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**Gen 26 1 Sam 6-8 Ps 55-56 Mark 3-4:23**

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## Isaac and the Philistines (Genesis 26)

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As in the days of Abraham, the land of Canaan experienced another drought and famine—and, having the example of his father before him, Isaac journeyed south with the probable intent of going into Egypt where food would be more likely available, that country being sustained by the annual inundation of the Nile. His journey took him to the southern Philistine city of Gerar, whose king bore the hereditary title Abimelech (meaning “Father King” or “My Father Is King”). That several kings bore the title of Abimelech is amply proven by archaeological discoveries.

Verse 2 records that God told Isaac, “Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land of which I shall tell you.” This implies that God generally directed Isaac’s movements, for if God had merely wanted Isaac to remain in Canaan, He would have simply said, “Live in the land,” omitting “of which I shall tell you.” The latter phrase implies continued guidance. This is interesting because we are told that Abraham, although going into Canaan, went “not knowing where he was going” (Hebrews 11:8), and that God had said, “Get out of your country to a land that I will show you” (Genesis 12:1), implying that although Abraham knew he was heading toward Canaan, he did not know whether he would remain there or if God would lead him elsewhere. Isaac’s movement toward Egypt was stopped by God’s directly intervening to guide his movements within Canaan. For the moment, God gave no further direction than to remain in the land of Canaan (verse 3).

Notice also that in both Genesis 12 and 26 we have the repeated pattern of God commanding his servant (Abraham or Isaac, respectively) to go to a land that He would show him, followed immediately by a giving or reaffirming of what has come to be called the Abrahamic Covenant. Genesis contains several examples of this kind of couplet—as you read through the book, you should keep your eyes open for them. One of the couplets is Abraham and Isaac’s denial of their wives, in each case to a king titled Abimelech (Abraham also did so to Pharaoh, Genesis 12). These couplets have led some to suggest that the book of Genesis was stitched together from several different and contradictory traditions—in this case, one tradition having Abraham denying his wife, and another tradition having Isaac denying his wife. The truth is that there are

no contradicting traditions. Abraham and Isaac both did the same things, the son imitating the father, perhaps for the same reasons.

Though the incidents with Abraham occurred before Isaac was born, Isaac probably heard about them, perhaps viewing such an approach as acceptable. In Isaac's case, however, he did not have his father's excuse that his wife actually *was* his sister. So, this was blatantly a lie (although it could perhaps be argued that a close relative could be called a sister). In any case, this was clearly wrong and illustrates the fact that a bad example can go a long way.

Still, despite Isaac's problems, he was a man who, like all of us, was growing in faith. Indeed, his is a tremendous example of perseverance. God greatly blessed him (26:12-14). But enemies tried to thwart him, filling in wells that his father's servants had dug. Isaac's answer: dig *new* wells. When the same enemies then quarreled with him over a new well, he dug another well, and then another, and then another. Country singer Paul Overstreet actually wrote a song inspired by all of this called "Dig Another Well." It talks about the devil thwarting our efforts—stopping up our wells—and then says, "When I go out for my morning drink, and get a dipper full of dirt, my heart does sink, but I think of old Ike and I have to grin—God blessed me once and He can do it again." And the song's advice to those facing such circumstances: "Just pick up your shovel and dig another well."

## **The Ark in Philistia (1 Samuel 5:1-7:1)**

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The plague many of the Philistines suffer and die from produces "tumors," the Hebrew word for which "literally means 'swellings' and may refer to any kind of tumor, swelling, or boil" (*Nelson*, note on 5:6). When the ark is sent back, the people include an "offering" consisting of five golden sculptures of these "tumors." But they also for some unstated reason include five golden rats. It would appear that rats had some sort of involvement with whatever the plague was. It is interesting to note that bubonic plague, the black death of the Middle Ages, is characterized by the formation of buboes, i.e. inflammatory swellings of the lymph glands, especially in the groin area—and that the plague was spread by the fleas of rodents, particularly rats. This, then, may have been what the Philistines were suffering from.

When the Philistines decide the ark is most likely the cause of their problems, and agree to send it back, they devise a test to try to determine for sure whether the God of Israel is behind all of this. They find two cows that have never pulled a cart and that have recently given birth, and they take their calves from them. If the cows are willing to be harnessed to a cart for the first time and cooperate together to pull it without balking, without any guidance, and in the correct direction away from their own calves, then, the Philistines reason, God would have to be involved. The lords of the Philistines follow the cart in astonishment as the cows pull the ark directly back to the land of Israel.

For some reason, the ark is never returned to the tabernacle. It remains in the house of Abinadab for 70 years or more until David brings it to Jerusalem when he pitches a new tent

for it (1 Chronicles 15:1; 16:1). Meanwhile, the tabernacle and altar of burnt offering somehow find their way to Gibeon (16:37-40).

## Israel Asks for a King (1 Samuel 7:2-8:22)

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After some 20 years, the Israelites begin to seek God again, and relief from the Philistines. Samuel gathers them together at Mizpah, about two miles north of his home in Ramah. Here Samuel leads them in pouring out water to God, evidently symbolic of pouring out one's heart in repentance (compare Lamentations 2:19; Psalm 62:8). The gathering incites the Philistines to attack, but the Israelites are in a particularly God-oriented frame of mind following Samuel's preaching, and God grants them a great victory.

But as Samuel gets older, Israel's faith begins to waver again. Samuel's sons are not righteous. (It is interesting to note, however, that Samuel's grandson, Joel's son Heman, becomes one of the chief musicians in David's time, see 1 Chronicles 6:32-33; 15:16-19). The people (or at least the elders, verse 4) worry about what will happen to them when Samuel dies, and decide that what they really need is a human king like those ruling and leading the nations around them. God had anticipated this years earlier (see Deuteronomy 17:14-20). But He has Samuel describe to them the problems inherent in having a human king, which they either don't believe or think they can endure.

The problem is that Israel *already had a King*—ever since the time of Moses and the Exodus, around 1445 B.C., when Israel became a true nation. The King at that time and for the next nearly 400 years was the Rock of Israel, the Eternal God Himself—in fact, the preincarnate Word, Yeshua Christ (compare Deuteronomy 32:4; 1 Corinthians 10:4; John 1:1-3, 14; 17:5). Though ruling through His chosen “judges”—from Moses and Joshua all the way to Samuel—God in the person of Christ sat on the throne of Israel (compare Judges 8:22-23). Indeed, Samuel later tells the Israelites that the period of the judges was the time “when the Lord your God was your King” (1 Samuel 12:12). And it is the reason that when the Israelites told Samuel around 1050 bc that they wanted a human king like the nations around them, the Lord told him, “They have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them” (1 Samuel 8:7). So, God then gives them a physical monarch.

It is interesting to note, as we will see in the next few chapters, that unlike other ancient rulers, the king of Israel was not to be an absolute despot. God will have Samuel anoint Saul “commander” (9:16; 10:1) or “captain” (KJV) over His people. This Hebrew term *nagiyd* used here could be rendered in English as viceroy or governor-general—the stand-in for the *real* monarch. In fact, the very act of anointing a ruler in the ancient world implied a vassal relationship. It is later explained that Israel's king “sat on the throne of the Lord,” reigning as king *for* Him (1 Chronicles 29:23; 2 Chronicles 9:6-8).

Also, quite different than in other realms was the fact that the king was not also priest over the national religion. Furthermore, in other countries, kings made law and were thus above it. But in Israel, God's prophet will explain “the rights and duties of the kingship” (1 Samuel 10:25,

NRSV). The ruler was *subject* to the law (see Deuteronomy 17:14-20). Essentially, the Almighty set up a constitutional limited monarchy—in which He would send a prophet as His representative to the king to give him his “report card.”

## Psalm 55

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**Psalm 55** is the last *maskil* of David in a sequence of four. As before, the word *Neginoth* in the superscription, perhaps part of a postscript to Psalm 54, is probably correctly translated in the NKJV as “stringed instruments.”

David cries out to God in this song about many enemies acting against him, though his focus is on one in particular. The psalm addresses the pain of being betrayed by a friend—one David knew well who even worshiped God at the tabernacle alongside him (verses 12-14). Besides being painful on its own, a betraying friend is an enemy with vital knowledge—an adversary particularly adept at causing harm and inflicting pain. David addresses both elements here when he says, “If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were raising himself against me, I could hide from him” (verse 12, NIV).

The friend having “broken his covenant” (verse 20) could mean an informal one of friendship or a formal oath of loyalty to David as king—perhaps part of an oath of office. The man’s loyalty and slick speech, David says, were a pretense—all part of a calculated plan to stab him in the back (verse 21).

David doesn’t name the friend, but many believe the person meant here was his counselor and prime minister Ahithophel, who betrayed him in joining and essentially directing Absalom’s rebellion (see 2 Samuel 15-17). Further, many see a connection between Psalm 55 and Psalm 41:9: “Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.” However, Psalm 41 also concerns an illness that befell David—and there is no record of him being ill when Absalom rebelled (though, as pointed out previously, it is not hard to imagine that his deep depression could have made him physically sick). It could be that Psalm 41 and Psalm 55 concern two different friends at different times—or that both concern the same friend but not Ahithophel. In any case, these two psalms are certainly linked by theme if not by occasion. That being so, we should recall that Psalm 41:9 is quoted in the New Testament as a prophecy of the betrayal of Yeshua by Judas Iscariot. The betrayal in Psalm 55 would seem to prefigure this as well, as many have recognized.

The NKJV translates David’s prayer in verse 15 as: “Let death seize them; let them go down alive into hell”—that is, not just the one treacherous friend but others who were set against him also. In no way does this refer to people descending into a burning hellfire and remaining conscious. Rather, the word translated “hell” here simply means, as the NIV renders it, “grave.” In using the word “alive,” David could conceivably be calling for what happened to Korah and the other rebels against Moses in the wilderness when the earth opened up and swallowed them—whereupon they were instantly killed. Yet it seems likely that he simply means for their deaths to come while they are in full vigor and not after they have lain on their sickbeds in old

age. David later expresses his belief that this will happen when he says near the end of the psalm, “Bloodthirsty and deceitful men shall not live out half their days” (verse 23).

How are we to understand David’s call for death on his enemies, as it may seem very unrighteous in light of Yeshua’ instruction to love our enemies and pray for our persecutors? One book explains regarding such imprecations (callings for curse or judgment on others) in the psalms: “These invocations are not mere outbursts of a vengeful spirit; they are, instead, prayers addressed to God. These earnest pleadings to God ask that he step in and right some matters so grossly distorted that if his help does not come, all hope for justice is lost.

“These hard sayings are legitimate expressions of the longings of Old Testament saints for the vindication that only God’s righteousness can bring. They are not statements of personal vendetta, but utterances of zeal for the kingdom of God and his glory. The attacks that provoked these prayers were not just from personal enemies; rather, they were rightly seen as attacks against God and especially his representatives in the promised line of the Messiah. Thus, David and his office bore the brunt of most of these attacks, and this was tantamount to an attack on God and his kingdom!

“It is frightening to realize that a righteous person may, from time to time, be in the presence of evil and have little or no reaction to it. But in these psalms, we have the reverse of the situation. These prayers express a fierce abhorrence of sin and a desire to see God’s name and cause triumph. Therefore, those whom the saints opposed in these prayers were the fearful embodiments of wickedness.

“Since David was the author of far more imprecatory psalms than anyone else, let it also be noted that David exhibited just the opposite of a vindictive or vengeful spirit in his own life. He was personally assaulted time and time again by people like Shimei, Doeg, Saul and his own son Absalom. Never once did he attempt to affect his own vindication or lift his hand to exercise what many may have regarded as his royal prerogative....

“Finally, these imprecations only repeat in prayer what God had already stated elsewhere would be the fate of those who were impenitent and who were persistently opposing God and his kingdom. In almost every instance, each expression used in one of these prayers of malediction may be found in plain prose statements of what will happen to those sinners who persist in opposing God” (Walter Kaiser Jr., Peter Davids, F.F. Bruce and Manfred Brauch, *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, 1996, comments on Psalm 137:8-9).

David, we should also remember, was a prophet expressing God’s judgment. Furthermore, here in Psalm 55 he even seems to make allowance for repentance when he says that it is such people’s *lack* of repentance that is the basis for their punishment: “God, who is enthroned forever, will hear them [i.e., the evil they say and do] and afflict them...men who never change their ways and have no fear of God” (verse 19, NIV).

Conversely, David has confidence that God will sustain His faithful people. He tells the righteous to “cast your burden on the LORD, and He shall sustain you” (verse 22). The apostle Peter later says the same in 1 Peter 5:6-7: “Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty

hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.”

## Psalm 56

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**Psalm 56** is the first of five Davidic psalms in a row bearing the title *mikhtam* (56-60). As explained in the Bible Reading Program comments on Psalm 16 (another *mikhtam*), the meaning of this word is uncertain. It may mean a writing or inscription-and could perhaps denote something first written as a poem (though we know from the examples here that these were set to music, at least at some point, and some express a desire to play instruments or sing). As noted previously, these *mikhtams* are all written in the face of great danger.

We earlier read Psalm 56 in conjunction with the account of David fleeing from Saul into Philistine territory and being taken into custody by the Philistines at Gath-the event mentioned in the superscription (see the Bible Reading Program comments on 1 Samuel 21:1-12; Psalm 56). This was immediately before David feigned madness to escape from the Philistines, after which he composed Psalm 34 in thanks to God.

David complains that his enemies are many and that they hound him all day (56:2). Having been on the run from Saul, it is likely that David was thinking a great deal about him and his forces and not just the Philistines-though they were certainly included.

David talks through his fears in prayer: “Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You.... In God I have put my trust; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me?” (verses 3-4; compare the same basic refrain in verses 4 and 10-11; see also 118:6). It was fear of Saul that had driven David from Israel and into Philistine territory. So, he was clearly learning some lessons here.

David then once more describes the actions of his enemies (Psalm 56:5-7) before again expressing trust in God to help him. *The Nelson Study Bible* says that “alternating passages of pain and faith are a characteristic of the lament psalms...[and] the poet typically complains about lies, the misuse of language, and deceit” (notes on Psalm 56:3-4 and verse 5).

Thinking about his life on the run and all his suffering, David knows that God is aware and keeps track of it (verse 8). David realizes God is *for* him-on his side (verse 9; compare Romans 8:31). God has been faithful to him in saving and helping him (Psalm 56:13)-and David will be faithful to God (verse 12).

## Mark 3-4:23

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Mark chapter 3 opens with once again an incident of Yeshua knowing the hard hearts of the Scribes and Pharisees and a confrontation concerning man made rules of the Sabbath. Yeshua heals a man with a withered hand. The Scribes and Pharisees plot with the Herodians on how to destroy Him. Yeshua again withdraws but masses of people continued to follow Him

because of the great healings He was doing. The unclean spirits proclaimed Him to be “the Son of Elohim.”

Verses 14 thru 19 we get a list of the twelve disciples and learn that He sent them out with great authority to heal and cast out demons. There was a huge commotion over Yeshua and all He was doing such that even His relatives tried to reign Him in. The Scribes and Pharisees accused Yeshua of casting out demons by Satan and Yeshua warns them of blaspheming against the Set apart Spirit, for which there is no forgiveness.

In chapter 4 we read of the giving of the parable of the seed and the sower. The four types of ground or soil upon which the seed may fall and the outcome. He spoke to them in parables so that those who were not to see or hear were unable. He then proceeds to explain the parable to His taught ones only.