

DAVID RECEIVES DIVINE DISCIPLINE

1 Samuel 21:1-31:13

Key Verse: 24:6

"He said to his men, 'The Lord forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, or lift my hand against him; for he is the anointed of the Lord.'"

God anointed Saul as king of Israel. But he could not serve God well mainly because he did not fear God. Instead, he feared the army forces of the Philistines which had been an ever-besetting old foe, and David who made a sudden rise from obscurity to be a possible future king. Saul could not serve God's purpose in his generation as God had intended partly because he was enslaved by jealousy toward David more than the harassment of the Philistines. But in this passage we learn that the main reason he could not serve God was because he was a man of unbelief. He did not fear God. On the other hand, he feared everything. In addition, he was a man of disobedience to God.

But when we carefully study the book of 1 Samuel, one of his serious problems was that he had never received divine discipline before becoming a king. These days most people reject discipline blindly, thinking that discipline violates human rights. But without discipline, human beings become

like useless weeds or thorns and thistles. For example, without discipline there would be no picked troops. These days the trend of the world has been to reject discipline. So there is not enough discipline during the years of elementary, junior and senior high school. Generally, students are wild when they grow where there is no discipline. When we study the Old Testament, God disciplined his chosen people in the furnace of Egypt and in the wilderness of scorpions and vipers. It was intended to make them well-disciplined soldiers in the hope that God would use them to spread the knowledge of God to the whole world. Therefore, discipline is a part of education.

When we read through the remaining part of 1 Samuel, the young man David confronts one trouble after another until he finds himself totally helpless to do anything. But through many unbearable hardships and sorrowful events in his young age, he does not become bitter; he learns how to love and fear God better in any situation. He also learns how to shepherd God's flock at the time of joy and victory, and at the time of trouble and distress. But David was not by himself. God was with him when he was wandering and running for his life as a political criminal. God did not put him in trouble and distress to trouble him, but to raise him as a well-disciplined king. So we can say that the hardships and distress that he had confronted were not bad luck, but were precisely a divine discipline. God disciplines his beloved ones. Therefore, we must accept God's divine discipline as his best love.

I. David shepherds bums and outcasts (21:1-23:29)

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First, David visited Ahimelech the priest for help. (21:1-9) After bidding a sorrowful adieu to Jonathan, David had to go somewhere else. But he had no place to go or hide. So he headed toward Nob. Ahimelech the priest lived in a temple in holy seclusion there. David went there to get some help, because he trusted Ahimelech the priest, who feared God. Ahimelech trembled when he saw David, because he felt that some terrible thing was happening to David. When David asked him for some bread to save himself and his men from starvation while running for their lives, Ahimelech had no bread except the consecrated bread, which ordinary people are forbidden to eat, and which was only for priests. But Ahimelech the priest gave him the consecrated bread. Legally speaking, he broke the law of bread. But before God he was right because he chose to save people who were in need. When David asked him for some weapons, Ahimelech gave him the sword of Goliath preserved as a souvenir of victory over the Philistines. At that time, Doeg the Edomite was there, and he was an opportunist. David, though he was a man after God's own heart, had become an outlaw. But there was a man of God, Ahimelech, who supported him. Obviously, David was greatly encouraged by the help of Ahimelech.

Second, David acted like a madman. (21:10-15) Since David was an outlaw in his own land, it was too risky to roam around in his land. So he decided to cross the border and seek refuge in the Philistine territory. That day David fled from Saul and went to Achish king of Gath. But the servants of

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Achish said to him, "Isn't this David, the king of the land? Isn't he the one they sing about in their dances: 'Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands'?" (21:11) David thought that he was not known in the land of the Philistines. But they knew him too well. On hearing the king's subjects, he realized that he had come into a den of ferocious lions and was afraid. When he thought about his situation, David felt like going crazy. He was in the hands of Achish king of Gath, who knew everything about David. While in a situation that made him go crazy, David depended on God. Then God gave him wisdom to act like a madman, expressing his impulsive feelings, and making marks on the doors of the gate, and letting saliva run down his beard. God also moved Achish king of Gath until he said, "Am I so short of madmen that you have to bring this fellow here to carry on like this in front of me? Must this man come into my house?" (21:15) David had no friends and no place to go. He was in the hands of an enemy king. But God was with him and protected him.

Third, David became a shepherd of bums and outlaws. (22:1-5) David had to leave Gath and escape to the cave of Adullam. David escaped. David was the youngest son of Jesse. And he had been a shepherd boy. Now he was a fugitive and a caveman. His human situation was a totally helpless one. But there was a motley crowd of people: They were his family members. They were those who were in distress or in debt or discontented. They came to the cave of Adullam to seek David's help. They were not just five or ten people; they were about 400 men. When David was in Saul's palace, he

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might have been able to help them. But since David was branded as a political exile and "a wanted man," he was not able to help them.

Did David send them away? No. He decided to help them. In order to help them, David had to send his own "blood" away first. It was not easy for David to send them away to help seemingly useless and dangerous people. Anyway, David went to the king of Moab at Mizpah to ask his favor to accept his own family members. In this way, he was ready to help the helpless. David took care of the helpless with all his heart and soul, and with all his mind and strength. In this event, we remember John 10:11, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." They learned from David how to love and fear God. They were happy to be with David. Later, each of them became a mighty warrior and a nucleus member of David's strong army. This seemed to be a small event. But it was a time of God's testing for David, to see if he could be a shepherd of his people. David shepherded this small flock of difficult sheep; later, God entrusted him with his people Israel.

Fourth, King Saul destroyed the priest Ahimelech and all his family. (22:6-23) Saul the king should have been the shepherd of his people. But since he disobeyed God and was possessed by evil spirits, he became a slave of jealousy. He did not care about anything--he only wanted to kill David. When he was rebuking his officials for not cooperating, Doeg the Edomite, a foreigner, told him that Ahimelech had helped David. So the

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king sent for Ahimelech and his father's whole family. Saul asked him, "Why have you conspired against me?" His verdict was that the priest gave David bread and a sword and prayed for him. (22:13)

Ahimelech answered the king, "Who of all your servants is as loyal as David, the king's son-in-law, captain of your bodyguard and highly respected in your household? Was that day the first time I inquired of God for him? Of course not! Let not the king accuse your servant or any of his father's family, for your servant knows nothing at all about this whole affair." (14,15) But the king ordered that he and all his family members be destroyed. Saul's officials were not willing to raise a hand to strike the priests of the Lord. Then the king ordered Doeg to strike down the priests. That day Doeg killed 85 men who wore the linen ephod. Having been compelled by God, Ahimelech helped David in his helpless situation. But it was costly. He and his family members were killed by Saul. But Ahimelech was not a victim of evil: He was the torch of the truth of God at the time of his death, and as long as human history exists. Doeg the opportunist did not get any reward from Saul for the information, but he was used in murdering the servants of God.

Fifth, David, a man of prayer. (23:1-29) When David heard that the Philistines were fighting against Keilah, he was bewildered, not knowing what to do. But David had a way to find the solution. David came to God and prayed, "Lord, shall I go and attack these Philistines?" The Lord answered

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him, "Go, attack the Philistines and save Keilah." (23:1,2) David was ready for the rescue mission. But his men were afraid to do so because they thought it was impossible for them to fight against the Philistines, because they were not the regular army of Israel, but a collective body of outcasts under the political criminal David.

What did David do? Look at verse 4. "Once again David inquired of the Lord, and the Lord answered him, 'Go down to Keilah, for I am going to give the Philistines into your hand.'" It is amazing to know that David came to God in prayer when he was in deep trouble. After prayer, David and his men went to Keilah, inflicted heavy losses and saved Keilah.

After the rescue mission, David learned that Saul was plotting against him. What did David do? David again sought God earnestly in prayer. David said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod." David said, "O Lord, God of Israel, your servant has heard definitely that Saul plans to come to Keilah and destroy the town on account of me. Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me to him? Will Saul come down, as your servant has heard? O Lord, God of Israel, tell your servant." And the Lord said, "He will." Again David asked, "Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me and my men to Saul?" And the Lord answered, "They will." So David and his men, about six hundred in number, left Keilah and kept moving from place to place. When Saul was told that David had escaped from Keilah, he did not go there. (13-15) When David prayed, God answered his prayer. Also, God rescued

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his life.

When David was in the Desert of Ziph, Jonathan went to him and helped him find strength in God by reminding him of the promise of God. "Don't be afraid," he said. "My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this." The two of them made a covenant before the Lord. Then Jonathan went home, but David remained at Horesh. (17,18) The Ziphites, however, betrayed him to Saul, and he was almost captured. But God rescued David by frustrating Saul's plot through a Philistine invasion.

II. David feared and loved God (24:1-26:25)

First, I will not touch the Lord's anointed. (24:1-22) Saul stopped pursuing the Philistines and came after David with an army of 3,000 men. He did not know that David and his men were hiding in the back of the cave when he went in to relieve himself. David's men said, "This is the day the Lord spoke of when he said to you, 'I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish.'" Then David crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul's robe. Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe. (4,5) Here we learn that David feared and loved God who had anointed Saul as king. So David spared Saul's life. If David had killed Saul while he was relieving himself, he would have been branded as the assassin of the king. Furthermore, he would have lost his spiritual

quality as a man after God's own heart. But God graciously saved him in this spiritual crisis.

After this, David called out to the king. "See, my father, look at this piece of your robe in my hand! I cut off the corner of your robe but did not kill you. Now understand and recognize that I am not guilty of wrongdoing or rebellion. I have not wronged you, but you are hunting me down to take my life. May the Lord judge between you and me. And may the Lord avenge the wrongs you have done to me, but my hand will not touch you." (11,12) On hearing David, Saul wept and confessed the truth he knew in his heart--David would be the next king; God would establish his kingdom. (20) David was now a political criminal running for his life. But from God's point of view, he was king of Israel for he honored God in dealing with Saul. (2:30b)

Second, Abigail's wisdom and faith. (25:1-31) David was wandering with his men without any provisions. David and his men saw Nabal's shepherds tending their sheep in the desert wilderness. But David and his men did not raid them. Rather, they afforded them protection while they were tending their sheep. When festival time came, David sent some of his men to get some provisions, expecting to be welcomed. But Nabal insulted his guests, reminding them that David was an outlaw and a rebel against Saul. When his good will was answered in insults, David was angry and decided to teach him a lesson.

As soon as Abigail heard what Nabal her husband had done to David's men, she lost no time. She rode off on a donkey with sufficient provisions to meet David and his men, who were marching out to capture Nabal. When Abigail saw David, she got off the donkey and bowed down to the ground and praised David and said that he would surely be the king of Israel someday. She also petitioned him as a man of God not to avenge himself with bloodshed. How could David be angry with a woman of such faith and beauty? Because of Abigail, David's anger subsided, and he was overjoyed to see such a woman of wisdom and faith.

Third, David said, "Don't destroy him." (26:1-25) At the report of the Ziphites, Saul set out with 3,000 men to find and kill David. But David discovered his camp, and, with Abishai, crept to the place where Saul was sleeping. Abishai said to David, "Today God has delivered your enemy into your hands. Now let me pin him to the ground with one thrust of my spear; I won't strike him twice." But David said to Abishai, "Don't destroy him! Who can lay a hand on the Lord's anointed and be guiltless? As surely as the Lord lives," he said, "the Lord himself will strike him; either his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish. But the Lord forbid that I should lay a hand on the Lord's anointed. Now get the spear and water jug that are near his head, and let's go." (8-11) It is amazing to know that David spared Saul's life even when he came out again to destroy him with 3,000 men. The first time or plot could be forgiven. But the sec-

ond time it was not easy for David not to destroy him because Saul broke his own promise.

What did David do to Saul? David stood on a high hill with a wide space between himself and Saul. Then he called Abner, Saul's commanding officer, and rebuked him that he did not protect the king safely. Saul recognized David and regretted, saying, "Surely I have acted like a fool and have erred greatly." (21) David could not forgive Saul this time. What's more, for the safety of his own life he could not but slay him. But David did not do so because he feared and loved God more than himself.

III. The tragedy of Saul's suicide (27:1-31:13)

First, David's struggles to survive among the Philistines. (27:1-12) David realized that he was safer with the Philistine enemies than in his own country. So he went to Achish king of Gath. Achish had realized that Saul was more eager to kill David than he was to kill the Philistines. So he gave David permission to live in Ziklag.

But Achish king of Gath could not figure out what David was doing. David brought the spoils of war to Achish quite regularly. But Achish had no idea where he got the spoils. Actually, David and his men were raiding the Amalekites and other peoples who were the enemies of Israel. David had never raided the cities of Judah. But he told Achish that he got the

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spoils from this and that city of Judah. So Achish came to trust David. David was in a dilemma and agony of soul. But he was faithful to the people of God even when they rejected him. It was possible for David to do so because he feared and loved God.

Second, a slave of fear, King Saul. (28:1-25) In the meantime, the Philistines mustered their forces for a great drive to destroy Israel. Saul was terrified when he saw the Philistine army assembling for the final showdown. Saul knew that God's word forbids consulting a medium or spiritist. So he had driven them out of Israel. But in his desperation, he disguised himself and went to a woman medium. He was driven to seek the help of a servant of the devil. The medium brought up the spirit of Samuel. But Samuel rebuked Saul and predicted his defeat and death. Samuel told him that all these things would happen because he had not obeyed God. When Saul disobeyed God the Spirit of God left him and he was possessed by evil spirits.

Third, David strengthened himself in the Lord. (29:1-30:6) As the Philistine rulers marched with their units of hundreds and thousands, David and his men were marching at the rear with Achish. Achish included David in the Philistine forces because he trusted him. Now David had to fight against his own people. He was in an impossible situation. David was walking a tightrope. But God graciously and mysteriously intervened. The Philistine rulers did not trust David because they remembered how he defeated the

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Philistine champion Goliath and how the women of Israel praised him, singing and dancing. So they overruled Achish. Achish yielded to the wisdom of his rulers and sent David back to Ziklag. God was with David.

When the Philistines and the Israelites assembled at Jezreel for a major confrontation, the Amalekite raiders saw their opportunity. They raided the defenseless cities of Judah and they attacked the smaller cities of the Philistines, taking a great amount of plunder. They also attacked David's city, Ziklag, burned it to the ground and took all the women and children captive.

When David and his men returned home and saw what happened, they were grief-stricken. They wept aloud until they had no more strength to weep. David's men, bitter in spirit because of their sons and daughters and wives, began to talk about stoning David. David had lost his country, his family, his city, his loyal men. What could he do? Who could help him? "David found strength in the Lord his God." (30:6c)

Fourth, David prayed to God. (30:7-31) Finding the Amalekites in that rough country would be like looking for a pin on a pile carpet. David didn't know what to do, so he called the priest and he inquired of the Lord--he prayed. The Lord said, "Pursue them." David and 600 men started in pursuit, but 200 of his men were too exhausted to go on. They didn't know where to start looking, but God provided a key--an abandoned Amalekite

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slave. David found them, took them by surprise and recovered everything--plus a large amount of spoils which the Amalekites had taken from other raids.

The great amount of plunder which they took from the Amalekites made some of David's men greedy. They didn't want to share anything with the 200 men who had stayed with the baggage. But this was not David's way. He made a rule which Israel continued to follow. He shared with the elders in Judah who had helped him, too.

Fifth, Saul's tragic end. (31:1-13) Saul and his sons died in defeat and disgrace in the battle with the Philistines. Saul was mortally wounded, and when his armor-bearer refused to kill him, he fell on his own sword--committed suicide. The Philistines found his body, took his armor and shamed him in his death by nailing his body to the wall of Beth Shan. They looked upon their victory as a victory of their gods over the God of Israel. When Saul disobeyed God, he fell into sin and sinned greatly against God. Also, he did not fulfill his mission to be a king of Israel. He consumed his life in jealousy. There is a saying, "Jealousy decays one's bones and his soul." Saul was a lonely man; even his crown prince could not recognize him as a kingly person on account of his indecent speech and deeds. He was no more king of Israel: He was a slave of an evil spirit. God gave him the most able and loyal subject, David. But because of jealousy Saul was out to kill David all his lifetime. He made God sorry by committing suicide before the uncircumcised Philistines.

On the other hand, David feared God and loved God in any situation. He had enough reason to destroy Saul when opportune times came. But David did not see him as a madman, but as the Lord's anointed king. David saw everything from God's point of view. During the time of his running for his life from Saul, he had confronted so many hardships. But he never became bitter toward himself or toward God. Moreover, when he was utterly helpless, he became a shepherd for 400 helpless people. He was able to shepherd these helpless people because God was his Shepherd.

In conclusion, God did not deliberately give David hard times; instead, God gave him divine discipline to raise him up as a king of Israel who had God's own heart. May God richly bless us and give us many unbearable divine disciplines until we may be raised as shepherds of God's flock in this generation.