

Samuel to King David **David Spares Saul Again 1st Samuel 26**

*[Please note : sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
English Standard Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Hello and welcome to Truth for Today, where we are continuing with the story of David, the future king of Israel. The series is entitled Samuel to King David and today's talk, which is called "David Spares Saul Again", is based upon 1 Samuel chapter 26. The previous four talks, in this series, have dealt with David while he was hiding from Saul, who was seeking to kill him.

In chapter 22 we learned how David, while hiding in the cave Adullam, attracted many of the men who were disenchanted with Saul's rule. This group formed the nucleus of his future army. Many of the priests supported David, but were killed for so doing. Chapter twenty-three describes how David's irregular army fought against a stronger force of Philistines, at Keilah, utterly defeating them in the ensuing battle. Unfortunately, the inhabitants of Keilah were not grateful, even to point of being eager to betray David and his men into the hands of Saul. Under the protection of the Lord, David escaped to hide in the mountains of the wilderness of Ziph. Please remember that location, for we shall revisit the area later in this talk. After much planning and searching, David was saved from the clutches of Saul by a Philistine incursion into his, Saul's, kingdom, which meant that he had to leave searching for David in order to put down the invasion. This twenty-third chapter is also notable, for it records the sad occasion when Jonathan and David met for the last time.

Chapter twenty-four finds David and his men in the wilderness of En Gedi, where Saul is still seeking diligently to capture the young warrior, who was provided with an opportunity to kill Saul. You probably noticed, from the title of today's talk, that David had already had an opportunity to take his revenge upon the anointed king. This was that occasion. Saul visited a cave where David was hiding, which gave him, David, an opportunity to quietly cut a piece off Saul's robe, thus proving he had the possibility of killing the king. When this action was made known, Saul promised friendship and not enmity to David.

Before we take up the second opportunity that David had to kill the king, we have the delightful story, in chapter twenty-five, of the gracious Abigail, who was able to provision David's army after her husband had refused such a service. Shortly afterwards Nabal, the husband of Abigail, died, leaving his widow free to become a wife of David. Another important event, in this chapter, is the death of Samuel, the prophet and judge of Israel, who is mentioned in the list of heroes, in Hebrews chapter eleven.

We have now arrived at chapter twenty-six, which is the basis of our talk today. For ease of today's study, I have divided the chapter into five sections as follows:

- Section 1: The Duplicity of the Ziphites. (vv 1-4).
- Section 2: David Overrides Abishai (vv 5-12).
- Section 3: David Rebukes Abner: (vv13-16).

Section 4: David Addresses Saul (vv 17-20).
Section 5: Saul Answers David (vv 21-25).

Section 1: The Duplicity of the Ziphites (vv 1-4)

Let us listen to the words of Scripture as this deception unfolds. All Scripture today will be from the English Standard Version:

“Then the Ziphites came to Saul at Gibeah, saying, ‘Is not David hiding himself on the hill of Hachilah, which is on the east of Jeshimon?’ So Saul arose and went down to the wilderness of Ziph with three thousand chosen men of Israel to seek David in the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul encamped on the hill of Hachilah, which is beside the road on the east of Jeshimon. But David remained in the wilderness. When he saw that Saul came after him into the wilderness, David sent out spies and learned that Saul had come” (1 Samuel 26 vv1-4).

One of the difficulties that some commentators have with this chapter, is its similarities with portions of chapters 23 & 24, where there is a similar account of David saving Saul’s life. For example, in both accounts the Ziphites are the villains who betray David’s hiding place. In both accounts Saul comes from Gibeah with an army of 3,000 men, David also takes something personal of Saul’s to prove he had opportunity to kill the king and the prolonged conversation between David and Saul that details the temporary repentance of Saul. A careful reading of both chapters will show that the similarities are outweighed by the differences, the main one being that David’s incursion, in chapter 26, was a night raid, whereas in chapters 23 & 24 it was mid-day when he, David, came across the sleeping Saul, in a cave not in the camp. There are other differences, but sufficient to state at this point that evangelical commentators tend to accept that the two accounts describe different events. Certainly, the team at Truth for Today would take that view.

We should take note that on both occasions the Ziphites displayed their enmity by betraying David’s hiding place. Did they hope to ingratiate themselves with Saul, or was their action symptomatic of their loyalty to the anointed king? Perhaps a word regarding Saul’s words of repentance, in chapter 24 verses 16 to 22, would be opportune. They were obviously not sincere, for though he might have promised to accept that David would be king one day, yet here, in chapter 26, is Saul with 3,000 men again seeking to end David’s life. Biblical repentance does not mean only saying sorry for past misdemeanours, but rather a change of attitude and action. Saul might have been sorry on the previous occasion, when David demonstrated that he could have taken Saul’s life, even when he was being hunted. Now, a second time he is searching the wilderness to capture and kill David. His animosity against David never ended.

David was always aware that he was being hunted. It was recorded previously in the sacred text that:

“Saul sought him every day, but God did not give him into his hand” (1 Samuel 23:14).

Even then, David was eager for the Lord to be the judge between them. Glances at a psalm, written by David at this time, illustrate his complete trust in God.

“Behold, God is my helper; the Lord is the upholder of my life” (Psalm 54:4).

Section 2: David Overrules Abishai (verses 5-12)

Our chapter reveals that David was a vigilant fugitive, for, as we have read, David sent out spies to ascertain the precise location of Saul's camp. This means that the scene of action is now centred on that camp.

“Then David rose and came to the place where Saul had encamped. And David saw the place where Saul lay, with Abner the son of Ner, the commander of his army. Saul was lying within the encampment, while the army was encamped round him” (1 Samuel 26:5).

As soon as David received the spies' report, he immediately acted upon it by drawing near to Saul's camp, in order to see for himself the disposition of Saul's troops. Imagine his amazement when he witnessed the whole army that surrounded the king, deep in slumber. This seems to be the spur that sent David into the camp, especially as Abner, the captain of the king's host, was also fast asleep. Later in the account, David admonishes Abner for being asleep when he should have been guarding the king. Are we vigilant for the Lord's interests and vigilant in His service? Ultimately, Abner had the very responsible task of ensuring the king's safety and survival. Sleeping on duty was a treasonable crime.

David now appeals for one of his companions to enter the camp with him, even to the very centre, where Saul lay sleeping. This entailed great courage and bravery, meaning it was no light or easy foray. Abishai was the first to consent to accompany David, while his other companion, Ahimelech, remains silent. Never again is this man mentioned in the sacred record. Perhaps he was one who, after counting the cost of discipleship, found the price too high. The Lord Jesus had something to say about this in Luke 14:33:

“So therefore, anyone of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple” (verse 33).

The U.K. does not levy much opposition against the followers of the Lord Jesus, unlike countries such as North Korea, where long years of harsh imprisonment can be awarded to readers of the Bible.

Confident that the whole camp was locked in slumber, David and Abishai moved silently to the centre, where Saul lay alongside of Abner. It was well for Saul that David was the decision maker, for Abishai pleaded with David to let him kill Saul, while he lay sleeping:

“Then said Abishai to David, ‘God has given your enemy into your hand this day. Now please let me pin him to the earth with one stroke of the spear, and I will not strike him twice.’ But David said to Abishai, ‘Do not destroy him, for who can put out his hand against the LORD's anointed and be guiltless?’ And David said, ‘As the LORD lives, the LORD will strike him, or his day will come to die, or he will go down into battle and perish’” (1 Samuel 26:8-10).

From this excerpt, we can see how we arrived at the title of today's talk. Without David's faith in God being in control and in God's timetable, Saul would have been killed, then and there, without the input of the Philistines. (see 1 Samuel 21)

One important lesson we can learn from this incident is that circumstances do not always encompass the will of God. When Jonah went to Joppa, he found a ship ready to sail to Tarshish. He could have persuaded himself that it was God's will as the ship was ready to depart. In his heart, Jonah knew that fleeing to Tarshish was not in the purposes of God. David had a deeper

knowledge of God than Abishai, understanding that he would be crowned king, in God's time not Abishai's.

There are other actions and words of David that are significant. From the account so far, we see that David was keenly aware that Saul was still God's anointed king. There was a sacred bond between Saul and God that David would be in grave error if he sought to break that link. He knew he would be king one day, but it was not for him to hurry that day along. He was content to rest in the assurance that God was in control of his destiny.

Despite saving Saul's life, David had the desire to demonstrate to Saul that he had been in close proximity to the sleeping king, thus he orders Abishai to take Saul's spear and his water jar, as proof they had been close enough to take his life. Abishai did as he was told, then the two of them slipped silently away.

Section 3: David Admonishes Abner (verses 13-16)

For the next part of the incident we need to read 1 Samuel 26 vv 14-16.

“And David called to the army, and to Abner the son of Ner, saying, ‘Will you not answer, Abner?’ Then Abner answered, ‘Who are you who calls to the king?’ And David said to Abner, ‘Are you not a man? Who is like you in Israel? Why then have you not kept watch over your lord the king? For one of the people came in to destroy the king your lord. This thing that you have done is not good. As the LORD lives, you deserve to die, because you have not kept watch over your lord, the LORD's anointed. And now see where the king's spear is and the jar of water that was at his head.’”

In taking the king's spear David stole a symbol of Saul's authority and his role as commander of the Israelite army. That spear seems to have been a constant artefact in the hands of Saul. It was with him at the gathering of the elders of Benjamin, when Saul was under a tamarisk tree (1 Samuel 22:6); it was near at hand when he flung it at David (1 Samuel 18:10/11); and he was wielding it in the battle on Mount Gilboa (2 Samuel 1:6). This same spear was inches away from Saul's pillow and so was within easy reach for Abishai to thrust it into Saul's body. How bizarre that Saul's spear was now available to kill him while he slept. There was no way that Abner, the king's bodyguard, could have prevented the assassination of Saul by means of the king's spear. David and Abishai had quietly travelled away from the sleeping camp, until they were afar off. Was this because David did not trust Saul, so he put a great distance between them? Now Saul could not surreptitiously send soldiers to kill him. Though the comments of the exiled David when he shouted across the divide seem tinged with sarcasm, they are also seemingly fringed with anger, that Abner was so careless and guilty of dereliction of duty, in that he left the LORD's anointed defenceless. Verse 14, where David asks Abner why he didn't answer, would suggest that he had to call more than once, meaning Abner was in a deep sleep. At the very least, Abner should have ensured a vanguard was in place.

Section 4: David Addresses Saul (verses 17-20)

“Saul recognised David's voice and said, ‘Is this your voice, my son David?’ And David said, ‘It is my voice, my lord, O king.’ And he said, ‘Why does my lord pursue after his servant? For what have I done? What evil; is on my hands? Now therefore let my lord the king hear the words of his servant. If it is the LORD who has stirred you up against me, may he accept an offering, but if it is men, may they be cursed before the LORD, for they have driven me out this day that I should have no

share in the heritage of the LORD, saying, "Go serve other gods." "Now therefore, let not my blood fall to the earth away from the presence of the LORD, for the king of Israel has come out to seek a single flea like one who hunts a partridge in the mountains" (1 Samuel 26: 17-20).

David's questions to Saul are reverent in their entirety, containing no trace of anger or pettishness. He sincerely wishes to know the source of Saul's enmity, for it was now patently obvious to the king that David sought not to assassinate him. David suggests two potential causes of the bitterness in Saul's heart. He considered it was possible, but not likely, that God had stirred up Saul to punish David for some sin that David was not aware of. If that was the case, then David was willing to bring an offering to God. Secondly, another possible source of the enmity of Saul was that of a third party whispering untruths into the king's ear. If the latter was the case, David considered himself too insignificant for the king's attention, likening himself to a single flea or a solitary partridge.

Living in the UK it would be unusual, or extremely unlikely, for any of us to be a candidate for murder, but the first of the reasons for Saul's persecution of David should lead us to the injunction,

"Let a person examine himself..." (1 Corinthians 11:28).

We need to constantly examine our life style, and actions, to ascertain anything that is not worthy of the Lord. If we are aware of those who spitefully use us, we should not return their lies with arrogance and vitriolic retaliation.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account" (Matthew 5: 9-11).

We must notice the effect that the continued persecution had on David. From verse nineteen, we learn that David had been driven out and lost the heritage of the LORD. So harrowing was this that David brought a curse to bear upon any who had been poisoning David's reputation with Saul. As far as David was concerned, his exclusion and service as an exile had, to a certain extent, removed him from the worship of the living God. His status as an outlaw was a legal sentence that prevented access to the communal worship of the God of his fathers. To all intents and purposes, David was considered by some to serve other gods. He also entered into a deeply depressed state, as the first verse of chapter 27 tells. I will not quote it as, strictly speaking, it belongs to next week's Truth for Today programme, yet I think it only right that we include the effect that Saul's delayed reaction had on the emotional life of David. Despite his promises Saul still sought to destroy David, meaning that David was gloomy and troubled.

Section 5: Saul Answers David (verses 21-25)

I have isolated verses 21 & 22 from the rest of section 5 to show the lengths to which man can strain his own conscience with foolishness and lies. Nothing that Saul shouts across the divide lasts longer than the heat of his breath:

"Then Saul said, 'I have sinned. Return, my son David, for I will no more do you harm, because my life was precious in your eyes this day. Behold, I have acted foolishly, and have made a great mistake.' And David answered and said, 'Here is the spear, O king! Let one of the young men come over and take it'" (1 Samuel 26:21 & 22).

A very temporary thread of repentance envelops Saul as he admits he had acted foolishly. When given the opportunity to strike down the king, David held the king's life as precious. We have just considered verse 1 of chapter 27 where David is despondent, because nothing of substance has altered, as Saul was still seeking his life. We need to note that Biblical repentance is a complete and permanent change in attitude. This was the last time that David and Saul met though, even at this late stage, David still acknowledged the kingship of Saul in that he returned the king's spear, one of the symbols of the king's office.

As time has almost gone we must briefly consider the last verse of our chapter.

“Then Saul said to David, ‘Blessed be you, my son David! You will do many things and will succeed in them.’ So David went his way and Saul returned to his place” (1 Samuel 26:25).

David did go on to do many great things. The writer of the Hebrew letter includes him amongst his heroes who, through faith conquered kingdoms and enforced justice. If he had achieved nothing else, his composing of the 23rd Psalm was a great legacy to the people of God. In chapter 26 of 1 Samuel we have seen just a smidgeon of the grace of God in David's life, when he spared the life of Saul for the second time. Truly, a man whose life is well worth studying.

Thank you for listening to this Truth Today for Today broadcast in the series Samuel to King David. Today's programme was entitled David Spares Saul a Second Time and is based upon 1 Samuel chapter 26. It is numbered programme T1365.

May God bless each one of us this day.

Please Note:

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1.