

King David Part 4: Hebrew Customs

Turn to Luke 15

In the previous teaching, the Hebrew concept of “Agency” was mentioned. Not understanding this Hebrew concept prevents us Gentiles from perceiving further details of truth within the Hebrew bible. What we call the Old Testament was originally recorded by Hebrew men of God to a Hebrew audience. Customs and concepts common to the Hebrew culture are often referred to without explanation. These references are not explained because the original audience had a full understanding of what was being communicated.

So it is in the next section we will cover in the life of David. In order to have some greater understanding of the depth of the actions which are recorded in 1 Samuel, we need to learn some background information.

Most of us are familiar with the story of what is commonly called the “prodigal son”. Others have called it the story of the “forgiving father”. The verses we are about to read is at the point in the story where the father is welcoming his son back to his home. They are on the road, just outside of the village. The father, who was watching, saw his son on the road, returning home after he had been gone for so long. So, his father *ran* to greet his son before he entered the village.

Luke 15:20

20 And he (*the son*) arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.

21 And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

22 But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet.

23 And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate.

24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate.

Now, to those of us Gentiles who have been raised and taught in the Western culture, customs and religious traditions, this all seems rather plain and straightforward. Since we do not have an understanding of the Hebrew culture, we miss most of the truth that is contained in this record. I am going to read to you from a book regarding this section of scripture. It was written by a man who has spent years living and studying among the villagers of the middle-east. Thus he has gained an understanding of the Hebrew culture and thinking behind the customs.

The book is entitled “The Cross & the Prodigal” by Kenneth E. Bailey. It can be obtained on-line at Amazon.com. I will read starting on page 70.

The servants are there on the road with the father. The father turns to them and orders them to dress the boy as a son. He doesn't say to the boy, “Go, clean up, shave, and get some decent clothes on.” Rather he orders the servants to bring the best robe and dress him. They are to honor him as a son of the house.

The “best robe” is naturally the father's finest robe. In the story of Esther, Haman is asked what he thinks the king should do for the man the king wishes to honor. His first suggestion is to have him

King David Part 4: Hebrew Customs

dressed in royal robes the king has worn (Esther 6:1-9). The prodigal will attend the banquet attired in his father's most elegant robe. The guests that night will recognize the robe and treat him in a respectful manner because of the clothes he is wearing. They will understand that he has been fully restored to sonship.

The ring is the signet ring of the house. Joseph was also given robes and a ring by Pharaoh (Genesis 41:41-42)...

To have shoes on his feet may also be a symbol of his new rank. Slaves go barefoot. Sons wear shoes.

The prodigal's community there in the village is made up of a number of different groups. He will have relations with the family, the family servants and workers, the villagers, and the village elders. The father very carefully reestablishes the boy's broken relationships with each group in turn.

Through self-emptying love he restores the prodigal to the family. He orders the servants to "dress him". Thus the servants know they must treat him with respect as a master. The initial welcome was public. Thus the son is restored to the village at large. At the banquet the prodigal wears his father's most expensive robe. The village elders will all thereby accept him out of loyalty to the father.

End of quote.

By the clothing given to the son to wear, the father has expressed, publicly to all, his acceptance, his love, his honor and the nature of the intimate relationship between him and his son. It is a very public expression and commitment.

Now do you understand the importance of clothing to the Hebrews? Although our clothing is important to us in our culture, it just does not have the same weight of importance as it did to the Hebrews. However, even in our culture, only those closest to us have any physical access to our clothing and the places where it is kept.

Turn to Luke 24

In case you may think that this custom is only an interesting bit of esoteric biblical minutia that has no impact on us as Christian believers, let's take what we have learned about this Hebrew custom and make it personal.

Luke 24:49

49 And behold, I (*Jesus Christ*) am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."

Jesus Christ and the apostles he was instructing, all knew the significance of being clothed with the garments of someone with a higher rank. They had all heard the parable of the "forgiving father". This instruction from Jesus must have just thrilled them with unspeakable excitement. The living God was going to clothe them, publicly declaring his intimate relationship, His love, and His acceptance of the apostles. They were to stay in Jerusalem until this great public honor had come to pass. They were to be clothed by the living God, with His power from on high.

This is the same thing that is to happen to any believer who becomes born again, or more accurately, born from above. This is the significance of speaking in tongues. It is a public declaration of your being clothed, by God, with power from on high. It is a public demonstration of His intimate relationship, His

King David Part 4: Hebrew Customs

love and His acceptance of YOU. It is the living God, publicly honoring YOU, his new son who is born from above.

The significance of this custom in scripture did not end with the ascension of Jesus Christ. The Hebrew customs and the thinking behind them were not dropped by the apostles when the epistles of the New Testament were written. The understanding of the Hebrew customs and thinking are just important today as it was when the scriptures were written.

Turn to 1 Samuel 17

Now we have established a little bit of background of the custom regarding clothing. Now we can read the record of David in 1 Samuel 17 and 18 with a little more understanding than before.

1 Samuel 17:38

38 Then Saul clothed David with his armor. He put a helmet of bronze on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail,

39 and David strapped his sword over his armor. And he tried in vain to go, for he had not tested them. Then David said to Saul, "I cannot go with these, for I have not tested them." So David put them off.

Saul clothing David was done before all of Saul's servants. If this were just a matter of arming David, there were other choices that could have been made. The king could have had someone else's armor given to David. No, the king honored David before all his servants, authorizing him to go and fight for the king and for the army.

1 Samuel 17:55

55 As soon as Saul saw David go out against the Philistine, he said to Abner, the commander of the army, "Abner, whose son is this youth?" And Abner said, "As your soul lives, O king, I do not know." **56** And the king said, "Inquire whose son the boy is."

57 And as soon as David returned from the striking down of the Philistine, Abner took him, and brought him before Saul with the head of the Philistine in his hand.

58 And Saul said to him, "Whose son are you, young man?" And David answered, "I am the son of your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite."

Again, David is before the king and all his servants. He has returned with the head of the Philistine, Goliath, still in his hand.

1 Samuel 18:1

1 As soon as he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.

2 And Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house.

3 Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul.

4 And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt.

King David Part 4: Hebrew Customs

If you read the previous chapters in 1 Samuel, you would know that Jonathan is Saul's eldest son. Jonathan is Saul's heir, and as heir he is the crown prince and Saul's natural agent.

Jonathan was there when David was speaking with the king, as was Abner, the commander of the army and the other servants of Saul.

Jonathan heaped honors upon David by giving him his royal clothing and armor. This showed all those in the royal court that David was an honored, intimate, trusted friend of the crown prince and his family. No one was to disrespect or insult David. This act gave him complete access to the ruling family and the inner circle of the leadership of Israel and everyone in the court knew it.

The clothes that Jonathan gave David were indicative of the covenant they made together. As the narrative of David's life continues, we learn that David and Jonathan became brothers that day. Again, this is another Hebrew custom that has great significance and thought behind it. We do not really have anything equivalent to this in our Gentile, Western culture.

Beginning at this point in 1 Samuel, Saul, the king that God had rejected, becomes a villain. I had often wondered why God chose Saul in the first place, if he was such an evil man. However, if you study the life of Jonathan, his son, you will begin to perceive and appreciate the sterling qualities that Saul had.

In the son, you can see the greatness of his father.

Later, after the death of Saul, David confirms the excellent qualities of Saul and Jonathan as he laments their deaths by revelation.

It should also be noted here, that David never ever held a grudge against Saul, despite all the evil that Saul tried to do to David. David never lost sight of his identity, God's anointed king of Israel. He never lost sight of who Saul and Jonathan were, either. Throughout all this time, David walked by the spirit, he walked with the Living God. Try to keep this in mind as we go further in the narrative of David's life.

1 Samuel 18:5

5 And David went out and was successful wherever Saul sent him, so that Saul set him over the men of war. And this was good in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of Saul's servants.

This is a general summary statement. David exercised leadership responsibilities for Saul. Saul even set him over a portion of the army. Here it appears that he is over the entire army; but then, Abner would be out of a job. No, as we go further, we will learn more details about his assignment. David, this young teenager, was successful wherever he went, whatever he did.

The entire leadership of Israel, the elders and the royal court were in agreement that Saul's decision in regards to David was very good.

1 Samuel 18:6

6 As they were coming home, when David returned from striking down the Philistine, the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with songs of joy, and with musical instruments.

Now verse 6 returns to the narrative; David, Saul and the army are all returning to Jerusalem after David's prophecies came to pass. He killed Goliath and gave the army of the philistines up to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the field. All the spirit realm and the world knew that the living God is

King David Part 4: Hebrew Customs

at work in Israel.

The women came out to greet the victors with songs and music. Imagine the relief of these women. If the army of Israel had lost the battle, there would be nothing to stop the army of the philistines from ravaging the land, the towns and the people in them. So, there was cause for great joy!

1 Samuel 18:7

7 And the women sang to one another as they celebrated,
“Saul has struck down his thousands,
and David his ten thousands.”

How innocent, respectful, and joyful is this? Saul should have been thankful to be included in the song of joy and praise.

1 Samuel 18:8

8 And Saul was very angry, and this saying displeased him. He said, “They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed thousands, and what more can he have but the kingdom?”

9 And Saul eyed David from that day on.

10 The next day a harmful spirit from God rushed upon Saul, and he raved within his house while David was playing the lyre, as he did day by day. Saul had his spear in his hand.

Saul knows that he has lost the kingdom, but he is doing his best to hang on to it. Now he sees that David, this young teenager, could actually threaten his rulership.

Again, remember that this is a Hebrew bible, written about, and to, a Hebrew audience. In part 2 of this series, I taught you about the Hebrew “idiom of permission” and some reasons for its existence. The idiom of permission must be understood if verse 10 is to be understood. God allowed the spiritual and natural laws to continue to function as they were designed to function. Saul had walked away from God's protection and was experiencing the consequences.

So, David was called in to get rid of the evil spirit by playing on the lyre. This had consistently worked before. But today, Saul was armed with a spear.

1 Samuel 18:11

11 And Saul hurled the spear, for he thought, “I will pin David to the wall.” But David evaded him twice.

12 Saul was afraid of David because the Lord was with him but had departed from Saul.

Saul tried to murder David, not once but twice. Both times David evaded him and got away. It says that Saul was afraid of David, but it does not say that David was afraid of Saul. Nevertheless, David stayed alert and was saved from harm. He did not act foolishly.

1 Samuel 18:13

13 So Saul removed him from his presence and made him a commander of a thousand. And he went out and came in before the people. *(these are the details to the summary in verse 5)*

14 And David had success in all his undertakings, for the Lord was with him.

15 And when Saul saw that the had great success, he stood in fearful awe of him.

King David Part 4: Hebrew Customs

1 Samuel 18:16

16 But all Israel and Judah loved David, for he went out and came in before them.

When it says that "...he went out and came in before them..." it means that he exercised leadership, he was one of the leaders of the army. As such his activities and conduct were in the open for all to observe.

Remember that verse 5 is a summary verse, then verses 6 through 13 give the details of what was just summarized.

Now there is some other business to take care of. Remember, what should happen to the man who would kill the philistine? The king would enrich him, and give him his daughter for a wife, and make his father free in Israel. These things have not been mentioned yet.

In the rest of chapter 18, Saul promises David his eldest daughter would be his wife, but then gives her to another man. Then he agrees to give his younger daughter to him for wife, but only if he kills 100 of the enemy in hopes that the enemy would kill David. David kills 200 of the enemy. So Saul lets him have Michal his daughter for a wife. Now David is the kings son-in-law, but, because of his successes in battle, Saul becomes his enemy continually.

In Chapter 19, Saul orders his servants to kill David, but Jonathan intervenes. Saul swears to Jonathan that David will not be killed. Let's continue reading in

1 Samuel 19:8

8 And there was war again. And David went out and fought with the Philistines and struck them with a great blow, so that they fled before him. **9** Then a harmful spirit from the Lord came upon Saul, as he sat in his house with his spear in his hand. And David was playing the lyre. **10** And Saul sought to pin David to the wall with the spear, but he eluded Saul, so that he struck the spear into the wall. And David fled and escaped that night.

11 Saul sent messengers to David's house to watch him, that he might kill him in the morning. But Michal, David's wife, told him, "If you do not escape with your life tonight, tomorrow you will be killed." **12** So Michal let David down through the window, and he fled away and escaped. **13** Michal took an image and laid it on the bed and put a pillow of goats' hair at its head and covered it with the clothes. **14** And when Saul sent messengers to take David, she said, "He is sick." **15** Then Saul sent the messengers to see David, saying, "Bring him up to me in the bed, that I may kill him." **16** And when the messengers came in, behold, the image was in the bed, with the pillow of goats' hair at its head. **17** Saul said to Michal, "Why have you deceived me thus and let my enemy go, so that he has escaped?" And Michal answered Saul, "He said to me, 'Let me go. Why should I kill you?'"

David did nothing but good to Saul and for the believers. He walked with God, and obeyed him in all that he did. David had not done anything wrong but suffered as an evil-doer and as a criminal. Why? Because there were evil spirits involved. Saul was afflicted with lying, envy, iniquity and murder spirits to name a few. I repeat, David had done nothing wrong – rather he had done wonderful things in the name of the Lord.

While he stayed, he was subject to four direct murder attempts and at least one indirect murder attempt. The marriage to Saul's daughter Michal, was permitted by Saul because he was counting on her to be

King David Part 4: Hebrew Customs

more loyal to Saul than to David. Saul wanted her to be a snare, a trap for David. But the plan did not succeed.

Finally, after five murder attempts on David, he left, he escaped. Sometimes you stay and fight and sometimes you leave. There is no set rule except for “walk by the spirit”. You apply scriptures and principles with the wisdom you obtain as you walk by the spirit. That is how the unique details of each specific situation and challenge is handled. That is how David handled these details – he walked by the spirit. That is how he endured, he walked by the spirit.

Turn to Psalms 59

By revelation, David recorded a prayer he prayed at this time of trouble. By reading the prayers of David and others recorded in Psalms, I have learned how and what is available to pray for when I am confronted with unreasonable challenges. Of course this is no substitute for praying perfectly by speaking in tongues. It is instructive for praying with the understanding.

As we read this prayer, think about the content – what David is saying, not so much how he is saying it. Imagine your own reaction if such things were included in a prayer in the assembly of believers in your area. Think about the reaction of others. I have really never heard anything like this uttered in an assembly.

This prayer is a lonely prayer. There is God, David and their enemies (*plural*). Even at this young age, David is familiar with loneliness. He was familiar with having to stand alone, without any other believers to stand with him or to assist him.

Psalms 59:1

1 Deliver me from my enemies (*plural*), O my God; protect me from those who rise up against me;

2 deliver me from those who work evil, and save me from bloodthirsty men (*plural*).

3 For behold, they (*plural*) lie in wait for my life; fierce men (*plural*) stir up strife against me. For no transgression or sin of mine, O Lord,

4 for no fault of mine, they (*plural*) run and make ready. Awake, come to meet me, and see!

David is praying for deliverance for himself from his enemies (*plural*); and he is very descriptive of these people. He is speaking about others who are supposed to be believers.

He is holding on to his spiritual integrity. He KNOWS he has done nothing wrong at all. He is not examining himself to find out what he has done wrong to cause all this trouble to happen. It is all an unjustified spiritual attack on his life! Although the cause of the persecution is spiritual, the threat and the trouble is carried out and manifested in the physical realm.

David KNOWS who he is. He is on talking terms with God. He says “Awake, come to meet me, and see!”

King David Part 4: Hebrew Customs

Psalms 59:5

5 You, Lord God of hosts, are God of Israel. Rouse yourself to punish all the nations; spare none of those who treacherously plot evil. Selah

6 Each evening they come back, howling like dogs and prowling about the city.

7 There they are, bellowing with their mouths with words in their lips—for “Who,” ~~they think~~, “will hear us?” (*David sees **them** and points them out to God*)

8 But you, O Lord, laugh at them; you hold all the nations in derision.

These enemies who are plotting and moving against David are counted as unbelievers, those of the nations. “Howling like dogs”, they are likened to the lowest, despised, filthy animal in the Hebrew culture.

These are godless men, saying that “who will hear us?” Of course God hears them and David hears them. From this point in the psalm, the enemies referred to are unbelievers or likened to unbelievers of other nations.

In response to these filthy, howling dogs, David prays the following.

Psalms 59:9

9 O my Strength, I will watch for you, for you, O God, are my fortress.

10 My God in his steadfast love will meet me; God will let me look in triumph on my enemies. (*At this point, David knows he has been delivered*)

11 Kill them not lest my people forget; make them ~~tetter~~ (*wander*) by your power and bring them down, O Lord, our shield!

(the Revised English Bible says “Will you not kill them (idiom of permission), lest my people be tempted to forget? Scatter them by your might and bring them to ruin, Lord, my shield.”; this seems to agree well with with verse 13)

Before becoming too alarmed about this, “*Will you not kill them...*”, remember who David is. He is the anointed King of Israel, and as such, he is the ultimate judge in the nation. It is his calling and job to pronounce such judgments. So, it's only fitting that he should have such inspiration to know who is guilty and who deserves what sentence. That is important to know; you and I would not necessarily be inspired to include such things in our prayers.

Psalms 59:12

12 For the sin of their mouths, the words of their lips, let them be trapped in their pride. For the cursing and lies that they utter,

13 consume them in wrath; consume them till they are no more, that they may know that God rules over Jacob to the ends of the earth. Selah

Verse 13 is very similar to what David prophesied to the philistine in 1 Samuel 17:46

“...that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel...”

David is passionately concerned that God is glorified and that the people know the reality of His (God's) presence and rulership in the kingdom of God.

King David Part 4: Hebrew Customs

Psalms 59:14

14 Each evening they come back, howling like dogs and prowling about the city.

15 They wander about for food and growl if they do not get their fill. *(Just as they are treating David, these dogs are harassing and feeding off the believers living in the city.)*

In response, David prays the following:

Psalms 59:16

16 But I will *(future)* sing of your strength; I will *(future)* sing aloud of your steadfast love **in the morning**. *(Again, he knows he has been delivered. His prayer has been answered)* For you have been *(past tense)* to me a fortress and a refuge in the day of my distress *(past tense)*. *He speaks of the singing aloud the next morning, because of the deliverance that God has worked tonight.*

17 O my Strength, I will *(future)* sing praises to you, for you, O God, are *(present)* my fortress, the God who shows me steadfast love *(present)*.

At the time he prayed, he may not have known that his prayer would be set to music and recorded in scripture. But it was an inspired prayer; what he prayed for was spiritually inspired and it was recorded by revelation as well.

David did not hold back on pouring his heart out to his Heavenly Father. He did it more eloquently than most of us would do, but he got the job done. He remembered his Heavenly Father and the protection, the strength, the steadfast love that He provides.

David is clearly acquainted with his Heavenly Father, he knows he is loved and protected by his Father. He knows he has done nothing wrong. He knows who his enemies are, what they are doing wrong and what should happen to them. These are critical attributes of someone who knows how to endure.

Although the evil doers are portrayed as people, then dogs, the attributes and workings of the evil spirits in them are described. He perceives and identifies the spirit of God working and the spirits of the devil working. David looked on the challenges and persecution spiritually. He prayed for God's solution to come to pass in this situation. David is concerned about God continuing to be glorified and praised, so he prays about that as well.

As you can understand, there is much that we can learn from David's prayer life and how he endured. There is much we need to uncover about the Hebrew customs and the thought behind those customs. As always, much work remains to be done.

Note: There is a teaching on my website which handles inspired prayer. It is in the archive, under Godly Abundance and Prosperity. The teaching is: *The Promises of God*