

Deliver Us From Evil

Protection is something everyone wants. Actually, it's something that every religion has promised in some form. From the muti that will protect you in modern South Africa, to the medieval charms and customs to ward off evil spirits in medieval Europe, all sorts of religions have promised protection. Protection from sickness, protection from your enemies, protection from thieves and crime, protection from accident and calamity, protection from death itself.

The insurance industry works on the idea of protection: when something bad happens, at least you have some compensation to ameliorate the damage. The security industry exists to protect you from that damage occurring in the first place. Everyone wants, and indeed, everyone needs some kind of protection.

Life is full of things that can harm you accidentally or intentionally. We live fairly precarious lives, and can be one step away from a car accident, a violent criminal, a sudden heart attack, or a reprisal from an enemy.

So what kind of protection can the people of God expect? Perhaps you have seen the bumper stickers that say that a car is protected by Psalm 91. I'm not sure that the kind of people who steal cars are the kind that are familiar with Psalm 91, but there you are. There is a kind of Christian superstition that uses chants and phrases as verbal amulets to supposedly seal the person off from bad luck or calamity. Is that how protection works for a Christian? Say a verse or print Scripture and stick it on the door? And what kind of protection should a Christian expect? Total safety for all of life? Protection from what others face? In fact, the better question to ask is, what kind of protection do God's people need?

The life of David is a good example of the Bible's theology of protection. God can and does protect His people, but for His own purposes. He does not shield them from all difficulty, all pain, all trouble, nor does He necessarily exempt them from the terrors of living in a fallen world. But God does protect His people for His purposes, and ultimately protect them for all eternity. David's flight from Saul helps us understand how God protects, and does not protect.

By the time we reach 1 Samuel 19, David is a man in need of protection. Quite simply, the most powerful man in Israel wants him dead. Saul has the wealth and power to get a lot of people after David to kill him. David may be in more danger than anyone else in all of Israel. At the same time, David has been anointed by Samuel to be king. God didn't make a mistake in doing so. David will certainly live to see his coronation. In that sense, David cannot be harmed outside the plan of God. A quote attributed to George Whitefield and to the missionary Henry Martyn, and to the missionary John Paton are the words, "I am immortal till my Master's work with me was done." If God is for you, and God has work for you, you are immortal until that work is complete; and when it is, it's hometime. David was set to be the king over God's people, and God's protection was going to be on Him until that task was complete. But as we'll see, David doesn't simply sing Psalm 91 with his eyes closed when Saul is throwing javelins at him. God protects His people using several means.

In Samuel 19 we'll see four attempts on David's life, and four different ways God protected him. These are not the only ways God protects His people, but they are a healthy sample of the majestic way that God shelters and watches over His loved ones.

I. God Protects Through Godly Warnings and Defences

1 Samuel 19:1 Now Saul spoke to Jonathan his son and to all his servants, that they should kill David; 2 but Jonathan, Saul's son, delighted greatly in David. 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.

3 "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."

4 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. 5 "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?"

6 So Saul heeded the voice of Jonathan, and Saul swore, "As the LORD lives, he shall not be killed."

7 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.

Saul is not hiding any longer his desire to have David killed. He tells all his servants and Jonathan to have David killed. But Jonathan was David's best friend. So God uses Jonathan to protect David by getting David to hide until Jonathan has spoken to his father.

He does so, and Jonathan basically challenges his father's rationality. Why would you be against a man who hasn't harmed you? He defeated Goliath, and you cheered! He's a patriot, not a rebel! And Saul, when not in the grip of envy, paranoia or the evil spirit, agrees. He even makes a vow that David will not be killed.

Jonathan fetches David, and in what had to have been rather awkward, David takes up his place in the household again, playing the harp, leading soldiers.

In this case, God used a godly and prudent man to simply warn David, and even to plead for David. Some protection comes through warnings. Mordecai warned Esther what was coming to the Jewish people. Paul's nephew warned him that some people had taken a vow not to eat until they had killed Paul. Jesus even warned the believers in Jerusalem that when they saw a siege developing around the city, they should immediately flee. "See, I have told you beforehand. (Matt. 24:25)

Some protection comes from the Lord using wise and balanced people to warn us to avoid traps, unseen dangers and foolishly vulnerable situations. A prudent *man* foresees evil and hides himself, But the simple pass on and are punished. (Prov. 22:3)

Of course, we live in an era now where everyone is warning us of all kinds of things on the Internet, and if you believe them, you'd never leave your house. That's why you should take the warning as seriously as the person giving it. People of proven judgement don't give warnings frivolously or hysterically, they don't cry-wolf with people's emotions just to get extra hits on their webpage or more subscribers.

But when you ignore the warnings of wisdom, you can't expect to escape harm. Lady wisdom says in Proverbs 1:

25 Because you disdained all my counsel, And would have none of my rebuke, 26 I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your terror comes, 27 When your terror comes like a storm, And your destruction comes like a whirlwind, When distress and anguish come upon you. (Prov. 1:25-27)

The greatest warning of all is the gospel itself. John the Baptist said the gospel was a warning to flee the wrath to come. The gospel is a warning that God commands all men everywhere to repent because "He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained." (Acts 17:31)

Jonathan was a wise and godly friend, and David heeded his warnings. Jonathan's intercessions on David's part also protected him, another reason to befriend the wise and faithful, not the worldly and fickle.

But David was protected a second way.

II. God Protects Through Providential Escapes

8 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. 9 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. 10 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 once again shows his prowess in battle and defeats the Philistines in a way that no doubt makes people sing about him again. And now Saul feels he is back to square one, with the rising popularity of his rival. Saul, as he sits there, we have a replay of a scene from chapter 18. The distressing spirit is upon him, David is playing to soothe him, and Saul has a spear in his hand.

Now Saul missed him once; you can be sure he's going to try not to miss him again. But as he throws the spear, we simply read, David slipped away from Saul's presence. David dodges the bullet and flees.

David no doubt had good reflexes, but the point here, God protected David with a providential escape. The flight of the spear, Saul's aim, David's movement, was all in a split second, but God providentially caused David to escape. Sometimes it goes the other way. 34 Now a *certain* man drew a bow at random, and struck the king of Israel between the joints of his armor. (1 Ki. 22:34)

But God is in charge, down to the flight of the sparrow. 29 "Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. (Matt. 10:29)

The point is, God overrules. He overrules the car missing yours by a split second. He overrules the falling brick missing the child's head. He rules over your missing the train or bus or plane that ended up crashing. He overrules the kitchen knife that missed an artery by a millimeter. He overrules thousands of near-misses in your body that would have been suffocations, aneurysms, heart-attacks, strokes. We all have stories of the near-miss, the brush with death, the something that was "so close". All of this is the providential escape.

These are the moments we know that as much as we flinched or slammed on the brakes or dodged, or reacted, only God prevented a complete tragedy. Who knows how many of these have taken place, and we knew nothing about it? Only eternity will show all the providential escapes from near misses, would-be criminal encounters, health-disasters, accidents, and even satanic attack that as averted by providential escape.

Salvation itself is a providential escape. Jonathan Edwards: "O sinner! consider the fearful danger you are in! It is a great furnace of wrath, a wide and bottomless pit, full of the fire of wrath that you are held over in the hand of that God whose wrath is provoked and incensed as much against you as against many of the damned in hell. You hang by a slender thread, with the flames of Divine wrath flashing about it, and ready every moment to singe it and burn it asunder. . . . You have offended him infinitely more than ever a stubborn rebel did his prince, and yet it is nothing but his hand that holds you from falling into the fire every moment. It is to be ascribed to nothing else that you did not get to hell the last night; that you were suffered to awake again in this world, after you closed your eyes to sleep. And there is no other reason to be given why you have not dropped into hell since you arose in the morning, but that God's hand has held you up. Yea, there is nothing else that is to be given as a reason why you do not this very moment drop down into hell

But David's temporary respite was over, and he knew that he was now target number one on Saul's hit list. So the next way we see David protected is

III. God Protects Through Unsaved Shrewdness

11 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." 12 So Michal let David down through a window. And he went and fled and escaped. 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. 14 So when Saul sent messengers to take David, she said, "He *is* sick." 15 Then Saul sent the messengers *back* to see David, saying, "Bring him up to me in the bed, that I may kill him."

Saul actually sends his hitmen to simply shadow David's house, and to kill him when he steps out his front door. This experience is what caused David to write Psalm 59, where he compares Saul's men to prowling, snarling dogs, looking for prey.

Michal, who was no model of godliness, wants David to be safe. It may be that David's house was built into the city walls, so she uses some kind of rope to let David down from a window where there would have been no men. In the meantime, to deceive the prowling assassins outside, she takes one of her teraphim, her household idols, and puts it in the bed. Apparently it was big enough and presented the shape of a human body under a blanket. And then she used some goats hair, probably close enough in colour to look like a human head from a distance.

So when David does not come out, Saul tells the men to at least knock on the door and see if he's there. When they do so, she lies and tells them David is sick, and they can see a figure in the bed.

That only buys a bit more time, because Saul is angry and desperate enough to tell the men to bring David, bed and all.

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

When Saul asks Michal why she participated in this deceitful escape-ruse, she tells another lie, and claims that David threatened her life. Instead of saying, "Father, repent, stop this evil and stop trying to kill innocent David. I helped him escape from you because it was the right thing to do", she lied to make herself look like a victim and make David look bad. Of course, this won't help David at all; it just means that Saul is going to be even more angry at David for threatening his spoilt daughter.

Like father, like daughter. This is how the unsaved operate: deception, lies, self-protection, more lies.

But the interesting thing is that this is the third way that David's life is saved in this chapter: through the shrewdness of unbelievers.

Remember, not everything the Bible records it endorses. It has plenty of things it includes but disapproves of. Michal's deception was not something God commanded or approved of. But as we've seen, God can make use of what and of whom He does not approve. He made use of Pharaoh, of Balaam, of Judas.

And more than once in Scripture, God uses unbelievers and their schemes to protect believers. He used the scheming Balaam to bless and protect Israel instead of curse her. He used an unsaved king like Cyrus to protect Israel when they were in Babylon. He used the scheming of Roman politicians to get Paul safely from Jerusalem to Rome.

And since David was not sinning by taking Michal's escape route, it was a good thing for him to do. God used it to protect him.

Jesus said, For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light. (Lk. 16:8)

Unbelievers are often more shrewd, more tactical, more street-savvy than believers. They live lives of fraud, trickery and attack, and so they have more of a nose for it before it comes. God sometimes protects His people through the ingenuity, wit, and cleverness of unbelieving armies, police forces, security guards, businessmen and politicians. Christians often sleep under a blanket that God has provided, in His common grace, through the shrewdness and cunning of unbelievers.

Sometimes God protect you through a godly intervention of warning you or defending you. Sometimes God protects you through a providential escape. Sometimes God protects you through the shrewdness and industry of the unsaved who befriend you or serve you. But we see one more form of protection.

IV. God Protects by Miraculous Intervention

18 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. 19 Now it was told Saul, saying, "Take note, David *is* at Naioth in Ramah!"

David flees to the safest place he knows: the presence of the prophet Samuel. Samuel anointed him, Samuel is walking with God, at least David is with the right person. Naioth actually means “dwellings” and was probably a section in Ramah where the “school of the prophets” assembled. In an archaeological dig at Naioth some time ago, the archaeologists found ancient remains of what we would call flats or a complex, houses built back to back, side to side, top to bottom—a mazelike arrangement.

Saul has spies and informers everywhere, as happens when tyrants are in power. So he hears that David is there, so he sends more henchman to collect David.

20 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.

21 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.

But when they get there and see these prophets in a state of ecstatic utterance, the Spirit of God seizes them and they enter into the same ecstatic utterance. Now what happens to those men, we don't know, but perhaps they stay there or flee out of fear, because Saul sends replacement men. It happens again: they are seized by the Spirit, and so Saul sends a third set of replacements. When they are disarmed and incapacitated by the Spirit, Saul himself comes up.

Now you would think by now that Saul would have gotten the message. God is miraculously protecting David by causing Saul's men to lose control of their faculties. Saul can fight David, but he cannot fight God if God is fighting for David.

22 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."

23 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.

24 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?" (1 Sam. 19:1-24)

But Saul presses ahead and the same frenzy comes upon Saul himself. Saul strips off his outer garments, which is more than just an accident. Remember when Samuel left Saul, Saul had held onto Samuel's garments and they tore, and Samuel said this was a symbol of how God had torn the kingdom from Saul. Here Saul, under the complete control of the Spirit strips off the robes that symbolise his kingship. He is prophesying right in front of Samuel, and presumably David, but is not in control of his faculties. If anything could have humbled Saul and been a sign to him that he was fighting the wrong battle, it was this, but he did not repent.

And just at the beginning of his kingship, so now at its twilight, the saying, "Is Saul also among the prophets" is developed. Saul is not a prophet, but involuntarily prophesies, and this becomes something of a proverb in Israel.

Here is more proof that lost sinners can be filled with the Spirit temporarily for God's own purposes. Balaam did so too. The High Priest prophesied about Jesus dying for the people. Judas preached sermons and even performed miracles (Matt. 10:1-8), yet he was not a believer (John 6:67-71; 13:10-11).

But all of this shows that there are times when God protects miraculously. He suspends or goes above normal laws and ways of operating and intervenes in ways that can only be explained by God's power. He keeps Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego alive in a fiery furnace, or Daniel alive in a lion's den. He strikes an attacking army of Assyrians blind. Fire comes down and consumes soldiers attacking Elijah. He opens a jail door for Peter by an angel. He keeps Paul alive after a snake bite. He allows hostile natives to see angels surrounding the missionary's hut.

A miracle is different from providence. Providence is God's active guidance of the normal course of this world for His purposes, including the flight of the arrow, the trajectory of the car, the functioning of the jet engine. But a miracle is when those normal laws are suspended: the bullet doesn't penetrate the body, the fire comes from Heaven, or doesn't burn the body at all.

People throw the word *miracle* around too loosely. They say, "It was a miracle that no one was hurt". Usually, that really means, "It was a remarkable providence that no one got hurt". But, with all that said, God can, and does, for His own purposes intervene in His world with genuine miracles, where survival was simply impossible according to the normal or even unusual circumstances of life. The miraculous is what is impossible normally, but possible with God.

Our salvation is a true miracle: God creating life from death in our hearts, applying Christ's death and resurrection to us. God protects us from the most dangerous thing of all: His own wrath in hell, by applying the miracle of salvation.

Now consider David's life. Saul wants him dead, and if anyone can get David killed, it's Saul. David is in mortal peril and in serious danger. But in the first attempt on his life. God uses the warnings and defence of a godly man, Saul's son, to spare David's life. When Saul tramples that hurdle, God uses His sovereign providence to cause Saul's spear to miss, and David to escape. Second attempt on his life foiled. When Saul pushes past that obvious protection, God uses an ungodly person, Saul's daughter, to protect David through shrewdness and lies: a taste of Saul's own medicine. Third attempt on his life foiled. Finally, Saul send three groups of hitmen, followed by his own presence, only to be stopped in their tracks by a miraculous ecstatic seizure by the Spirit.

It looks like you can't shoot at David and hit. When God is protecting someone, He has so many ways, natural and supernatural, godly works by godly people, shrewd strategies by ungodly people, providential and miraculous to protect His people. Now God is not going to protect David from his wilful sin, or from the consequences of bad parenting, or from the consequences of pride. He is going to protect David so that David can fulfill God's plan for him. But David is immortal until God is done with him.

John Paton, missionary to the New Hebrides islands, was often faced by imminent death by natives with spears and muskets. He writes in his autobiography of one occasion where he and his native friend Abraham were surrounded by raging natives who kept urging each other to strike the first blow.

“My heart rose up to the Lord Jesus; I saw Him watching all the scene. My peace came back to me like a wave from God. I realized that I was immortal till my Master’s work with me was done. The assurance came to me, as if a voice out of Heaven had spoken, that not a musket would be fired to wound us, not a club prevail to strike us, not a spear leave the hand in which it was held vibrating to be thrown, not an arrow leave the bow, or a killing stone the fingers, without the permission of Jesus Christ, whose is all power in Heaven and on Earth. He rules all Nature, animate and inanimate, and restrains even the Savage of the South Seas.” (Autobiography, 207)

Henry Martyn, the missionary to India, wrote “I am immortal until God's work for me to do is done. The Lord reigns.” George Whitefield wrote, “We are immortal until our work on earth is done.” Why did they all say this? Because they understood the truth: God protects His children for His purposes. His children take and use the means He gives: they listen to the warnings, they flee when they have to, they accept protection and help from shrewd people, they dodge flying spears, and they seek safety among wise and godly people. But, they know this: God's people cannot die a moment before God permits it; God's people cannot face a single danger or calamity without His guiding hand. God's protection of His people is so complete, so perfect, so thorough, that it is entirely true for a believer to say, “I am immortal until God's work with us and for us is complete.” And when it is, to die is gain. That's the heart of Hebrews 13:5-6: “For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” 6 So we may boldly say: “The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?” (Heb. 13:5-6)