

Seeing God's Hand When God Seems Absent

1Samuel 19:8-17

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 2-27-2011

Introduction

The title of this sermon is "Seeing God's Hand When God Seems Absent." When you read through these verses it seems as if everything is falling apart for David. It sure doesn't look like God is fulfilling His promise that David will one day be king. In fact, David later tells Jonathan what appears to be true here, **"...as your soul lives, there is but a step between me and death."** He is barely escaping from death. It takes faith to know the reality of this title when you are in circumstances like David was. His life was falling apart. In these ten verses David lost almost everything. He lost Saul's favor, lost his position in the army, lost his wife (whom he would not see for several years – in fact Saul is going to immediately marry her off to someone else – talk about heartbreak). David lost all of his earthly possessions because he had to flee from his home with nothing; he was about to lose his best friend Jonathan, and never see him again. Where is God in all of this? It sure seems like God has abandoned David.

And yet on this very night David would praise God for being in total control of his life. The reason I know is that David wrote Psalm 59 on this very evening. The inspired title of Psalm 59 says, **"A Michtam of David when Saul sent men, and they watched the house in order to kill him."** That means that the words of that Psalm came to him before he fled the house. In that Psalm he praises God that his enemies are no match for God. He praises God for being his fortress, his shield, and for ruling in Jacob and to the ends of the earth.

It took faith for David to say with absolute confidence, "The Lord is my fortress." You need to learn how to say the same thing when the doctor brings the results of the CT scan and tells you that you have a serious medical condition. You need to be able to say, "The Lord is my fortress," when you can't make your mortgage payments, or your wife has left you, or CPS is harassing you, or your life is falling apart in other ways.

Certainly that Psalm talks about a lot of things going wrong, the hatred of the enemy, and his closeness to death. He's not ignoring the very real danger around him. But throughout that Psalm David acknowledges the

presence of God's loving hand at every stage of these events. Let's look at them.

I. In physical warfare (v. 8)

In 1 Samuel 19:8 we have a reminder that when it came to war, David's leadership just seems to be blessed by the Lord. It says, "**And there was war again; and David went out and fought with the Philistines, and struck them with a mighty blow, and they fled from him.**" Ever since chapter 17, God has protected David in the most dangerous of circumstances. In fact, Saul has deliberately tried to make the battles such that they will guarantee David's death. It's sort of like what David did with Uriah the Hittite. But to Saul's surprise, David keeps going into the thick of the fray, and is never harmed by a sword. Instead, God gives David yet another remarkable victory against the Philistines.

If you have ever read the book, *Sergeant York*, you know that God can do the same thing today. Everything around him was completely riddled with bullets, yet not a bullet touched him. Scripture says that God can protect us from the arrow that flies by day and the pestilence that stalks at night. How can He do that? He can do that because God is sovereign over all creation. He is sovereign over bullets. He is sovereign over arrows that fly. You may remember that Ahab was killed, just as God predicted, by an arrow that a soldier shot at random. He wasn't even aiming. From man's perspective, Ahab had been killed by chance. But God controlled that arrow. He prepared Jonah's fish from the time that it was a baby to be just the fish needed to transport him back to Nineveh. In Exodus, God says that He controlled the hornets to drive out the Canaanites in stages, yet He controlled them in such a way that those same hornets did not drive out the Israelites. In Deuteronomy 28 you see that God controls animals, insects, mold, and other things to accomplish His purposes. Not a hair can fall from your head without God's permission. Obviously God has given some of your hairs a lot of permissions! Proverbs 16:33 says that "**the lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.**" That means that there is no such thing as chance. God's hand is everywhere.

I can give you numerous testimonies of my own near escapes from death, and some of you have told me how God has miraculously spared your lives from what looked like certain death. But we tend to forget that, don't we? And the next time a crisis comes along we panic. What I want to encourage you to do in the crises that God brings into your lives in the future is to respond with the faith and confidence that David did in Psalm 59. You

don't have to be passive. David was not. He did everything that was in his power to do, and trusted God with the results. But it's the faith and confidence that you need to have.

Let me just tell you a quick story about Kefa Sempangi. He was a Reformed pastor in Uganda, who wrote the book, *A Distant Grief*. He has amazing stories of God's protection and provision during the scariest times of persecution under Idi Amin. Numerous Christians had been tortured, killed, even eaten by Amin and his thugs. Kefa had just witnessed a brutal killing of a Christian. So they were pretty dangerous times in Uganda, back in 1973.

Amin had ordered all churches closed. But Kefa Sempangi refused to do so. In fact, he had already rented his town's football stadium for Easter Sunday, and planned to follow through on that service. And he did. Kefa preached to a crowd of 7,000 people. After the service, he was followed to his small church by five of Idi Amin's secret police. They entered the church, closed the door, and pointed their five guns at Sempangi's face. The captain said, "We are going to kill you for disobeying Amin's orders. If you have something to say, say it before you die." Initially he began to shake with fear. And we tend to do this. When we look at the difficult circumstances we can begin to panic. But Kefa looked to the Lord for strength, and immediately the Lord gave him a total confidence to speak to them. The first words out of his mouth were,

Do what you must. The Word of God says that in Christ I am already dead, and that my real life is hidden with Him in God. It is not my life that is in danger, but yours. I am alive in the risen Lord but you are still dead in your sins. May He spare you from eternal destruction.

The leader looked at him wide eyed for a long time, then lowered his gun and asked, "Would you pray for us?" Sempangi did, and shared the Gospel, and converted all five. Those five started to protect Sempangi with their own lives. (Preaching Illustrations, April 5, 2010)

Not all stories of persecution turn out that way. Some have the greater glory of being martyrs for Christ and of being ushered into the fortress of heaven. That's what happened to the Christian that Kefa had recently seen being beaten to death. But the point is, God can protect us from all danger, and you cannot die before it is God's time. So that was the first way in which God was his fortress. He protected him from the arrow that flew by day.

II. In spiritual warfare (v. 9)

Verse 9 indicates that God protected David from the demonic. **“Now the distressing spirit from the LORD came upon Saul as he sat in his house with his spear in his hand. And David was playing music with his hand.”** You may question whether that is really a case of protection, because, number one, David was not able to cast this demon out this time. Number two, the demon moves Saul to try to murder David. But think of it this way - if demons couldn't get close to you, threaten you, or be any danger whatsoever, you wouldn't need God to *be* a fortress, would you?

Yes this demon was dangerous. But who sent the demon? Look at the text. The text says that it was an “evil spirit from the Lord.” Not “*of* the Lord” but “*from* the Lord.” That demon could not come unless God gave it permission. And we saw previously that Satan is a roaring lion who is on a chain. He cannot do more than God sovereignly allows Him to do. God's providence is so amazing that it even governs the free actions of demons.

Secondly, when we looked at the demonic warfare before, we saw that 1 John 5:18 promises that if we guard ourselves spiritually, the wicked one cannot touch us. Yes, he can move others to touch us, but he cannot touch us. This demon would have loved to have possessed David, but he could not. He would have loved to have made David fearful, angry, and bitter, but he could not. David refused to give this demon any legal ground that it could take advantage of. This demon would have loved to have directly killed him, but he could not.

And so in a very real sense, in the face of demons David could say, “The LORD is my fortress.” And you need not fear the demonic. We have already taught you how to flee to that strong tower. You plead the name of Jesus, your Savior. You claim the cleansing and protection of His blood. And you use the powerful sword of the Word against those demons. If you read the Psalms that David composed during the period covered in chapters 19-20, you will know exactly how to do that – Psalms like Psalm 5, 11, 56 and 59. Yes, God's hand was covering David as he did battle with demons.

III. Controlling Saul's spear (v. 10)

Verse 10 gives yet another way that God was David's strong tower. **“Then Saul sought to pin David to the wall with the spear, but he slipped away from Saul's presence; and he drove the spear into the wall. So David fled and escaped that night.”** Keep in mind that Saul is a seasoned warrior, and this is the third time that he has tried to spear David. He did so twice in chapter 18:11. And for Saul to miss three times is nothing

short of staggering. When I was a teenager in Ethiopia, I had my own spear that I practiced with regularly. And even though I wasn't an expert, I don't understand how Saul could miss – *except* that the Lord was David's fortress. God made Saul miss. And David knows it. And you know stories of people who have been shot at, but the gun misfired.

And the God who can make a spear miss, can make an infected mosquito miss your arm by feeding on someone else. He can divert your car from an accident. When you fall down the stairs, he can keep you from breaking his leg. And when He does not, you know there is a good purpose in that as well. Those things are not accidents. There is no such thing as an accident from God's vantage point. We can call them accidents because we did not purpose them to occur. But there are no accidents with God. When you barely escape a close accident, give praise to the God who is your fortress. Don't chalk it up to chance.

I've had a number of near death experiences that I can only explain as the hand of God upon me. One time I was climbing up a mountainside and the whole mountainside gave way underneath me in a landslide. With the dirt and boulders flying all around me, I still don't know to this day how I managed to stay on top of the slide and keep my feet while riding the slide down the mountainside. It was like I was lifted up and couldn't fall under the rocks. That doesn't mean we should be foolish, and try mountain-slide-riding as an extreme sport. But if you start looking, you will find many times when God has been your fortress. In fact, if some come to mind as I'm preaching this sermon, I would encourage you to jot it down on your notes. At the end of the sermon I will give an opportunity for you men to share testimonies of how you or your wives or children have seen God's hand as real and present in your lives. I think it would be encouraging. What you have experienced may be different than the ten ways that David saw God's hand at work. That's OK. But we need to get used to seeing God's hand in our lives.

IV. Enabling David's escape from the palace (v. 10b)

The last phrase of verse 10 gives the fourth example in our text. He managed to get out of the palace. How did he do that? Wouldn't there have been numerous servants and guards who could have seized him? They could have closed the doors. They could have prevented his escape. But either God froze them into shock at what Saul had done and inactivity, or He made them not think too clearly. But somehow he gets by them all. He escapes.

I have had a number of close escapes from capture in one closed country. One time we were walking out the building right as the thugs were walking in the building to look for us. But some of you have shared with me some of the escapes that God has given to you. Your life might look just like these verses. You could read these verses and say, “Where is God?” or you could read these verses in light of the truth of providence and say, “Wow! God was there every step of the way.” It takes faith to make the second statement, but God wants us to walk by faith.

V. Controlling Saul’s instructions to the messengers (v. 11)

In verse 11 you see that God was David’s refuge controlling the messengers. **“Saul also sent messengers to David’s house to watch him and to kill him in the morning.”** Why did Saul want them to wait till morning? Why not kill David right away? Given what Saul does in the next verses, that doesn’t make any sense. But God was in those instructions. God was keeping those messengers from coming inside too soon.

There was one time when the secret police were following Jonathan and me everywhere we went on one of our trips. It was impossible to shake them. So Jonathan and I did some tourism that day, checked into a hotel, and in the middle of the night I left Jonathan there and went out a side door to a waiting car and was able to spend the whole week at our destination, get back into the hotel at the end of the week, and no one was the wiser because we had never checked out. In the meantime, Jonathan, who is quite adept at improvising, had a whole week of ministry of his own. They weren’t looking for him; they were looking for me. So we doubled our ministry that week, and I suspect it was because God controlled the instructions that were given to the ones who were watching me. They knew I hadn’t checked out of the hotel. So they were quite happy.

VI. Giving Michal a warning (v. 11b)

We’ve experienced the second part of verse 11 as well. **“And Michal, David’s wife, told him, saying, ‘If you do not save your life tonight, tomorrow you will be killed.’”** Either Michal heard Saul’s instructions when she was in the palace, or someone in the palace was a confidant to her. But she had inside information that saved David’s life. It was insider information that enabled John Calvin to escape capture in Paris. Some people want all leaks of top-secret information in America shut down tight even if it means the loss of American civil liberties. And I can sort of understand where they are coming from. But there have been a number of times in American history where liberty triumphed because of a leak.

Obviously this can be used for evil as well. But quite frankly, I would welcome some wikileaks of what goes on behind closed doors in the Federal Reserve, or in the Bilderberger meetings, or at the United Nations. And if it served God's purposes, He could certainly allow that. Now that is not to justify unethical leakers. My point is simply that there are dozens of examples from the last 1000 years of how this world would be a much worse place if it had not been for God giving some people motivation to leak information. Whatever you think of Wikileaks, we have to affirm that God was sovereign over those leaks.

VII. Through the providential placing of an unguarded window (v. 12a)

Verse 12 shows God's providential placing of an unguarded window. **“So Michal let David down through a window.”** If the messenger's are guarding the house, it seems very odd that there would be *any* window that was not guarded. One commentary suggested that the house was probably built onto the city wall, so that letting David down through the window was letting him down quite a long ways, and he would have been deposited outside the city of Gibeah and not have to go through the guards. If that is the case, then this parallels Rahab's letting down of the spies over the wall in the book of Judges. But either way, God's providence was controlling where the window would be built many years before and whether it could be guarded by Saul's soldiers or not. And of course, the Scriptures say that God's plans for us do not just start a few years before. His plans for us started before the foundation of the world. And those plans include even mundane, trivial things like windows, and whether there is going to be enough rope in the room to let David down. There had to be rope or strong enough bed sheets to accomplish this.

VIII. Through David's own quick action (v. 12b)

Verse 12 continues to say, **“And he went and fled and escaped.”** David takes action. Too often when Christians are facing disaster they passively wait for something to happen. Their stocks are going down, and rather than selling and cutting their losses, they have a gambler's hope that God will bail them out and bless their passivity. They hang on till they have lost everything. When the budget is falling apart, rather than cutting up the credit cards, getting financial counseling, cutting costs, and doing what they can, they act passively. God is our fortress, but He doesn't want us to act like a blob of fat that needs to be lifted with a crane and deposited into the fortress. No. He commands us to flee into the fortress. This means at times

using every providentially available means at our disposal to make a difference. But the point is that God's providence not only gives you the means, but Philippians says that He works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure. His hand is everywhere. It is absolutely everywhere.

IX. Through the previous compromise of Michal (v. 13)

Verse 13 shows that God can even overrule sin for our good. He doesn't sin, nor does he tempt people to sin, yet he can even overrule in such a way that the sins of others work together for our good. Doesn't He say that *all* things work together for our good? Yes, He does. Isn't that what Joseph said at the end of Genesis. He told his brothers, "**you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good.**" Look at verse 13: "**And Michal took an image and laid it in the bed, put a cover of goats hair for his head, and covered it with clothes.**" The Hebrew word for image is teraphim, and refers to a large man-sized idol that Canaanites had in the house of the ruler of the clan. The 15 times that this word occurs in the Old Testament, it is condemned. Any Hebrew who read this would have been horrified: "What!? She had an idol in her home?!" The fact that Michal had this teraphim, shows compromise on her part. And yet amazingly, God uses even that to help David escape.

Let me comment on this a bit more, because some people had questions after the last two sermons. I said two weeks ago that Michal had some of the same characteristics of her father, and more of those characteristics will ooze through in the future. But for the author to mention this teraphim idol is an extremely significant clue. The New American Commentary says,

"Ominously, the prophet Samuel previously had suggested that Saul's rebellious acts were equitable to the "evil of teraphim" (15:23). Through the present compelling scene and without the intrusion of didactic commentary, the writer suggests that Michal was as much a spiritual rebel as her father." (p. 208).

And he goes on to give some other evidences of her rebellion.

People might object that David would have been implicated in the idolatry himself if he allowed her to have the teraphim in the house. That would be true if he knew that it existed. But the commentary went on to contrast her trust in an idol with David's supreme trust in the Lord, as evidenced in the Psalm that he wrote that night.

Another commentary pointed out that in the Middle East in those days, the person who inherited the teraphim of the family gained the right to the leadership and property of that family. That was why Rachael stole

Laban's teraphim. She believed that her husband had the right to inherit the family property. And by the way, her husband Jacob didn't know that she had a teraphim in her tent. So it is possible that David was unaware. It could be very parallel to what Rachael did. And who knows – when she found out that David was in danger, maybe she stole the teraphim from Saul that day. Usually the teraphim was a clan idol. Anyway, this commentary thinks that Michal may have taken the teraphim from Saul in order to have its powers on David's behalf. If she had the teraphim, she maybe thought that David could have the kingdom. So not only is she compromised, but she is seeking to manipulate advancement through this god. It's the way Saul operated.

Anyway, this is yet another evidence that David should not have married Michal in the first place. But once he was married, the Bible would say that he would need to make the best of his marriage that he could. And I believe that he would have. But God allowed Saul to take her away from David, and to marry her off to Palti, the son of Laish. According to Deuteronomy 24 this would forever preclude David from taking her back. Yet he did so in 2 Samuel 3. And she despises David. It is an absolute mess.

But that's one of the characteristics of the Bible, isn't it? It describes life like it really is – with all of its messiness. It describes heroes with their defects. Yet, mistake though his marriage to Michal was, God used her to save David. Even the teraphim, which was an abomination in the eyes of the Lord, was used by God to let David get some space between him and Saul. And God continues to use the compromises of His people today. It never justifies those compromises, and there will always be the bitter fruits of that sin. But Scripture says that God causes even the wrath of man to praise Him. I'm trying to give you a picture of how far reaching God's providence is. It covers and overrules everything, without ever implicating God in sin (that's the amazing thing).

X. Through Michal's actions (vv. 13b-17)

We can see that God was at work in protecting David through the rest of her actions as well. She obviously loved David, and we need to give her credit for that. Continuing to read:

1 Samuel 19:13 And Michal took an image and laid it in the bed, put a cover of goats' hair for his head, and covered it with clothes.

There is the first deception. It is very similar to the ruse that God had the Israelites perform at Ai. And it would be very similar to syncing your lights to come off and on at times that would deceive a burglar into thinking that someone was there. Even though there is debate among Christians on this

subject, I tend to side with Corrie ten Boom on whether you owe the truth to the enemy. I don't think you do. Verse 14:

1 Samuel 19:14 So when Saul sent messengers to take David, she said, “He is sick.”

There is the second deception. In many ways this is parallel to the midwives in Egypt deceiving Pharaoh in order to save the lives of babies. Both Exodus and Hebrews seem to praise the midwives for doing that. We can't get into all of the ethics of misleading the enemy during time of war. I just want to let you know that this is a subject you might need to study. The writer does not seem to highlight this as being the problem with Michal. When God later judged her, the judgment was over other things. Anyway, continuing in verse 15:

1 Samuel 19:15 Then Saul sent the messengers *back* to see David, saying, “Bring him up to me in the bed, that I may kill him.”

1 Samuel 19:16 And when the messengers had come in, there was the image in the bed, with a cover of goats' *hair* for his head.

1 Samuel 19:17 Then Saul said to Michal, “Why have you deceived me like this, and sent my enemy away, so that he has escaped?” And Michal answered Saul, “He said to me, ‘Let me go! Why should I kill you?’ ”

I can certainly understand Michal's lie. But I think this last lie was a big mistake, and was actually testifying against her husband. She probably feared for her life. Saul doesn't make a big deal about the teraphim, though that alone could have gotten her in trouble. Maybe David gets blamed both for the teraphim and threatening her with death – we don't know. But certainly this claimed threat of David may have been used by Saul as an excuse to marry Michal off to someone else. He could now accuse David of attempting to kill his daughter and attempting to take over the kingdom. So this lie just complicated things. I'm not saying that I blame her for it. The point I want to highlight is that God uses Michal, whatever her merits or demerits, as part of His protection of David. God was using the teraphim, and it was clearly a sin to have that teraphim in the home. There is not a single verse in this section where God is not being a fortress and a strong defense for David.

XI. Through the presence of Samuel (v. 18)

Finally, verse 18 says, “**So David fled and escaped, and went to Samuel at Ramah, and told him all that Saul had done to him. And he and Samuel went and stayed in Naioth.**” Ramah was three miles downhill away from Gibeah. And his going to Samuel makes perfect sense. He can get advice from a senior statesman who was also a prophet. As soon as Samuel finds out what is going on, he brings David to Naioth, a complex

maze of buildings, which was the school and community of the prophets. And in a similar way, God often brings *people like Samuel* into our lives who can encourage us and bless us when we are going through difficult, difficult times. I'm so grateful that God's providence includes divinely appointed contacts with other people.

Conclusion

So there was a quick listing of eleven ways in which God's hand was clearly present in David's life, even though it may *not* have seemed like it at the time. Rather than concluding with my own words, I want to do something different today. I want to give an opportunity to some of the men in our congregation to speak informally right now and share testimonies of how God has been present in your life. These can be big or these can be small. It can be a story from the past, or a story from the very recent. It can be God's rescue of you from a huge disaster, or it can be a very peaceful recognition that God has been blessing you. Since this is a worship service, all I ask is that it be a male, 20 years old or above, who is a member of the congregation who shares. But certainly feel free to share a story about your wife, or your children. Perhaps after the congregation, some of the rest of you can share with one another the reality and presence of God in your lives.

And why am I doing this? Well, Scripture calls upon the members of the body to share with one another, speak to one another, encourage one another, and to remember God's wonderful works to the children of men. We'll have a roving mic for you to speak.

G	Z	U	V	K	P	L	B	S	Z	G	W	C	H	P	W	Y	D	G	T	P	B	A	A	E
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|------------|------------|-----------|----------------|----------|-------|
| fortress | providence | sovereign | lot | arrow | demon |
| protection | escape | leaks | predestination | teraphim | |

Youth Notes

Draw a picture of the sermon

Word checklist: check words off as Pastor Kayser says them.

- fortress
- providence
- sovereign
- lot
- arrow
- demon
- protection
- escape
- leaks
- predestination
- teraphim

Things I need to do:

Try the following word scramble, using words from the list to the right.

G Z U V K P L B S Z G W C H P W Y D G T P B A A E
N G B C G J W Q X Y C T E R A P H I M J R W F M S
V T X T H A U P G V P P A M N P G R M E O R Z R C
T K K I W C W F P I P R T L L P W T I W V D U Q A
N T I D R Y T P Q R N N O B O W F A N T I A S U P
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A R V M I R L E A K S D Q D E M O N F F E F Y F Q
X G U T Z Z T A V F M A E Y X C M S T A N I U Q E
M I J L O T S M W Y Q M F S G H T E Y F C I L T J
M F E V A D I V P W Y W U X T G V I V M E J Q A Q
P O Q E K C S N Q L O P Q L I I G G O C K R Q M V
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W E H R X G N I M O U T L I K R Z U A I I D O C C
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E S O W P P X U U A L T F W K C W W H M L N X M J

Seeing God's Hand When God Seems Absent 1Samuel 19:8-17

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 2-27-2011

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