

12.31.18 – The Nakedness of King Saul

To get started I would like to give a little background on the story. David was getting too much recognition in Saul's administration and Saul was looking for who Samuel predicted would replace him as king. It seems that whenever someone starts to do an outstanding job, his leader becomes jealous and looks for ways to slow him or stop him. At this point Saul's attempts to slow David had not worked so he plotted to kill David. David fled to Samuel at Naioth. Saul had his servants looking for him and they reported that he was in Naioth. Saul sent messengers to Naioth to bring David to him. But God had different plans. The messengers were overcome by the Holy Spirit and began prophesying with the prophets. Unlike King Ahaziah, (II Kings 1:1-16) who could not go himself and sent 100 men to fire from heaven, Saul went himself. On the trip Saul was overcome by the Holy Spirit and prophesied with the prophets before Samuel.

Now that we've established some background of the account, let's look at scripture:

The verse that we will focus on is **1Samuel 19:24 - And he stripped off his clothes also, and prophesied before Samuel in like manner, and lay down naked all that day and all that night. Wherefore they say, Is Saul also among the prophets?**

Translating is not my strongest skill. I had 2 years of Latin and 2 years of Spanish in high school and nearly flunked the second year of both. Copying translations is no help at test time. I do know that sometimes the meaning is lost in translation, so the translators had to be very exact when choosing the words to use. I am using the Tools feature on Blue Letter Bible (US) for my translation statements.

Note that Saul took his clothes off. He was the supreme human power at the event so no human had the authority to strip him of his clothes. God did not make his clothing fall off or disappear. Usually when nakedness is a shame in the Bible someone else removes your clothing as in being defeated in battle and going into captivity naked.

I think we can safely say that God / The Holy Spirit put it in his heart to remove his clothing, because as insecure as Saul was and as concerned about appearances as he was, he certainly didn't want to look just like everyone else. For evidence of Saul's concern about his appearance before the people see **1 Samuel 15:30a - Then he said, I have sinned: yet honour me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel...**

You see, nakedness is the great equalizer...it's hard to tell who's an attorney, or doctor (or King) vs who is a factory worker, field worker or fisherman....one of the many benefits of naturism, by the way! King Saul was always concerned about his image and being naked sure does make it hard to tell who is king or prophet or shepherd. God may have used this to show Saul that he was only a man before God like all the others at the event.

The Hebrew word for **And he stripped off** is used 43 times and is usually translated "strip". The other translations do not fit this verse. Notice how much needs to be added to make sense out of the passage. I assume the gender and other feathers of the word justified the added words. Imagine the discussion about how to phrase each verse among the translators.

The phrase **in like manner, and lay down** is one Hebrew word that is used 434 times and is usually translated "fall" or "fall down" (343x) and lay only 3x. The point is there is much represented by tense and implication that can not be translated word for word from Hebrew to English.

I keep trying to visualize this scene. I imagine that there was a large crowd of Israelites there to hear the prophets speak. We know that a large contingent of naked prophets were there, were the people naked as well? Did the prophets take turns preaching while Samuel looked on or were they laying on the ground while Samuel taught the scriptures or were there small groups and a prophet for each group. Either way we know that Samuel must have been naked, Saul was naked, the rest of the prophets were naked...does anyone really believe that this was all in sin knowing all the while that the Holy Spirit is speaking through them?

The obvious focus for us in this verse is the word **naked**. This is a “word for word”, exact translation. The Hebrew word used here is used 16x and is translated “naked” (meaning without any clothes) all 16 times. The first time is in **Gen 2:25 - And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.** The next time is in **Job 1:21 - And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.** and again in **Ecclesiastes 5:15 - As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand.** Notice that in none of these cases were they “almost” naked or “nearly” naked, you don’t come out of your mother’s womb “almost naked”. Each time the word “naked” is used in these verses it is the same Hebrew word used in **1 Samuel 19:24**. So, if we stick to the same definition then Saul and the prophets weren’t “almost naked” either.

Since God was directly involved in the nakedness, to say nakedness is a sin is to say God caused Saul to go into sin. Not something you want to say about an all-powerful living God. Since the people asked, “Is Saul with the prophets?” We may properly assume that nakedness was common among the prophets. Since Samuel was greatly used of God and He regularly spoke to

him directly. If nakedness was a sin can we not assume that He would have told Samuel to correct the matter.

I believe that you could make a case that nakedness must have been common due to the fact that there was no surprise from the people that the prophets were naked. The only surprise in the entire account was the question of whether or not King Saul was a prophet. I guess that seemed out of character for the grumpy King who was obsessed with killing David to be all of the sudden prophesying, but under the control of the Holy Spirit you do what God wants you to do, not what you want to do.

Understand fully that Saul's prophesying was out of character, but when the Spirit took over, Saul took his clothes off and proclaimed God's Word like the rest of the prophets. So, King Saul's nakedness was a direct result of Holy Spirit fullness! Please let that sink in for a moment...King Saul, Samuel, the prophets and probably even the servants who were sent to fetch David...all under the influence of the Holy Spirit right now and all naked as the day they were born.

The only logical conclusions I can draw are:

1. Nakedness cannot be sin as it was done under the direction of the Holy Spirit
2. Nakedness was commonplace or the people would have been shocked at the nakedness not at Saul's prophesying
3. Naked actually meant naked (not almost naked) as it was compared to the condition you were in at your birth