

When David's World Fell Apart

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[0 : 00] I often hear Christians, when discussing major events and usually tragic events, they ask, do you think that God is judging us? Or they'll ask a similar question, what do you think God is saying in all of this? If it's a flood or an earthquake or a major disaster somewhere in the world, either internationally or locally, often people will speculate on this question, where is God in all of this? What is He saying to us? Is He judging us? Is He repaying us for something we have done against Him? The problem, of course, and there are many problems with that kind of thinking, one problem is, well, what happens when nothing goes wrong? What happens when there are no tragic events? Does that mean that we're pleasing God? Does that mean that everything is going well? Not necessarily. And what about those outside of the region where the disaster or the or the problem has taken place? What is God saying to them? I think it's very dangerous to go down that road. But that's not to say that God is not present in all events. God is involved in the world that we belong to. And that's something that is hugely comforting and hugely encouraging for all of God's people this evening. When David returned to Ziklag, his hometown, the town that had become his home, albeit temporarily, he could have asked those same questions because the town had been raised to the ground. It had been burned. And all the people that he and his men had left behind, their wives and their families, their children, they had all been taken away by the Amalekites.

It was a complete disaster. And it all happened on David's watch. So David could easily, and we could understand, David beginning to ask, well, maybe God is judging me for something. And if he had gone down that road, then he could have found something because he was in the wrong place. He had made a bad decision. He had come to the wrong conclusion. And he found himself in a very awkward position. I think we have to rewind at this stage just to recap for the benefit of those of you who are perhaps less familiar with the story. This is David's early days. He's not King David at this stage. King David comes in 2 Samuel. He is David who is on the run. And pursuing him is the king of Israel, who's called Saul. And he hates David. He hates him with a passion because, A, he's jealous of him because of his gifts. And secondly, he knows that God has promised and prophesied that one day David will be king after him. And Saul is going to try his best and not let that happen. Very foolish to stand against God's will and God's plan and purpose. But that's what Saul completely, irrationally did. So for months and months and months, Saul mustered all his forces and their one objective was to destroy David, which meant, of course, that David's one objective was to survive. He was on the run day after day pursued by Saul. And there was only one thing that David could lay hold on, and that was the promise that went all the way back to that day when Samuel had promised him and anointed him as king over Israel. He knew because God had said that one day that he would be king over Israel. And come what may, that was going to happen. And that actually did happen.

Now, we can say from the comfort of our nice chairs here, well, why did David not believe that? Why did he not just continue to have faith in God and everything would have been okay? Because God was going to be always true to His word. And it didn't matter what kind of danger David faced, matter what kind of life-threatening situations that he had to endure, he should have known that God would be true to His word. Well, it's easy to say that, isn't it, after the event and from the comfort of our position here. But we're not David. And I guess for a while, it was clear that God had made His promise and one day he would be king over Israel. And so David was prepared to endure all kinds of hardships. But when that goes on for month after month, it gets really wearing.

[5 : 26] And it looks like, if you read back in chapter 26, 27, it looks like it got through to David. And he gave in to his own fear and he decided to do something quite irrational, although understandable. You see, by this stage he had collected a whole bunch of men who were on his side, people who had come from all places, from different places in Israel who wanted to support

him.

So he had them to look after as much as himself. Things were not easy at all. So he made a very foolish decision. He decided that instead of continuing to face the threat of Saul every day, he would cross the border into enemy territory, the Philistines, because he figured that there, if he managed to persuade the king of the Philistines to give him refuge, that he would be safe from Saul. Saul would think twice before entering into Philistine territory in order to catch David. That was just more than David's life was worth.

And so he did that. He went into Philistine territory and sure enough, the king Achish, he welcomed him. He thought he had scooped a trophy because here was David, who everybody was predicting would be the future king of Israel, and it appeared that David was now switching sides.

David asked for a place to stay. Achish said, of course, come and I'll show you. I'll give you a whole city where you and your men and your wives and your families can all settle down amongst us.

And so he gave him the city of Ziklag. And David settled there, and he stayed there for a year and four months. But that didn't make things easy for David because in order to prove his support for the Philistine king, David had to take his men to all kinds of different places and conduct wars against ethnic minorities in that land, destroying them.

[7 : 41] David had to compromise his own values. What he knew was right in order to preserve his own safety.

That was a step too far. It always is when we have to compromise what we know is right in order to do the easy thing or in order to preserve our own safety or our own reputation or our own comfort or whatever it is we're trying to preserve for a Christian, God has to come first.

And sadly, God was left out of this decision. But that didn't mean that God had finished with David or that he had rejected him. God still stuck to his plan that one day David would be king after Saul of Israel. And that was going to happen. What happened was that as time went on, a war was gathering between Israel and, guess who, the Philistines. There was going to be a there was going to be a massive conflict. And David was on the wrong side with his men. And it looked as if David was going to be sucked into this war on the wrong side. Achish thought this was great, that David, one of the Israelites and all his men would be helping him to win the war against his own people. But then the other rulers of the Philistines came to Achish and they said, Are you kidding? Is this, are you for real? This cannot happen. This man is an Israeli.

You're about to take an Israeli into battle against the Israelites. How do you know that he's on your side? How do you know that he's on our side? What happens if in the middle of the battle he turns against us, then we're all destroyed. You are crazy. Send him home. And Achish had to bow to the pressure of the majority. And he had to say to David, Look, I'm sorry about this, but I'm going to have to send you home. You're just a liability. These guys think you're a liability to us.

We're going to have to send you back to Ziklag. You cannot be part of this war. You see what was happening? God is intervening because if God hadn't done that, if that hadn't happened, David would have found himself in a massively awkward position. He'd have found himself warring against his own people and against the people of God, all because he had made a foolish decision in the first place to come and live in Philistine territory. So the king sent him back, him and his men, to Ziklag. When they got there, that's where we take up the reading of this chapter, when they got there, Ziklag was raised to the ground. It was destroyed. The people who David had left had been kidnapped by the Amalekites. Who knows where they were? Who knows whether they had killed them? Who knows what condition his families, the families were in. They had no idea all they saw. It must have been absolutely devastating for David and his men to arrive to such carnage. The men, once they'd regained their composure, they wanted to turn on David and they wanted to kill him because this happened under his watch. He was responsible for all of this in their eyes. And you would have thought that if David had gone down the road that we started on and asked, well, is God judging me in all of this? The answer may well have been yes.

[11 : 39] The fact is, the answer was not yes. God was not judging David. God continued to have a plan and a purpose for David because he is faithful to himself. And so I want to, I find it fascinating, and I would like to just focus this evening for our encouragement and our edification to think about how David reacted to this horrendous situation by finding refuge in the Lord His God. That's what we read. He found refuge in the Lord His God. And he did two things. He found refuge in God and he also asked for something called the ephod. Now I know this might be strange to some of us this evening and I hope that by the end of the evening we'll have a little bit more understanding of what

it is. But before we come on to that, let me, let's just focus on the God in whom David finds refuge. David strengthened himself in the Lord His God. First of all, he's described as His God, His God. And I want us to pay, just stop there for a few moments, just to think of that special relationship that there was between David and God. It wasn't like all of his men had all different gods and they all went to worship their gods and David meanwhile went to worship his God and they were all, they all happily coexisted, worshipping different gods.

That's the way that the world wants us to think. It's the way that the world likes to think. Everybody to their own religion and none, each one of them of equal value. We hear it all the time. Except a thinking person will be asking, well, that cannot be. Because surely God by very definition is unique. The Creator high above everything else, exalted above and beyond everything else. Reason and logic alone tell you that if God is God, there can only be one God. But that's not what it means. It means that there was a personal, unique relationship between David and God in which he was able to say, oh Lord, you are my God.

Oh, earnestly, I will seek you, Psalm 63. The Lord is my refuge and my strength. The Lord is my light, the light of my salvation. That's the kind of unique personal relationship that David knew and possessed with the living and the true God. And it is that same relationship that there is between you and the Lord through the Lord Jesus Christ this evening.

I just want to remind you, we've heard all of this before, but we need to be reminded of the fact that God is faithful to his people. And just as we regard him as our God, he has called us his treasured possession in Jesus Christ.

[15 : 24] Now the reason I emphasize that is because you will never come to God with confidence if you don't have confidence in that relationship that God has created through Jesus Christ.

God was his God. The Lord was his God, and he is ours tonight through Jesus. But then I want us also to think about the name, the Lord. See these names in capitals, you know this already, I'm quite sure. Verse 6, David strengthened himself in the Lord, his God. That word Lord is in capitals. Anytime you see that, you know that it is the English version of Yahweh, which is the name that God gave himself when he met with Moses in the burning bush. I am. I am unchangeable. I am eternal. I am faithful to myself and to my promise.

God does not change from day to day with our unfaithfulness and with our, with the way in which we very often change. David strengthened himself in the Lord, his God. That word Yahweh was such a precious name. It was unique to the people of Israel, and it was the name by which God bound himself in covenant love and in covenant commitment to his people. And even although there were many times in the history of the Old Testament when his people wandered away from him, yet time after time God brings them back to himself in order to fulfill his plan to send Jesus into the world amongst them to give his life on the cross. God is faithful. The Lord was his God. The same is true as true 2,000 years after Jesus as it was in David's time. And it applies to you and I this evening through the Lord Jesus Christ. So that's the first thing he did. He found refuge in the Lord his God. But then in verse 7, David said to a biathlete of the priest, the son of Ahimele, bring me the ephod. Bring me the ephod. And the first question of course is, well, what is an ephod?

The an ephod was an item of clothing. It was a waistcoat. Gareth Southgate has done two things. Whatever he's done for the fortunes of the English team, and I'm sure we'd all agree that he has done tremendous work with them. We're not particularly concerned about that this evening. He's also put waistcoats back on the map. I can guess that many people will be buying waistcoats from now on in order to somehow emulate his clothes. But I have to say that his ephod or his waistcoat is rather different from the ephod that we're talking about here or that David wanted here.

[19 : 04] Because for one thing, the waistcoat that Gareth Southgate wears is kind of boring. It's one color. The waistcoat that the high priest wore that is described here was entirely different.

It was made of the choicest, most expensive materials, including gold and purple. You have to close your eyes. This is one of these places in the Bible. You have to close your eyes and just imagine this. It was gold and purple and blue and scarlet cloth and finely woven linen.

So it was like a sleeveless vest. It was like a waistcoat without the buttons. It was fastened on the shoulders and it was fastened by six onyx stones on one shoulder and six onyx stones on the other. Again, close your eyes. Imagine this six onyx stones, one shoulder, six onyx stones on the other.

And the reason for that is actually quite important because each of the onyx stones represented the 12 tribes of Israel. You see, this ephod was worn only by one person.

Even David wasn't allowed to wear it. It was worn by the high priest. Now, I'll explain to you what the high priest was and why this is so important in a moment. But this was part of his clothing. The high priest had to wear this ephod that had the six onyx stones on one shoulder, six onyx stones, and each of them represented one of the tribes of Israel. He is carrying on his shoulders as it were the responsibility for each of the 12 tribes of Israel.

[20 : 54] But that's not where it ends, because on the ephod there was a wide belt that kind of fixed or fastened the ephod to the body of the high priest. You weren't undergarment, of course, but you had a belt. And you also had another thing called the breast piece. If I know this in Exodus, by the way, you had a breast piece. And again, there were 12 precious stones on the chest embedded into this breast piece. And so each of the 12 precious stones again represented the 12 tribes of Israel. So the 12 tribes of Israel were on his shoulders and next to his heart, representing his duty as a high priest. Now the high priest was the single most important figure in Old Testament Israel. And the reason for that was because he represented the people before God, and he also represented God before the people. See, there was a big problem between God and the people of Israel. He was perfectly holy. They were not. He was perfectly righteous. His righteousness burned with fire. The people of Israel were sinners. And so there had to be a separation, even though God chose to dwell amongst the people of Israel in the Holy of

Holies in the middle of their camp. There had to be a separation in which no one could ever approach the presence of God except one person. And that was the high priest. The high priest's job was to mediate between God and the people of Israel and to make sacrifice on their behalf. It was always the priests that brought the sacrifice that carried the guilt of the sin of Israel every day. And at special times, sacrifices would be made, and they would be made by the priests overseen by the high priest, wearing this elaborate clothing that represented so much, that represented his job and his responsibility. But inside this breast piece on the Ephod, there was something else. There was a pouch. And the pouch contained two things.

It contained urim and thumim. Now I know that this is all very mysterious, and I think it's meant to be. It's meant to arouse our intrigue and our fascination.

Urim and thumim were kept in this pouch. And when the people of Israel wanted to know God's will on some question that they needed to know the mind of God, they needed to ask God about, they would take the urim and the thumim, and they would ask God, what do you want us to do? Like here in this case, what do I do?

Lord, what do I do? Here's my city is destroyed. My wives and my families, they've all been taken away. I don't know where they've gone. Should I pursue the Amalekites or not? Is it a waste of time or not?

[24 : 41] Have you completely rejected us or not? What do I do? And the way that David found out what the mind of God was, was to use the urim and the thumim that were contained in this little pouch that was on the breast piece that was on the ephod. That's why David wanted the ephod, so that he could find out the mind of God. And so he takes the urim and the thumim, and they are the means by which God reveals to him that he does want them to pursue the Amalekites.

Now you're asking, I know what you're asking. You're asking what were the urim and the thumim. What was it? I have no idea. Nobody does. Whatever they were, God doesn't want us to know. It's something that the Israelites used way back in the Old Testament, and he doesn't want us to know what they were. What he does want us to know tonight is what all of this looked forward to. What it all foreshadowed. Number one, the High Priest foreshadowed the coming of Jesus into the world. The New Testament gives the title of our great High Priest to Jesus. Why? Because he is the one who ultimately represented us before God, and he carried the sacrifice of himself to God on the cross.

And as High Priest, he made perfect satisfaction by his death on the cross, as he took our guilt, and as he paid the ultimate price that God demanded as the payment for our sin, which was his life. No wonder the writer to the Hebrews calls him our great High Priest.

We have our great High Priest. But then there's more than that, because all of these garments that fill us with such intrigue and fascination, again, they point us to the work that our great High Priest does, even tonight. We saw this this morning as we thought about Jesus in heaven, sitting at the right hand of God. The Bible tells us where he makes intercession for us, and what that means is that he is part of this worship this evening. Do we think about Jesus as being part of our worship when we come together in St. Columbus morning or evening? Do we remember that he is part of

what we are doing? He in heaven and we on earth, but we are in him. The Bible tells us that he has raised us with Christ, and he has made us to sit in heavenly places in Jesus Christ. So there's a sense in which he is with us as we worship God, but there's also a sense that we are in him as he sits at the Father's right hand this evening. There is this unique connection between God's people and the Lord Jesus Christ, in which we too can come to him in all our agony sometimes.

[28 : 34] And when things go disastrously wrong, as they did for David on this occasion, does it mean that he has rejected us and cast us off? No, it doesn't, because he's faithful to his covenant, just as he was in the Old Testament. How do we know? Because we have a great high priest, the Lord Jesus Christ who has given himself for us and who now sits at the Father's right hand on our behalf.

So what this story, along with so many others in the Old Testament, they look forward, they prefigure the coming, the death, the resurrection, and the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, our privileges in him as we come to him this evening. David said to Abbaethar, bring me the ephod, and this was his way of coming. I should say this was God's way in which David was able to make an approach to God. We have that same privilege this evening, and the ephod was what we might call a means of grace, a means by which God spoke to David, and a means by which David was able to approach God through the mediatorship of the high priest. We have the same, we have in fact a greater privilege because our great high priest has paid the ultimate price in his death on the cross. It was also a means whereby God was willing to make his will known to David and to his men. When David asked the question, should I pursue the Amalekites, then the answer was yes. This was God's way in which

God guided him into the right kind of action, and this of course proved a turning point for David, where he would eventually come back into his own territory and fulfill God's purpose for him once again. So is the Bible. The Bible is what we have tonight, by which we know God's will for our lives. That doesn't mean that the Bible is going to answer every specific question that tonight you or I might be bringing to God, and yet as we live in the light of the Bible, and as we allow God's light to shine in our hearts and in our lives, then we can expect God to guide us because we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. These are our privileges. This is our massive, the tremendous relationship that we have with God in which God dwells within us, and in which God is pleased to make his will known as we live in the light of his Word.

Our means of grace tonight are prayer by which we can speak to God personally. It also means that we have his Word, the Bible, which is as relevant today as it ever was.

We have our church here where we can have fellowship with other Christians, and we can study God's Word together and be enriched and strengthened in our faith, and we can be reminded of what God is doing in all the world, in other parts of the world. We can be reminded of what God has made us and done for us in the Lord Jesus Christ. And so that's what God has given us in the Old Testament. God gave His people the ephod, the high priest, the ephod that was to remind the people of Israel of their special relationship to Him, that was to strengthen the people of God, and that was to restore them even when they made bad decisions and to bring them to a place of reconciliation to God once again. Today we have the Lord Jesus Christ, and everything that He has done for us. We have His Word, the Bible, and the Old and the New Testament, and we have access to this grace in which we stand. May we tonight make use, and that's the question that each one of us, including myself, must ask on a day by day basis, may we tonight make use of these amazing privileges that God has given us. He has spoken to us. He has called us to be in the Lord Jesus Christ, and He has promised to be in us and with us forever more as we face all the challenges of living in a very difficult world, a difficult world where we will be required to make the kind of awkward decisions that David and all of these characters in the Old and the New Testament were made, and we have to learn from their lives and their example. Sometimes we learn from their bad example, and we are inspired at the same time by the way in which God drew them back into fellowship with Himself. Let's pray together. Our Father in heaven, we thank you for your Word to us, and we thank you for all the privileges that we have this evening. We thank you that we have our great high priest in the Lord Jesus Christ who has loved us and given Himself for us, and we pray to never lose sight of Him. We pray to come to Him in prayer, confessing our weaknesses and our failures, and asking for His guidance in every detailed decision that we have to make. Our Father, we confess that we do not take enough of our perplexities to the Lord in prayer, and we ask that this reminder will be an encouragement to us to come to you afresh and asking for your

guidance in Jesus' name. Amen.