

CSI

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 26 October 2008

Preacher: Paul Barker

- [0 : 0 0] Well, please keep your Bibles open at that passage from 1 Samuel chapter 21, beginning on page 231. And this is the second of four weeks on the last chapters of 1 Samuel.
- And last week we looked at chapters 18 to 20. Let's pray as we come to God's word that God will guide us to understand and apply what we learn here tonight.
- God, our Heavenly Father, we pray that your word will be clear to our hearts and minds and that you will change our wills so that we desire and accomplish to obey you and trust you for the sake and glory of Jesus, your Son.
- Amen. Imagine that you're living during World War II. You have hidden in your house a Jew.
- And the Gestapo come and knock on your door. They are looking for Jews. You know that if they find them, they might as well be dead.
- [1 : 0 6] Do you tell the truth or do you lie? Do you say, yes, I have a Jew hidden in a concealed room or something like that?
- Or do you say no? And hope they're not found. It's a difficult ethical dilemma and one that some Christians would debate and take different views over.
- After all, the scriptures tell us not to bear false witness, to speak the truth, that God is truth, that truth matters. And yet my hunch would be that most of us probably would lie in a case like that and deny the fact that a Jewish person is hidden.
- Thinking perhaps, and maybe rightly, that handing somebody over in effect to inevitable death and murder is actually a worse sin than deceit.
- But, as I say, it's an ethical dilemma. But you might want to keep in your mind as we look in these chapters tonight. David is anointed already back in chapter 16 to be the next king of Israel.
- [2 : 2 1] Time period is about 1000 BC. But he's on the run. Because Saul is still king. David is not going to take up arms against Saul.
- But David has been anointed, called by God, anointed by Samuel the prophet to be the next king. We, the reader, know that. And as we saw last week, Jonathan, the son of Saul, in effect knows that David will be the next king.
- And indeed we find an ironic hint of that in tonight's passage as well. But David's on the run. Because as we saw last week, Saul is intensely jealous at David's success.
- David has killed his 10,000. Saul has only killed his thousands. David is the one who killed Goliath, that great big giant of the Philistines, by merely a sling and a pebble stone.
- David is the hero of the nation. The one who everybody is acclaiming. And yet the king, in his intense jealousy and envy, leads David to be on the run for his life.
- [3 : 3 0] At the end of chapter 20, as we saw last week, David departs from what is in effect the capital of Saul's kingdom. That is Gibeah, not all that far from Jerusalem. He's warned by the son of Saul, Jonathan, that his life is really under threat.

And so David is on the run. A fugitive. A wanted man. This is an ancient version of Catch Me If You Can. Or No Country for Old Men.

Or something like that. It's a gripping story. A gripping narrative, in effect. And first David goes, at the beginning of chapter 21, as we heard in the reading tonight, to a town called Nob.

Only two and a half miles away. So not very far. I guess it's less than an hour's walk. Probably David would have done it a bit quicker. Probably in haste.

To get away from Gibeah. To get away from King Saul. Nob, it seems, is the religious sanctuary at this time. The beginning of 1 Samuel, it was a place called Shiloh. But Shiloh had probably been destroyed by the Philistines when the ark was captured.

[4 : 34] And now it seems that all the priests have congregated at this little town of Nob. And that seems to be the religious center of the nation. To that place David goes.

And when he comes there, we're told that the priest, that is the chief priest, the high priest or the senior priest, Ahimelech, came trembling to meet David.

That is fear. He's afraid when he sees David. David, the hero of the nation. Unarmed. And it seems at least in the sight of Ahimelech alone.

Why is he afraid? Is it because David doesn't have a retinue, an army with him? Is there some gut feeling of Ahimelech that something is wrong?

Well, he trembles on meeting David. Ahimelech, I should say, is the great grandson of Eli, who is the priest at the beginning of this book.

[5 : 36] An old, ineffectual man. Whose sons were killed in the battle by the Philistines in chapter 4. And Ahimelech is his great grandson, as we learn elsewhere. David replies to Ahimelech's statement.

Ahimelech says, why are you alone and no one with you? Ahimelech gets the feeling that something's not quite right. And so David says to the priest Ahimelech, the king has charged me with a matter.

And said to me, no one must know anything of the matter about which I send you. And with which I've charged you. I've made an appointment with the young men for such and such a place.

Hmm. David's lying. It's not true. He's on the run. But he doesn't tell the truth. Humanly speaking, David's the hero of the story.

But he acts in deceit. We're not told exactly why. It could well be that David is afraid that if he says the king is after me, that Ahimelech's allegiances would be with the king, and therefore David would be captured by Ahimelech and the priests in Nob and handed over to the king.

[6 : 54] It could be that David is a bit more altruistic and thinks, I don't want to sort of compromise Ahimelech in some sort of treasonable behavior.

So I'll make up a story. But we're not told why, and in effect, that's not the point of the story. Whenever the Bible doesn't tell us something, we actually in the end don't need to know, even if our curiosity has been provoked, as so often it seems to be.

But think about it. Often in the Bible, the human heroes act in very dubious ways. They're murderers, adulterers, David later on, for example, deceivers, not only David here, but Jacob perhaps in the book of Genesis.

Certainly people who fail in all sorts of different ways. The human heroes in the Bible, with of course one notable exception, Jesus, are failed, flawed, and compromised characters.

They are not there simply to be examples for us to follow. So be careful of that as we read these sorts of accounts and stories.

[8 : 12] David is anointed by God. We know that he's to be the next king. But the end does not justify the means. That is, David's deceit is not justified by the fact that God has called him to be king.

And therefore David's got to do anything and everything to make sure he becomes king. Not so. Sometimes ethically we think that the end justifies our behavior now.

So that if it's a good end outcome that we're working towards, it doesn't quite matter how I behave now, whether I lie or tell the truth or whatever. But that's actually not biblical ethics.

Biblical ethics is that we act rightly all the time. The means and the end. So we cannot justify David's behavior by saying, well, he's called by God, therefore it's right for him to do whatever it takes to make sure he stays alive in order to become king.

The end does not justify the means. Perhaps the clearest statement of that in the scriptures is the words about Judas, the betrayer, the one who led Jesus in effect to die.

[9 : 22] Woe to him. That is, we could argue that it's a good thing that Jesus dies for our salvation. But woe to the man through whom it happens, Judas. The end does not justify his means of betrayal.

And he's condemned in the strongest words of scripture. David asks for bread because he's hungry, on the run. He says in verse 3, Now then, what have you at hand?

Give me five loaves of bread and whatever is here. And the priest, Ahimelech, answered David, I have no ordinary bread at hand, only holy bread. Holy bread was the bread that was baked, particularly on the Sabbath, and it would be placed in the court outside the most holy place where the ark is kept, in the tabernacle.

And it was there ultimately for the priests only to consume. And there's a law about that back in the book of Leviticus. Only for the priests to consume. But in the end, Ahimelech gives him that holy bread, breaking the Old Testament law as well.

He gives it to him with one condition. The end of verse 4, provided that the young men have kept themselves from women. Now somehow in that, it's clear that Ahimelech knows that there are others with David, at least some, even if they're not in the presence of David here.

[10 : 47] Have they kept themselves from women? Why that command? Is Ahimelech being a bit fussy? But no, it was actually a biblical thing that if they were going to fight or be in battle or do the Lord's work, then sexual relations ought to be abstained from for a time.

There's indications of that in the laws of Deuteronomy, for example, about warfare. It's a little bit like the debates that go on with sporting teams. Should the wives or girlfriends of cricketers and football players and so on go on tour with them?

Sometimes AFL clubs, I think, try and tell their players, you know, you're not to have sexual relations the night before the game. There's a great fuss sometimes when the English cricket team's wives all came on a cricket tour a few years ago and they lost every match.

Well, they probably lose anyway, but, you know, is it distracting them? So it's a similar thing to that sort of Old Testament principle in a way. But there's a great irony here for those who keep reading through not only 1 Samuel but 2 Samuel, the second part of this one big book.

Because later on, David commits adultery. He does so while his army is off fighting. He's king at this time. He has sex with Bathsheba. He tries to put her husband, he calls him back from the front where the war is, to have relations with his wife so that when a baby is born, David's adultery won't be found out.

[12 : 11] And Uriah, honest and righteous Uriah, refrains from sexual relations with his wife because he's at battle. It shames David, whose adultery, of course, is in a sense found out, at least by God.

So there's an irony here in this sort of statement from Ahimelech and David's taking the bread. He answers the priest, Indeed, women have been kept from us as always when I go on an expedition.

The vessels of the young men are holy, which may mean their bodies probably are holy, even when it is a common journey. How much more today will their vessels be holy?

So clearly the indication is that David's make-believe story is that somehow he's going off on some little battle somewhere, a secret mission. to fight an enemy. So Ahimelech gave him the holy bread, for there was no bread there except the bread of the presence, which is removed from before the Lord, to be replaced by hot bread on the day it's taken away.

Usually on the Sabbath day, it seems, from the law in Leviticus. Well, if this were a film, the camera would be having David and Ahimelech, but you'd just notice in the background a sly-looking character who just looks on briefly and then goes, A certain man of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the Lord.

[13 : 36] His name was Doig the Edomite, the chief of Saul's shepherds. And that's it for now. But remember the name, Doig the Edomite, a sly and dangerous character.

David's on the run, but he's unarmed. And he says to Ahimelech, Is there no spear or sword here with you?

I did not bring any sword or my weapons with me because the king's business required haste. Now that's an odd thing. If you were off to do some sort of battle on behalf of the king, no matter how hasty it is, surely you'd pick up your weapons.

So David's story doesn't really fully ring true. Whether Ahimelech is totally deceived by it or not, we're not actually told. The priest said, The sword of Goliath, the Philistine whom you killed in the valley of Elah, is here wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod.

If you will take that, take it. There is none here except that one. So David now takes the Philistine Goliath's huge sword, himself.

[14 : 47] There's none like it. Give it to me. And David then flees from Saul, we're told in verse 10, because he now goes outside the country, across the border, away further.

There's a saying that my enemy's friend is, sorry, my enemy's enemy is my friend. It's a dangerous saying to believe. It helped sort of mire the world with the Vietnam disaster in part, as America thought that their enemy's enemy must be their friend.

But actually, they've got more enemies than they realize. My enemy's enemy is not always my friend. But David perhaps thought that my enemy is Saul and his enemy are the Philistines and maybe now that I'm on the run from Saul, the Philistines will be my friends.

And so David flees to the Philistines, to Gath, no less, the town that Goliath had actually come from. And he goes, of course, with Goliath's sword. And it may be that David somehow thought that he would be unrecognized by the Philistines of Gath.

That somehow he could be perhaps like a paid mercenary and join with them and be free from Saul's dominion over Israel. So David flees and he goes down to Gath.

[16 : 01] 23 miles away, southwest towards the Mediterranean, further away from Gibeah, the capital of Saul. But the trouble is, David is recognized pretty promptly, it seems. Straight away, the people of Gath quoting the Israelite song, Saul has killed his thousands but David's killed his ten thousands.

It's a strange sort of thing to think that you'll be safe there when you actually carry Goliath of Gath's great big sword. And so David is brought before the king of Gath, Achish.

David's life is under threat yet again. He's out of the frying pan of Saul into the fire of Achish of Gath. Now we know that David's a musician, that's been told a number of times in earlier chapters, he played the harp.

It's also that he plays the fool. He's an actor. So when he's brought before King Achish, this is what he does. He was afraid of King Achish of Gath so he changed his behavior, verse 13 says, before them.

He pretended to be mad when in their presence. He scratched marks on the doors of the gate. He let his spittle run down in his beard. And Achish is taken in by this.

[17 : 16] He thinks he is mad. He thinks he's benign and not a threat at all. So Achish says to his servants, look this, you see this man is mad. Why then have you brought him to me?

That is, he's no threat. He's an idiot. Something's gone wrong with David. But then you get this hysterical side comment. The king of Gath of the Philistines says to his servants, do I lack madmen that you have brought this fellow to play the madmen in my presence?

You see, the Philistines are the enemies of God's people. And here's the king of at least Gath of the Philistines saying, I've got enough madmen in Philistines, in Gath. I don't want any more.

He's probably also saying, you're mad for bringing him here to me as though he's a threat. He's mad. You're mad. But it's a little sort of put down of the Philistines ironically by the king of Gath. So David is on the run again out of Gath, back into the territory of Saul most likely to a cave of Adullam.

Ten kilometres, ten miles rather east he's now gone, heading back a bit closer to Jerusalem and Gibeah where Saul is. And to this cave others come and join him.

[18 : 33] So clearly he's not totally secret. There are certainly people out with David who've sent messengers and at the beginning of chapter 22 David actually ends up gathering a whole crowd of 400 malcontents.

People who've been put out somehow by Saul's reign. People who've been impoverished by it, including David's own family. After all, David's family must surely be at risk from Saul.

I mean, after all, Saul's own son Jonathan was at risk for being in an alliance with David. So David's family now come and join him. People who are in distress, verse 2 says, of chapter 22, and everyone who's in debt, everyone who's discontented, gathered to him.

A motley crew and David becomes captain over them and those who were with him numbered about 400. Must have been a big cave. But there are big caves actually in that area, in the low-lying hills of Israel today even.

But David doesn't stay in this cave. He's still on the run. He's gone to Nob, he's gone to Gath, he's gone to the cave, and now he goes across the nation out the other side to the other neighbouring eastern boundary to the country of Moab.

[19 : 49] He goes to Moab in verse 3 and he says to the king of Moab, please let my father and mother come to you until I know what God will do for me. Now why Moab?

Is it my enemy's enemy is my friend? But there's an added connection of course. For where did David's, I've forgotten how many greats, grandmother come from?

Ruth the Moabitess. Is David appealing back to his ancestry? here. Moab had earlier been conquered by Saul back in chapter 14, but it's still a nation it seems.

David's gone there. And he finds a sort of friendly face in a way, and it seems that at least for a time David's family is allowed to stay there. But David doesn't for very long.

He left them with the king of Moab, verse 4 says, and they stayed with him all the time that David was in the stronghold. Then the prophet Gad said to David, do not remain in the stronghold, leave and go into the land of Judah.

[20 : 56] So David left and went into the forest of Herod. So David it seems has gone to Nob, to Gath, to the cave of Dullam, to Moab, then to some stronghold somewhere there, and now he's gone back into Judah, to Saul's territory, to a forest of Herod, which is unknown geographically where that is.

Always on the run, never able to stay in one place for very long. And there we leave David for this week, in the forest of Herod, because the rest of chapter 22 that we'll look at tonight isn't about David's running around, there's more of that to come.

But now we go back to the king, to Saul. There's quite a contrast actually, chapter 22 verse 6, Saul heard that David and those who were with him had been located.

Saul was sitting at Gibeah, his capital city, under the tamarisk tree on the height, with his spear in his hand. Almost every time we see Saul, he's got his spear in his hand.

And all his servants were standing around him. You sort of get the sense of a pompous gathering in a way. The king with his spear on the height and all his men gathered around him.

[22 : 14] The trouble is, Saul is deeply distressed. It might look on the surface to be a sort of regal gathering, the sort of stately power of the nation, but actually it's very troubled.

Saul in particular, we should say, is especially troubled. He shows absolute disdain, no respect at all for his own servants, for whom we get the impression that they are in fact loyal to him.

He says to them in verse seven, here now you Benjaminites, Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin, and his servants in particular are from that tribe. Maybe as he says that he's putting them down a little bit.

Will the son of Jesse, he can't even bring himself to name David by name. So he calls him by the son of his father. Give every one of you fields and vineyards.

Will he make you all commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds? Is that why all of you have conspired against me? No one discloses to me when my son makes a league with the son of Jesse.

[23 : 22] Doesn't even name his own son Jonathan, just my son. None of you is sorry for me. Oh, poor Saul, poor Saul. What a pathetic king. And none of you discloses to me that my son has stirred up my servant against me to lie in wait as he's doing today.

It's a pathetic figure we get from this speech. It's pathetic that he accuses all his loyal servants of conspiracy, something that he'll raise again later on with another person.

He's a person who's bordering in one sense on paranoia. Although of course he knows he's got an enemy on the run and he knows he's got a popular enemy on the run as well. But there's no real hint that his own men have been conspiring against him either.

None of them answers. Some of the commentaries suggest that there's a long silence, but there's no real hint of that in the text. But the person who speaks, have you remembered his name?

Doeg the Edomite, who was in charge of Saul's servants, answered, I saw the son of Jesse, using the same disparaging way of referring to David, coming to Nob, to Ahimelech, son of Ahitub.

[24 : 38] He inquired of the Lord for him, though we weren't told that in the previous chapter, gave him provisions and gave him the sword of Goliath, the Philistine. Saul immediately, it seems, sends for Ahimelech, the chief priest of the nation, and the chief priest of the priests at Nob.

And like with David calling him disparagingly son of Jesse, he calls Ahimelech to him and he says to him in verse 12, listen now, son of Ahitub.

He doesn't use his name either. Ahimelech answers, here I am, my Lord. Saul said to him, why have you conspired, same word as we've earlier seen, great conspiracy theorists, Saul, against me.

You and the son of Jesse, by giving him bread and a sword and by inquiring of God for him, the three things that Doeg had reported, so that he has risen against me.

Notice how that's implying that the conspiracy with Ahimelech has caused David to rise against him, so that he's risen against me. Saul's no doubt heard word that 400 have gathered with David, but there's no cause and effect there to lie in wait as he's doing today.

[25 : 57] But we don't get a sense of him lying in wait for Saul, not at all. And in fact, in later chapters as we'll see next week and the week after, when David has opportunity to kill Saul, he refrains from it.

Saul's overstepped in a sense the threat of David. Ahimelech replies to him, fatally, innocently, Ahimelech is a good man.

He, of course, is innocent of conspiracy. David, of course, told him a fabricated story. Whether or not Ahimelech fell for it totally or not, we're not sure, and it's a slightly implausible story from David.

But Ahimelech is perhaps a guileless character. Sadly, David's deceit leads in the end to Ahimelech's tragic death and worse.

Ahimelech answered the king, who among all your servants is so faithful as David. I think he firmly believes it. He's not spinning a story here. He thinks David is fiercely loyal to Saul.

[26 : 59] He is the king's son-in-law. Remember last week he married Michelle, one of the daughters of Saul, and is quick to do your bidding and is honoured in your house.

Is today the first time that I've inquired of God for him? By no means. Clearly he's done it before, although we weren't even told in chapter 21 that he did inquire of the Lord for David.

Do not let the king impute anything to his servant or to any member of my father's house, that is to any of the other priests. For your servant has known nothing of all this, much or little.

Does Saul believe him? Of course not. You will surely die. Strong words indeed in verse 16. You, Ahimelech, you and all your father's house, all the priests, his uncles and cousins and brothers and children and whoever they are, all the priests will die.

What a terrible statement. To their credit, the servants of Saul in verse 17 refuse to kill the priests. So Saul is losing people who were loyal at the beginning of this section and are now beginning to refuse him.

[28 : 15] The servants of the king would not raise their hand to attack the priests of the Lord. Then the king said to Doeg, you, Doeg, turn and attack the priests. Doeg the Edomite, you can imagine him being quite a sycophant to Saul, turned and attacked the priests.

On that day he killed 85 who wore the linen ephod. 85 priests are killed. They're innocent. But they're killed.

By this paranoid and raving king Saul who sees conspiracy theories everywhere. Nob, the city of the priests, he put to the sword men, women, children, infants, oxen, donkeys, sheep, he put to the sword.

The whole place, killed. All of it. Every living thing. Dead. In the city of Nob. There is a terrible irony in this deed.

What Saul has done here to Nob, one of his own cities, his own priests, his chief priests, is treat them like an enemy pagan city.

[29 : 19] The complete destruction of everything living in a town in the land of Israel was part of the holy war laws for the enemies of Israel when they conquered the land. The terrible irony is that back in chapter 15, Saul was fighting against one of the arch enemies of Israel from generations before, from the time of Moses, the Amalekites.

And what did Saul do then in the battle? Did he follow the biblical laws and kill them all as he should have? No. He spared their king, Agag. And here is Saul whose values are so distorted and perverted that he kills the priests who are innocent in his own nation.

All of them. Absolutely. And yet earlier he'd spared the king of their arch enemies. It's a terrible irony between those two events.

But that's Saul. His own jealousy led him to throw a spear at his own son as we saw last week. He's out to kill his best hero in effect, the leader of his army, all because of this insane jealousy.

Except one. One flees from Nob. In verse 20 of chapter 22, one of the sons of Ahimelech, son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped and fled after David.

[30 : 41] Abiathar told David that Saul had killed the priest of the Lord. And David said to Abiathar, I knew on that day when Doug the Edomite was there that he would surely tell Saul, I'm responsible for the lives of all your father's house.

Stay with me and do not be afraid for the one who seeks my life seeks your life. You will be safe with me. It's an extraordinary way to finish the chapter. David's on the run.

Last week he went to Ramah, back to Gibeah, then now this week to Nob, to Gath, to the cave of Dullam, to Moab, to a stronghold, to the forest of Heret. Perhaps that's where he is here.

He's on the run. He doesn't look safe. He doesn't look as though he feels safe and yet he says to Abiathar, stay with me. You'll be safe with me. Abiathar does stay with him all through David's reign as king into Solomon's reign after David dies.

He's loyal to David to the end, virtually. What's God teaching from a story like this? Why can David say at the end, you'll be safe with me, when he's on the run from this king who's out to kill him?

[31 : 46] We have intrigue, plots, escapes, deceit, fugitives. It's a gripping story. It's a stuff of films, stuff of fiction. But it's true.

What's it teaching us? Let me suggest three points. It is not simply or explicitly a moral guide. Don't read biblical story or history or narrative simply to find examples to follow or not to follow.

Saul's the baddie and David's the goodie, but your life will get wrecked if you follow David's example always and always shun Saul's. Human beings are mixed.

None is perfect other than that one son of David, Jesus Christ. David is good, but he doesn't always do good things. And of course, some of the bad things of David, Saul does bad things too.

The end doesn't justify the means. So don't simply see this as a moral manual. Yes, narratives do sometimes teach more implicitly than explicitly moral virtues and values.

[32 : 58] But it's not simply a moral book to open and follow examples from. That's the first warning. In one sense, it's how we read the Bible and in one sense, this story does not answer the question.

If somebody comes to you to hand over, let's say, a Jew in the Second World War, do you lie to protect their life or not? David's example of deceit is not justifiable by way of following that example.

We have to weigh up other considerations. But perhaps two more positive points. History is not the survival of the fittest. despite what some have said.

It's easy to read this narrative as simply human intrigue. God is mentioned in passing in these chapters. And that's it. But there's more to this story than simply the machinations of human beings.

Back at the beginning of 1 Samuel, a prophet, a man of God, unnamed, comes to the then chief priest Eli, the great grandfather of Ahimelech that we've seen in tonight's story.

[34 : 13] Eli's sons at the time were wicked and Eli was pretty ineffectual as a priest. The man of God came to Eli and he said to him these words from 1 Samuel 2.

2 A time is coming when I will cut off your strength and the strength of your ancestors' family so that no one in your family will live to old age.

Then in distress you will look with greedy eye on all the prosperity that should be bestowed upon Israel. And no one in your family shall ever live to old age. The only one of you whom I shall not cut off from my altar shall be spared to weep out his eyes and grieve his heart.

All the members of your household shall die by the sword. The fate of your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, shall be the sign to you. Both of them shall die on the same day.

I will raise up for myself a faithful priest who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind. And so it came to pass.

[35 : 19] Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli, died on the same day. Chapter 4 of 1 Samuel tells us that. And here in 1 Samuel 21, 22, the destruction of all the priests of Nob is actually foretold by that prophet in chapter 2.

You see, history is not the survival of the fittest. God is sovereign over history. God's word is being fulfilled. There is judgment on Eli and his house for the failure of the priesthood at the beginning of this chapter and in effect in the history leading up to the time of Samuel as well.

God's word directs and governs and guides history. It's not simply the evil of Saul that took over and controlled history when he killed off Nob.

But even above that, sovereignly superintending is God and God's word. It doesn't make the event of the killing of the priests of Nob good.

Saul actually, by doing an evil act, brings about some fulfillment of the word of God. Notice too that the word of that man of God was that one would be spared.

[36 : 31] We've discovered tonight his name, Leviathan, as he flees to David and finds sanctuary with David. It's why in Jewish tradition the book of Samuel along with Joshua through to two kings are called not history books but former prophets.

Because it reminds us that what's guiding and controlling history is the prophetic word of God. Not the strength or weaknesses of different kings and nations, the survival of the fittest, Saul simply versus David.

Who's going to win? We don't know. Let's see how it finds out. But rather the directing, powerful, sovereign hand of God. But let's think about it a bit more. It's not thwarted by evil.

It's not thwarted by Saul's evil. It's not thwarted by Saul out to kill David. David is God's chosen king, anointed already to be king.

But God's sovereignty over this doesn't justify every action of David. Not at all. Just as the same with Judas, bringing about fulfillment of God's word in the death of Christ.

[37 : 41] And yet Judas, of course, condemned for eternity by God. That point should make it clear that as we read biblical story and history, even if in the pages or the words on the page, God seems to be a bit distant or even absent or on the side.

He's actually guiding what's going on, bringing about the fulfillment of his purpose always, regardless of the to-ing and fro-ing of different people, regardless of their faults and their virtues, regardless of their contests and weaknesses and powers.

God is the one who's bringing about his purposes, using good and evil people and actions. That then explains the final point.

It's tempting to think, oh, David, how clever to let your spittle dribble in your beard and to scratch a door. What a great ploy to get out of the grip of Achish, king of Gath.

How clever you are, David. How ingenious you are to escape what could have been death from the Philistine king. David, how clever to make up that ruse that fooled Ahimelech so that he could give you bread and give you a sword.

[38 : 55] Because after all, if you told him the truth, Ahimelech may well have handed you back to Saul and died. It's tempting to think just to that merely human level and think, David's been quite clever, even if morally a little bit compromised.

But David doesn't think, phew, I've done it. He doesn't think, oh, how clever I am. I've got out of this mess, this pickle in Nob and then again in Gath. He doesn't think that it's a lucky life.

But rather, David keeps thanking God. You don't see it in these chapters. Why do I say it? Because David not only played the liar, he wrote songs.

One of the world's great songwriters, actually. And the songs are not listed here, but they're gathered together, many of them, in a book that has things other than David's songs in a book called the Psalms.

And we know where some of those Psalms come from. I don't mean just simply from David, but from when in David's life they come. Psalm 56, for example.

[40 : 04] Let me read just a couple of verses of it. Psalm 56, we're told, is a psalm of David when the Philistines seized him in Gath. That's from today's passage.

And what does David say? How clever I am to pretend to be mad. Not at all. This is what David says. Be gracious to me, O God, for people trample on me.

All day long foes oppress me. My enemies trample on me all day long, for many fight against me. O most high, when I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God whose word I praise.

In God I trust. I'm not afraid. What can flesh do to me? For you have delivered my soul from death and my feet from falling, so that I may walk before God in the light of life.

David knows that over and above all these historical events, the good, the bad, the ugly, God is directing his purposes and fulfilling them.

[41 : 07] And David turns back to praise God. Psalm 52, a psalm of David. When Doid the Edomite came to Saul and said to him, David has come to the house of Ahimelech.

Presumably David heard about this after the event, from a viath or if not from others. And he wrote a psalm. He's not addressing God, but Saul.

But verse 5, But God will break you down forever. He will snatch and tear you from your tent. He'll uproot you from the land of the living.

The righteous will see and fear and will laugh at the evildoers, saying, See the one who would not take refuge in God, but trusted in abundant riches and sought refuge in wealth. David knows the sovereign provision of God.

Which is why he says to a viath at the end of chapter 22, When David is on the run, And a viath is on the run, Stay with me and do not be afraid.

[42 : 37] For the one who seeks my life seeks your life. But more importantly, You will be safe with me. For David knows God.

And God's promises. David may be flawed. He's deceitful. Later an adulterer. And after that, Compromised in effect in murder.

But David kept turning back to God. And acknowledging God. And praising Him. As we ought as well.

When we know that God is sovereign. And fulfilling His word. Then we have true refuge. And we praise God.

As we should. Amen.