

The Wilderness of Hatred: A Vignette on David's Enemies

“But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them.” 1 John 2:11

How often do you say the words “I hate _____”? My mother always told me never to use the word hate. Coming from her, it was a warning to guard against the seeds of hostility and bitterness from taking root. 1 John 2:11 describes hate as a form of spiritual blindness to reality, growing out of a lack of fellowship with God. As you read David’s story it quickly becomes apparent that he is familiar with hate. In fact, some of the people closest to him hate him so much they plot his death. This leads him to the wilderness and closer to God while his enemies are caught up in a different kind of wilderness, a separation from God that leads to sin.

His first wife Michal “despised him in her heart” and was filled with contempt while watching David worship with abandon as the ark of the covenant was brought back home. Likely this resentment grew out of the bitterness of the circumstances around their marriage. Starting with her father’s thinly veiled intention to ensure David’s death in his dowry agreement and then fueled by his retaliation a few years into their marriage, when she is punished for lying to her father’s men in order to save David. Saul rips Michal away and forces her to marry another man. Years later, David then demands Michal back as a concubine to strengthen his family and rule over a united Israel. Those traumatic circumstances are fertile ground for hate to grow. Ultimately, her disgust at his act of worship blinded her to the opportunity to praise God and celebrate God’s provision and presence in her city. Perhaps this was a generational curse, passed down by her father’s hatred for David’s anointing. She chose not to break the cycle by focusing on God, instead she succumbed to the wilderness of separation from both husband and God.

As our Lord taught us, we pray - Forgive our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. Matthew 6:12-13

King Saul's hatred was even greater for the young man who soothed him with music, defeated many enemies of Judah, was his son's best friend and eventually his own son in law. Once he fully realized that the Lord was with David and that his daughter Michal loved him, he became more afraid of David and hated him always (1 Sam 18:28-29). This fear combined with his desire for revenge motivated crazed campaigns to kill David, but the true root of his irrational behavior was that David was a mirror for his own lack of faith and continual disobedience to God. This caused a vacuum that became a wilderness of separation from the love of his people and God.

If the world hates you, understand that it hated me before it hated you. John 15:18

Finally, his own son Absolom nursed a resentment toward his half-brother that became an intense hatred for his father. When David learned that Absolom's sister, his daughter, had been raped, he did nothing. His inaction contributed to the wilderness that enveloped Absolom as he lost faith in his father and decided to seek revenge for his sister. He became cold and calculated, killed his half-brother, then calloused, as he planned a conspiracy to de-throne his father by winning the favor of the people and raising an army against him. David again escapes death in the wilderness, and even wanted his treacherous son brought home alive, but when the dust settled, David had lost another son. In his sadness, he almost lost the kingdom. To them, Absolom was an enemy defeated, a traitor regardless of his family ties. This division within David's own family was directly related to the punishment God meted out for David's past sins against Bathsheba and Uriah (2 Sam 12:10). Unfortunately, Absolom was a casualty to the wilderness created by the disobedience of both son and father.

As David entered the actual wilderness to escape from his enemies, he never let a wilderness of distance come between him and God. Even through persecution by his family, he knew that God loved him fully, blessed his anointing and set his steps. David repented for his misdeeds, renewing his deep faith in God's unwavering love. David's last words reflected his complete

confidence in the Lord's provision as he passed the kingdom on to the son that would carry this covenant.

"As for you... know the God of your father, and serve him wholeheartedly and with a willing mind, for the Lord searches every heart and understands the intentions of every thought. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you abandon him, he will reject you forever." 1 Chron 28:9