

David in the Wilderness: I Samuel 24-25

Introduction

With one smooth stone Goliath was defeated and a tremendous victory ensued, but in the very next chapter, in the celebration of David's victory, a new enemy is born, an enemy far more elusive and treacherous than Goliath. For the next ten years of his life, David would flee from the jealous rage of Saul. Unlike Goliath, this Israelite "giant" could not be felled with a single stone. David could not obey the Lord and raise a hand against his anointed, so he fled and waited patiently for the Lord to deliver him.

- David's victory is the most celebrated giant story in the OT, but David's long and difficult struggle with Saul, the Israelite giant, is even more instructive to the kind of enemies we face on a daily basis. Saul is the "hidden" giant.
- Saul's opposition to David was subversive, crafty, and *long*. He was not an enemy who could be struck with a single blow or who would "just go away." Saul tested David like temptations often test us. They are difficult, humbling, and sap us of our strength and patience. Saul was David's "graduate" school.
- **David's giants tested him in opposite directions.** Each of them tempted David to treat them like the other.
 - When boldness and decisive action were required (Goliath), David was tempted to "patience" and inaction ("You are not able to against this Philistine...").
 - When longsuffering and patience were required (Saul), David was tempted to "strike with his hand." **Note 17:46 and 24:4** – David's men are still thinking in terms of the valley of Elah.

From the Exodus to the Wilderness

By chapter 20, David has made his "exodus" from Saul's house. David had gone from being the king's "son" to the despised "Son of Jesse" (20:27, 31). But before David will see the "Promised Land" of kingship, he must pass through the wilderness.

- In Israel's history, the wilderness was a place of testing and especially a place of death. The Israel that left Egypt had to die before the conquest. The wilderness is a place where people go to die and to be raised again, strengthened by God's power. **Both Moses (wilderness of Midian) and Paul (wilderness of Arabia) had to learn that salvation was from the Lord before they were prepared to lead God's people.**
- Like his father's fields, the wilderness is a place of preparation for David. **But this time instead of killing with his hands, David must learn to wait for the Lord's deliverance.** He emerges from the wilderness a man raised to new life and prepared to be a king whose strength in the Lord.
 - The wilderness kills the myth that we belong to ourselves. "Whoever wishes to be my disciple, must deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me." Matt. 16:24

Of Kings and Fools

The conquest of Goliath proved that David was a courageous warrior like Joshua, but David's "wilderness wanderings" tested him in a different direction. In chapters 24-25, David is confronted with enemies who abuse him, return evil for good, and tempt him to take matters into his own "hands."

- It's not by accident that the word "hand" is used so frequently in these chapters. It is used as a figure for "power." Saul looks for those who are willing to deliver David into his "hand." In chs. 24, 26 this is reversed and David's men suggest that Saul has been delivered into David's "hand" (24:4; 26:8). David's response is severe (vs. 7 "tore into"). David could not grasp the promises of God if his hands were stained with blood guiltiness.
- The test of chapter 25 is similar but in the opposite direction. David must not overthrow the Lord's anointed, but he must also not avenge insults from fools.
 - Nabal (who's name means "fool") is wealthy and David's men protect his shepherds. When David politely asks for supplies in return, Nabal rebuffs his request (vs. 10). David straps on his sword (vs. 13) and prepares to take revenge.
 - Nabal's wife Abigail intercepts David and in a remarkable speech, "rebukes" David's desire for bloodguilt and saving by his own hand. She maintains that the Lord will fight for him (vs. 29).

The words good and evil are used more times in these chapters than anywhere else in I Samuel. Their presence here point to the theological background that is involved in these tests. Good and evil remind us that David's test was an Adamic test. David was tempted to "take" with his own hands the "forbidden" fruit. Like Jesus, he would not accept the kingdom by taking a short cut though the wilderness.

- Perhaps the greatest temptation for David was the opportunity to put an end to his trials. With the opportunities to kill Saul, David could not only obtain what the Lord had promised him, but he could also put an end to the wilderness. But David believed the Lord's word and refused to sinfully shorten his test. He was willing to endure and suffer long if necessary. The valley of Elah required courage and boldness; the wilderness of Engedi required patience, endurance and longsuffering.

Application:

The wilderness taught David to lean to submit to God's rule rather than "take" matters into his own hand. It required Him to entrust himself to Him who judges righteously.

- Every temptation to return evil for evil is ultimately a temptation to "take matters into our own hands" and to follow our father Adam. It says two things:
 - God will not vindicate me and I need to save myself (working salvation with my own hand.)
 - The only way I can save myself is by becoming like my persecutor (blood guiltiness).
 - But when I entrust myself to God, not only will he judge justly (something I cannot do), but He will make me like Him.
- The wilderness teaches repentance that leads to maturity. It enables us to cultivate a "hearing heart." David responds naturally to Nabal's insult, but he receives Abigail's words as God call to repent. He "hears" the word of the Lord.