well they weren't just white lies, they were bold-faced porkers. These were out-and-out lies. One was an act of total deception. By deceiving the spies into thinking that David was actually sick in bed it was, whatever it was. And the second was the occasion when she said to her father, “What else could I do? David was trying to kill me.”

It raises an age old problem, doesn't it? What do you do if you have Jews hiding in the basement of your house and the Nazis knock at the front door and say, “Do you have Jews in the house?” and if you say yes, those Jews are going to be killed and they are going to be on your conscience. What do you say? You say, “No. I don't have any Jews in my house.” You do what Corrie ten Boom did in Holland. I remember seeing Corrie ten Boom's memorial tree which is in Jerusalem. It's outside the Holocaust Museum. There's a row of trees commemorating those brave men and women throughout Europe who helped Jews during the time of the Holocaust and Corrie ten Boom, Gentile as she was,

is there in that array of trees. Do you know the strange thing was she had just died about a month before I saw this tree and the tree itself had died at the same time? It was a most strange thing.

Rahab — she told lies, didn't she? And she is commended. She is commended in the New Testament. John Murray says, "She was commended for her faith but not her lying" which is a distinction worthy of Aquinas. Her faith is demonstrated in what she actually did. And it seems to me that sometimes in the providence of God we may well find ourselves in circumstances where to do the loving thing for our neighbor may well involve doing something that is ethically and morally questionable.

Is it sin? Yes, it is. But we find ourselves in a situation where we can do nothing other out of love for our neighbor than sin. And as soon as we do it, we'll feel dirty, and we have to go to Jesus and confess that sin and ask Him to forgive us that sin and plead with Him that He would take us out of this sin-cursed, hopeless, unfulfilling world and bring us into that new heavens and new earth where that kind of thing will never have to be done again.

God moves in mysterious ways, His wonders to perform. He plants His footsteps on the sea and rides upon the storm. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You. Thank You for these incidents in the life of David and we pray that we too tonight might rest in the sureness, in the certainty, that Your hand of control upon our lives is total and absolute. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

Please stand. Receive the Lord's benediction.

Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

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