

I Samuel ch.19
“Unreasonable Hostility”

Introduction:

Throughout the previous chapter, the narrator chronicled Saul’s growing efforts to eliminate David. Although he initially loved David (16:21), Saul came to fear him (18:12) and then sought to seek his death. Saul’s attempts began with a murderous thought (18:11), then progressed to awkward homicidal acts hidden from public view (18:11). After these failed, Saul then crafted a series of plans that involved public lies (18:22) and a small circle of people, including servants and a daughter, all designed to put David in mortal danger. The chapter revealed that God caused all of Saul’s schemes to fail. The chapter closed with an account of the last scheme of Saul that failed to kill David. That last failure resulted in David not only surviving, but gaining a stronger tie to the royal family, because David, by killing two thousand Philistines, gained the privilege of marrying the king’s daughter Michal.

This chapter focuses on the final break in the relationship of Saul and David. In this chapter we find five references to Saul’s intent to kill David (1, 2, 5, 11, 15), and within these verses it is recorded that Saul made three separate attempts to kill David (mirroring chapter 18 which also recorded three separate attempts by Saul to kill David). In addition to this there is emphasis on the departure of David from the presence of Saul. The vocabulary of the refugee is found throughout this chapter:

- (vs.2) “go into hiding”
- (vs.10) “eluded”
- (vs.11) “made good his escape”
- (vs.12) “run for your life”
- (vs.12) “fled and escaped”
- (vs.17) “escaped”
- (vs.17) “get away”
- (vs.18) “fled and made his escape”

I. Jonathan Mediates a Temporary Peace: (19:1-7)

In verse one we read, “*Now Saul spoke to Jonathan his son and to all his servants, that they should kill David; but Jonathan, Saul’s son, delighted greatly in David.*” At this point, Saul’s desire to kill David had become an evil obsession. For the first time, Saul openly announced his intention to kill David to both Jonathan and his court (both of whom we have been told were fond of David). Since his own plans up to this point had failed, Saul now apparently chose to enlist Jonathan to help him do what he had been unable to do on his own. Saul’s choice to include Jonathan in his plans to kill David revealed the distance that existed between the father and the son, since Saul was oblivious to Jonathan’s ongoing affection for David. Ironically, the Hebrew word translated as “*delighted greatly*” to describe Jonathan’s affection for David was used to express Saul’s own claim about his feelings toward David when he was trying to convince David through his

messengers about his good will toward him (18:22). Jonathan was now faced with a dilemma. He had to choose between the covenant he had made with David and his desire to please his father. Jonathan had learned by experience that his father was prone to pursue poorly conceived impulsive plans (14:29). Jonathan's own life had been put in jeopardy because of his father's rash impulses, and his life had only been spared because others stood up against his father's rash actions (14:39–45). Now, David, equally as innocent as he himself had been, was in mortal danger from the irrational behavior of the king. Because of both his love for David, and because he knew David had never done anything to justify his execution, Jonathan chose to intervene to save David's life.

As in the previous chapter, the narrator inserted a statement about Jonathan's deep affection for David. This is part of how the narrator used Jonathan as a literary foil to his father. Though Saul is threatened by David and wants to kill him, Jonathan fully supports David. Jonathan's loyalty to David is part of the narrator's presentation of David as someone who was not out to usurp Saul's throne, for if he had been Jonathan would have also regarded him as a traitor.

In verse two we read, "*So Jonathan told David, saying, 'My father Saul seeks to kill you. Therefore, please be on your guard until morning, and stay in a secret place and hide.'*" In this verse we are told that the first thing Jonathan did was to warn David about Saul's intention to murder him. Jonathan also told David to stay in a secret place and hide. This "*secret place*" was one from which David could witness Jonathan's conversation with his father. It was most likely secret in the sense that Saul was not aware of the spot and thus would have no reason to be concerned that David was nearby when he spoke with his son.

In verse three we read, "*And I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where you are, and I will speak with my father about you. Then what I observe, I will tell you.*" Having told David where to hide, Jonathan proposed a plan to David, he would speak to his father on David's behalf near where he had told David to hide and then promised to tell David what he learned from his conversation with his father. Jonathan's personal interest in helping David is underscored by use of the emphatic pronoun in the phrases "*I will go out*" and "*I'll speak*". In saying that he would "*stand beside*" (literally, "*at the hand of*") his father, Jonathan was promising to be David's advocate. From what Jonathan would say (vs.4) it was clear that he believed that by doing so, he would also be acting in the king's best interests (this is the best conclusion in light of how the phrase is used elsewhere in the OT-I Chron.18:17; Neh.11:24).

Some liberal interpreters argue that what is preserved here in this text doesn't make any sense, and thus the text must be corrupted. They argue that since the verse indicates that David could witness and hear Saul's response, he wouldn't need Jonathan to tell him how his conversation with Saul had gone. However, these sorts of criticisms reveal more about the inclinations of the interpreter than they do about any problems with the text. Such interpreters reveal they possess a hostility to the text and a bias toward the belief that it is untrustworthy. This is seen in the fact that this interpretation rests on an unnecessary assumption. That assumption

is that David was close enough to hear everything that was said between the two men, something that the text does not state. Given that the conversation took place outdoors, and the unlikelihood that David was not extremely close to the two men as they spoke, then the reader is meant to conclude that though David was able to observe the conversation, he was not able to hear very much (if anything) that was actually said by these two men. We are only told that David would be nearby, Jonathan did not tell David he would hear what was being said. And Jonathan's promise to talk to David afterward clearly implies that David would not be able to hear everything. The purpose of Jonathan's instruction to David to hide nearby seems to have been two-fold. First, it would mean that Jonathan could quickly inform David after the conversation as to whether or not he was still in danger. Second, by watching the exchange, David would get an immediate opportunity to assess Saul's overall demeanor and attitude by the way he was responding to what Jonathan was saying. It is almost certain that David would be able to determine whether Saul broke into a rage when Jonathan began speaking to him about David, or if he was willing to listen to reason. If it was the former, this would give David the earliest warning that he needed to flee the area.

In verses four and five we read, "*Thus Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father, and said to him, 'Let not the king sin against his servant, against David, because he has not sinned against you, and because his works have been very good toward you. For he took his life in his hands and killed the Philistine, and the LORD brought about a great deliverance for all Israel. You saw it and rejoiced. Why then will you sin against innocent blood, to kill David without a cause?'*" In these verses, the author used Jonathan's words in defense of David to stress the reality of David's innocence to the reader. The wording used by Jonathan also indicates that he addressed his father formally as king, and reasoned with him on the basis of the appropriate actions of a king, rather than trying to persuade Saul based on his own feelings of loyalty and friendship to David. One aspect of that formality was that when he spoke to the king, he referred to him in the third person. In Jonathan's speech, he was saying more than simply that David had accomplished some things that were beneficial to Saul, he was saying that David, through his loyal acts of service to Saul, had proven himself to genuinely be the king's servant. The Hebrew wording translated as "*his works have been very good toward you*" describe the proper treatment of one another by partners in a political relationship. Therefore, Jonathan was urging the king to reconsider the basis of his hostility toward David and provided Saul with several reasons for doing so. The first reason Jonathan gave was that David had not committed any crime against the crown that would justify him being executed. Second, on the positive side David had been of great help to Saul by killing a dreaded enemy. Jonathan's view of David's battle with Goliath was that it was ultimately Yahweh's victory (thus his interpretation was consistent with David's interpretation of the event-17:47). It was also consistent with his interpretation of the victory that he had achieved earlier over the Philistine (14:6, 10, 12). By reminding his father of this theological reality, Jonathan was casting David in the role of Yahweh's instrument of victory

(something that Saul had readily accepted when it occurred). Therefore, David's accomplishments should have brought him praise, not death. The speech should have also reminded Saul that when David had won that victory Saul had been pleased with David and what he had accomplished. This speech also highlights an irony in the situation. The heroic acts of both Jonathan and David were the instruments of Yahweh's intervention on behalf of the Israelites that resulted in them having victories over their enemies. But after both victories, Saul sought to kill the very ones whom God had used to provide that victory (14:44; 18:11). Jonathan also gave his father a third reason he should spare David's life. By doing that he would avoid committing a serious sin, that of shedding innocent blood. The idea of shedding innocent blood is addressed in God's Law (Deut.19:10; 21:8; 27:25). According to the teaching in these verses, to shed innocent blood would cause one to bear bloodguilt before God. Later in the historical narratives this would be a sin that would be particularly associated with wicked king Manasseh (II Kings 21:16: 24:4).

It is interesting to note how much Saul had changed from the person he had been when he first became king. Earlier in chapter eleven it was recorded that Saul refused to allow his detractors to be put to death. But now he has become a person who was willing to execute the most loyal member of his court, only because he was jealous of that man's successes. He hated David because he feared God would give him the throne, even though God had already rejected him as Israel's king. Saul was no longer Yahweh's servant; he was Yahweh's enemy.

In verse six we read, "*So Saul heeded the voice of Jonathan, and Saul swore, 'As the LORD lives, he shall not be killed.'*" Jonathan's reasoned defense of David convinced Saul that David was not a threat, but a loyal ally. The king took an oath. The wording of the oath "*as Yahweh lives*" more literally meant he was swearing by the very life of Yahweh, which was the most solemn of all oaths (14:39; Jer.4:2; Hos.4:15). It was a vow that David would not be put to death. The expression of this oath by Saul was intended to underscore the fact that he had changed his mind about David. However, Saul's change of mind about David, and his commitment to this oath were both temporary, for it was a vow he quickly and conveniently forgot (vs.11). This was not the first vow that Saul would make that he did not keep (14:44). Both cases reveal something about Saul. First, he was a man who made irresponsible and wicked oaths. Second, he was a man who broke legitimate oaths. In this verse the second reference to Saul's name was included to make it clear that it was the king himself who had sworn that David would not be killed.

In verse seven we read, "*Then Jonathan called David, and Jonathan told him all these things. So Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence as in times past.*" Having negotiated the reconciliation, Jonathan went at once to David to inform him of his success and then accompanied David back to the royal household. As a result, David would once again serve the king in his court. The implication being that the king willingly accepted David back into his service. For emphasis, the author included Jonathan's name before all three verbs of the verse (which is unusual) to emphasize that he was the defender of David.

II. Jealousy Arouses a Renewal of Saul's Hatred: (19:8-18)

In verse eight we read, "*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.*" This verse introduces a new setting for the following narrative (that there was another war with the Philistine). Doing this was a literary way of indicating that what follows is a new scene in the story. David, having returned to his position as a general over Israel's army, once again experienced a period of continued military success against the Philistines. This indicates that Israel's struggle to gain control over Canaan was ongoing as they continued to have battles with the Philistines.

Though the text does not address how Saul reacted to David's military successes, what follows implies that history began to repeat itself (18:1-7), and Saul once again became jealous and suspicious of David because of the victories that Yahweh gave to David.

In verse nine we read, "*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.*" The reference to the evil spirit's influence on Saul was not included to suggest that it took control of him and manipulated him to do something he would not have done otherwise. Rather, the idea here is that the evil spirit prodded Saul to follow an evil inclination that was already in his heart. Earlier in the book we read that an evil spirit came to torment Saul in conjunction with the departure of the Spirit of Yahweh (16:14). Next, we read that this same spirit came upon Saul with force in conjunction with his anger and jealousy over the way David was honored more than he was (18:8-10). Here that spirit moves within him again as his jealousy returned and prompts him to forget about the vow he made to Jonathan before God not to harm David. This pictures that Saul's life was directed by the influence of an evil spirit, not by any loyalty or allegiance to God, and that once again he was motivated to set himself against God's chosen servant, and thus to act against the will of God. This scene is identical to one that played out in the last chapter (18:10-11). David was seeking to sooth the king who was being afflicted by the evil spirit, but meanwhile, Saul was poised once again with a javelin in his hand. Therefore, while David sought to minister to Saul for his well-being, Saul's heart was filled with murderous thoughts toward David.

In verse ten we read, "*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.*" David was undoubtedly keenly aware of Saul's instability. He would not have forgotten the threatening behavior in the past (18:10-11), so, since he was a talented warrior, he surely would have prepared himself for any irrational acts that Saul might engage in. Thus, when Saul once again threw a javelin at David, he did not remain in Saul's presence to provide him with a second opportunity to take his life (as he had the last time he was in that situation), rather he immediately retreated to his own residence (vs.12). The Hebrew word that is translated here as "*pin*" was used in verses five and eight of this chapter to refer to David's successful attacks against Goliath and the

Philistines. The use of this same word here creates a vivid contrast between David and Saul. While David was actively being used by God to destroy Israel's enemies, again, Saul was seeking to destroy Yahweh's chosen servant. This irony is further developed when the reader recognizes that the text states that David caused the Philistines to flee (Israel's true enemies), but here Saul caused David to flee (a wrongly assumed enemy, one who was Yahweh's chosen servant).

In the final clause of the verse, we read that David fled and escaped. After that night David would never return to minister to Saul or serve in his court.

After this, David's life would be marked by long periods of living as a hunted fugitive. Before he became king he would be pursued by Saul. Then later in his life, after he had become king, he would be pursued by one of his own wicked sons (II Sam.17:9).

In verse eleven we read, "*Saul also sent messengers to David's house to watch him and to kill him in the morning. And Michal, David's wife, told him, saying, 'If you do not save your life tonight, tomorrow you will be killed.'*" Verse ten ends with the statement that David "*fled and escaped that night*", and verse eighteen opens with the phrase that David "*fled and escaped*". These two expressions thus frame this portion of the narrative (vs.11–17).

In this portion of the story, we read that, yet another member of Saul's family intervenes to protect David. Michal was apparently aware of her father's plan, and, like her brother, she warned David of the danger he was in and urged him to flee before morning. The Hebrew word translated as "*told*" links the concern of Jonathan with that of his sister Michal, both of whom wanted no harm to come to David. The account itself is structurally held together also by the repeated use of the word "*send*".

According to tradition, these verses describe the setting behind Psalm 59, which includes in its title "*When Saul had sent men to watch David's house in order to kill him*" using the language and vocabulary of this verse.

In verse twelve we read, "*So Michal let David down through a window. And he went and fled and escaped.*" We read here that Michal facilitated David's escape by letting David down through an unguarded window. There are two other Biblical stories where this same escape is employed; the spies who were aided by Rahab (Jos.2:15); and the Apostle Paul (Acts 9:24-25).

In verse thirteen we read, "*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.*" This verse demonstrated that what she did to facilitate David's escape revealed as much about her spiritual condition as it did about her commitment to her husband. The Hebrew word translated as "*idol*" is "*teraphim*". This word refers to a particular type of household idol that was used in the practice of divination (Ezek.21:21; Zech.10:2). These idols were believed to bring luck and prosperity to the family that owned them. However, the possession and use of these idols was explicitly condemned by the biblical authors (Ex.15:23; II Kings 23:24). The narrator in Genesis 31 referred to Laban's gods as teraphim. The fact that Rachel was able to hide the ones she had under a saddle (Gen 31:19) suggests that some were quite small, though from this

present passage, it appears that Michal's teraphim were of human size and shape. Many of these figurines have been found in Mesopotamia and Syro-Palestine. They were a part of the popular religion of the region and were not associated with temples or national cults for the major deities. Though the Law prohibited the possession and use of idols, they were ubiquitous in the culture and had a long history of use among the Israelites. The use of these by the Israelites would continue until after the exile. This is also the second reference to teraphim in this book. Ominously, the prophet Samuel previously had suggested that Saul's rebellious acts were equivalent to the evil of teraphim (translated there as "idolatry"-15:23). By the inclusion of this detail, even without a specific assessment given by the narrator, the indication is given that Michal, like her father, was not completely devoted to Yahweh. This detail serves to foreshadow an outcome for Michal's life that is the feminine counterpart to Saul's. Michal's father lost his opportunity to establish a dynasty; Michal will lose her opportunity to establish a family (II Sam.6:23). When this passage is read in connection with Psalm 59, Michal's action creates a strong contrast with those of her husband; whereas Michal trusted in a teraphim to save David, David trusted in Yahweh (Ps 59:9-10, 16-17). The Hebrew word translated as "cover" is only found here in the Old Testament, it referred to something intertwined or tangled. It seems that Michal used a tangle of goat's hair to look like David's head sticking out of the blankets. Michal's ruse (using the idol and other things to give the impression David was in his bed) worked to perfection; Saul's men would be deceived. The purpose of the deception was to give David time to put sufficient distance between himself and his pursuers.

In spite of the negative implications of the teraphim, the sequence of actions performed by Michal creates links between her and those of previous biblical heroines. In each case these allusions identify David in particularly favorable comparisons. Jacob too was saved by a woman who had possession of teraphim and deceived her father during a desperate search (Gen.31:19-35). Moses also was saved through the efforts of the daughter of a wicked ruler (Exod.2:6-10). Furthermore, David's escape echoed that of the spies saved by Rahab, who were let down through a window at night by a woman who lied to a king (Josh 2:2-15).

In both this instance and the one involving Jonathan earlier in the chapter, members of Saul's own family took the lead in scheming to protect David's life. In both instances David was portrayed as the passive conspirator in the attempts to undermine Saul's will. Saul's own children were the ones who initiated and executed plans on David's behalf to derail their father's purposes.

The author's careful description of the circumstances surrounding David's deliverances are not without purpose; they reinforce the claim that David did not usurp the throne from Saul. Leading members of Saul's own family loved and supported David throughout his rise to power and even played leading roles in David's ascent to the throne.

In verse fourteen we read, "*So when Saul sent messengers to take David, she said, 'He is sick'*". This verse is interpreted in two different ways by various scholars. Some understand this to be a second act by Saul, where he sent out a

second group of messengers. Others argue that this refers to the same incident that was written about earlier in verse eleven. In other words, chronologically here the story goes back to the point when Saul first sent his messengers after David. According to this view, the intervening verses (12-13) related to Michal's efforts to help David escape while those messengers were on their way. This is closely related to the matter of how David was able to escape notice when he was lowered from the window. If verse eleven refers to an earlier dispatch of agents who were to watch David's residence all night, then the only way he would have been able to escape detection would be if the window he was lowered from was connected to the city's wall so that he was lowered outside of the city (as in the case of Rahab's apartment in Jericho). However, if the reference here is to the same group of agents, then the narrative implies that they arrived after David's escape, and thus there was no one to view the descent. The first view seems best because there has to be an explanation why David didn't simply leave by way of the door. The logical reason he didn't is because some of Saul's agents were already outside. Also, Michal's urging in verse twelve about David needing to leave by morning implies that Saul's agents were just outside.

Here we read that Michal further stalled for time by telling Saul's men that her husband was ill, thus implying that they should not disturb him. Since the socially powerful daughter of the king refused to grant the men access to David's room, claiming he was ill, it is understandable that these men might have been hesitant to act against the objections of a royal family member, so they returned to Saul empty-handed.

In verse fifteen and sixteen we read, "*Then Saul sent the messengers back to see David, saying, 'Bring him up to me in the bed, that I may kill him'. And when the messengers had come in, there was the image in the bed, with a cover of goats' hair for his head.*" Saul was not satisfied with the report of his messengers. Instead, he sent them back for another look, and this time with orders to bring David back with them, even on his bed if necessary. When the messengers returned and went into David's bedroom, they discovered Michal's deception.

In verse seventeen we read, "*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?''*" Upon learning what happened, Saul demanded an explanation as to why Michal had deceived the messengers and why she had helped David in his escape. It is likely, given Saul's irrational behavior, that Michal told the lie about David threatening her because she feared for her life if her father learned that she helped David willingly. Her response however would have been convenient for Saul, if not convincing; she explained that she acted as she did because David threatened her with death. Her defense could not be tested, since there were no witnesses. But more importantly, true or false, Saul could use this claim to his advantage, for by threatening the safety of a member of the royal household, David would be doubly worthy of death. Saul's words about David identified him as Saul's mortal enemy, thus implying that David would be barred forever from returning to Saul's court at Gibeah. David's

days as an outlaw, had now begun in earnest, would continue until Saul's death. This statement, that David was his enemy demonstrated Saul's warped perspective.

In verse eighteen we read, "*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.*" David was most likely seeking sanctuary when he fled to Samuel. It is also likely that he did not return to his father's home because he feared he might be betrayed by one of his brothers (given the resentment they demonstrated toward him in the past). Samuel was three miles from Gibeath at Ramah. Samuel could empathize with David, since Samuel had also experienced that king Saul could represent a deadly threat to anyone who did not side with him (16:2). He also could supply spiritual encouragement, since he was the prophet who had received the revelation of David's selection as Israel's next king. Upon arriving in Ramah David undoubtedly informed Samuel about everything that had transpired between himself and Saul. The term "*Naioth*" is associated with Ramah only here in this context. It is probably not to be understood as a proper noun (since it is accompanied by a definite article). Rather it is a generic word for a camp. It is possible that Israelite prophetic groups may have occupied shepherd's residences or simply formed a similar type of camp on their own outside Ramah.

III. David Protected in the Midst of the Prophets: (19:19-24)

In verse nineteen we read, "*Now it was told Saul, saying, 'Take note, David is at Naioth in Ramah!'*" The logical conclusion is that those who told Saul about David's whereabouts were Saul's own spies.

In verse twenty we read, "*Then Saul sent messengers to take David. And when they saw the group of prophets prophesying, and Samuel standing as leader over them, the Spirit of God came upon the messengers of Saul, and they also prophesied.*" Saul's servants approached the prophets' encampment, yet no indication is given that they located David. Instead, they saw Samuel and a group of prophets prophesying, perhaps the same group Saul had encountered earlier (10:5). Before these messengers could initiate a search for David within the group, they were captured by God's Spirit and compelled to join the prophets. This activity so absorbed the men that they were unable to continue with their royal mission. God's Spirit, who had previously marked David for kingship over Israel, now acted to preserve David for that task. When the text refers to these men having "*prophesied*" it is likely that this was in the form of succumbing to a divinely induced possession trance rather than of speaking a Divinely given word. What is described here should not be equated with the ecstatic phenomenon that was present among the prophets of pagan peoples, as the nature of prophecy in Israel was rooted in a real experience of Yahweh, whereas prophecy among the pagans had its origin in demonism and human imagination.

We were told in 3:1 that the word of prophecy was rare when Samuel came on the scene, therefore we can conclude that it was he who was responsible for the fact that there was an entire contingent of prophets who functioned together at that time.

In verse twenty-one we read, “*And when Saul was told, he sent other messengers, and they prophesied likewise. Then Saul sent messengers again the third time, and they prophesied also.*” The phenomenon that overtook his men did not deter Saul from pursuing his goal of hunting down and killing David. Instead, he sent a second group to the encampment, but they too were overcome and failed to apprehend David. Becoming increasingly more desperate, Saul sent a third group into this mismatched clash between men and God, with identical results. The Spirit of God was gently invincible; those who had entered into Naioth under the influence of the ruler of Israel now found themselves under the infinitely greater influence of the ruler of the universe. We read later in the Biblical narratives about a similar phenomenon that took place in Elijah’s time (II Kings 1:9-18) where three groups were sent to apprehend a servant of God who were then systematically neutralized. And how in the end, the king who sent them chose to confront his enemy.

In verses twenty-two through twenty-four we read, “*Then he also went to Ramah, and came to the great well that is at Sechu. So he asked, and said, ‘Where are Samuel and David?’ And someone said, ‘Indeed they are at Naioth in Ramah.’ So he went there to Naioth in Ramah. Then the Spirit of God was upon him also, and he went on and prophesied until he came to Naioth in Ramah. And he also stripped off his clothes and prophesied before Samuel in like manner, and lay down naked all that day and all that night. Therefore they say, ‘Is Saul also among the prophets?’*” As a last resort Saul himself left for Ramah. This would have ordinarily been about a ninety-minute journey. On the road, Saul passed by a major regional water source, “*the well at Sechu*”. This “*well*” was a cistern that was a communal place from which to draw water. At Sechu, Saul asked people who had come there to fill their water jars, some of whom probably were from Ramah (9:11), where he might find Samuel and David. The title “*Sechu*” denotes an elevated and barren place. As with Naioth, this word should not be taken as a proper noun, because it is modified by a definite article (which is very unusual for proper nouns). There are more than half a dozen wells or springs along the two-mile road from Gibeah to Ramah. It was along this route that the encampment of these prophets was located.

After he received the information he needed to find the encampment, Saul proceeded on his way to apprehend David. However, unlike his messengers, Saul began prophesying before he even arrived at the prophets’ encampment. When Saul did make it to the camp, the Spirit of God so overwhelmed him that “*he stripped off his robes*” (vs.24) as he continued to prophesy “*before Samuel*”. The three-fold use of the Hebrew phrase “*gam hu*” (literally meaning “*even he*” and it emphasizes the fact that Israel’s most powerful citizen was subjugated by the power of God. Saul, like his messengers before him, was immobilized and made incapable of accomplishing his evil intentions. Saul’s loss of royal attire in the presence of God’s Spirit presented a powerful image confirming the prophetic judgments Samuel made earlier (15:23, 28). God had rejected Saul as king, so in God’s presence Saul would not be permitted to wear the clothing of royalty. Saul had chosen to reject the word of Yahweh (15:23), so now in an ironic twist he would be condemned to be

a mouthpiece for that very word. Saul remained naked all day and night, something that represented a shameful state in the ancient Near East.

For a second time a particular proverb was applied to Saul “*Is Saul also among the prophets?*”. Though the previous reference to Saul being in this possessive trance was positive (10:10-13), here the implication from the context is that it is to be viewed negatively. Whereas earlier in Saul’s life the Spirit of God used him as a vehicle for true prophecy, this time the Spirit of God came upon him to keep him from harming David. Saul’s present actions, which were so out of keeping with his background and earlier character, gave new life to the proverb coined when Saul was first anointed king over Israel, the proverb that celebrated Saul’s inclusion among the prophets in the past now expressed how he had been separated from the royal office. Therefore, the use of this proverb first in 10:11–12 and now here brackets the narrative descriptions of Saul’s first and last encounters with Samuel as well as his first and last encounters with the Spirit of God. He was now no longer a legitimate king or a genuine prophet. Instead, Saul continued to stumble toward his doom at the hands of the Philistines, where he would be stripped of his garments for the last time (31:8–9).

Conclusion:

To the reader, Saul’s experience is a warning of the consequences of disobedience to God and the fearful thing it is to be rejected by God. He demonstrates that an individual can go from being an object of Divine favor to one who assumes the posture of an enemy.

Some interpreters suggest that Saul is an illustration of a backslidden believer in rebellion against God, allowing the sins of the flesh to go unconfessed. They further erroneously conclude that what is described here is prophesy in the characteristic sense, and that this situation shows that God can even work in a seriously backslidden servant of the Lord, even though at times that servant might be dominated by an evil spirit. This is out of sync with the specific teaching of the New Testament. Saul is not presented here as a person struggling but failing to live a predominantly godly life, he is shown to have been a man in open hostility to God who valued his own perspective over God’s revealed will. Therefore, he is pictured as a spiritual fraud, a person who claims to worship Yahweh, but who is in truth, an unbeliever.

David’s experience can help us to properly interpret a well-known proverb. In the Book of Proverbs we read, “*When a man’s ways please the LORD, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him*” (Prov.16:7). On the surface this would seem to be a guarantee that if one lives a godly life, then one will not be troubled by one’s enemies. However, David’s experience with Saul seems to contradict this proverb. So, does that mean then that the proverb is false? No. What must be understood is that a proverb is an expression of a general truism, it is not an absolute statement of fact. The idea is that normally, righteous living leads to harmony with others. However, this part of David’s story illustrates that some, because of the evil in their hearts, will irrationally choose to be our enemies.