

# 1 Samuel 24 - David Spares Saul's Life, Cuts Off His Hem; David Rebukes Saul; Saul's Remorse & David's Promise

IV. Transition from the house of Saul to the house of David (1 Samuel 16:1—31:13)

(3) David in exile from the pursuing Saul (21:1—29:11)

(J) David's exemplary character (24:1—26:25)

(a) David spares Saul's life at Engedi (24:1-22)

## 1 Samuel 24

(J) David's exemplary character (24:1—26:25)

(a) David spares Saul's life at Engedi (24:1-22)

1 Now when Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, it was reported to him, saying, "Behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi."

1 Now when Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, saying, "Behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi."

1 When Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, "Look, David is in the wilderness of En-gedi."

1 And it came to pass, when Saul was returned from following the Philistines, that it was told him, saying, Behold, David is in the wilderness of En Gedi.

- En Gedi was located near the western shore of the Dead Sea, close to its north-south midpoint

2 Then Saul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel and went to search for David and his men in front of the Rocks of the Mountain Goats.

2 Then Saul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel and went to seek David and his men in front of the Rocks of the Wild Goats.

2 Saul took 3,000 of his best troops from all over Israel, and he went to look for David and his men in the direction of the Rocks of the Wild Goats.

2 Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel, and went to seek David and his men upon the rocks of the wild goats.

- Saul chased David with 3,000 of his finest soldiers, giving him a 5-to-1 advantage over David, who had 600 men (23:13)

3 And he came to the **sheepfolds** on the way, where there was a cave; and Saul went in to **relieve himself**. Now David and his men were sitting in the inner recesses of the cave.

3 He came to the sheepfolds on the way, where there was a cave; and Saul went in to relieve himself. Now David and his men were sitting in the inner recesses of the cave.

3 He came to the sheepfolds beside the road. There was a cave there, and Saul went in to relieve himself. Now David and his men were sitting in the inner recesses of the cave.

3 And he came to the sheepcotes by the way, where was a cave; and Saul went in to cover his feet: and David and his men remained in the sides of the cave.

- "...sheepfolds" - rough stone walls built at the entrances to the caves to protect the sheep from wild beasts and to serve for shelter in case of bad weather

- "...relieve himself" - a euphemism for "taking a dump" or "going #2"; Saul came into the cave to rest and relieve himself, probably laying his outer garment down (over his feet) as he squatted

- The cave was large and very dark, so he did not see David and his men hiding in the recesses of the same cave

Both Psalm 57 & 142 relate to David's time "in the cave." These Psalms express David's pressures, needs, desires and faith.

4 Then David's men said to him, "Behold, *this is* the day of which the LORD said to you, 'Behold; I am about to hand your enemy over to you, and you shall do to him as it seems good to you.'" Then David got up and cut off the edge of Saul's robe secretly.

4 The men of David said to him, "Behold, *this is* the day of which the LORD said to you, 'Behold; I am about to give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it seems good to you.'" Then David arose and cut off the edge of Saul's robe secretly.

4 David's men told him, "Look, today is the day about which the LORD spoke to you when he said, 'I'll give your enemy into your hand.' Do to him whatever you want!"

David rose and stealthily cut off the corner of Saul's robe.

4 And the men of David said unto him, Behold the day of which the LORD said unto thee, Behold, I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand, that thou mayest do to him as it shall seem good unto thee. Then David arose, and cut off the skirt of Saul's robe privily.

- Saul had probably laid aside his robe upon entering the cave, which enabled David to cut off a piece of it unobserved

— Certainly this could have been the time to kill his enemy! In fact, some of David's men insisted that God had arranged the circumstances so that David might so act.

— David's men interpreted Saul's vulnerable position as divine provision that would allow David to free himself from his enemy. However, there is no record in the text that God had

given David permission to assassinate Saul. It is important that we always test our circumstances by the Word of God.

— Their counsel pushed David to take some action against Saul (cutting off the corner of his robe), which he soon regretted (v5)

- David's gesture of cutting off the corner of Saul's robe seems harmless to us today, but to cut a king's robe could be seen as an act of disdain or open rebellion

5 But it came about afterward that David's conscience bothered him because he had cut off **the edge of Saul's robe**.

5 It came about afterward that David's conscience bothered him because he had cut off the edge of Saul's *robe*.

5 Afterwards, David's conscience bothered him because he had cut off the corner of Saul's robe.

5 And it came to pass afterward, that David's heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt.

- David had hardly returned to his men with the fabric before he was overwhelmed with guilt; he was convinced of the dishonor his act had shown both God and Saul.

- "...the edge of Saul's *robe*" - *kanaph*, extremity, edge, border, skirt, corner (of garment), hem, fringe, bottom edge of skirt or train

— The hem or edge of a person's garment made a statement about a person's social standing

— The hem of a king's garment would've identified him as a king

— By cutting off the hem of his robe, David suggested that he could cut off Saul's reign as king just as easily (Cf. v21). The act constituted mild rebellion against Saul's authority, which David regretted

## Hems

In ancient Mesopotamia, "to cut off the hem" was to strip one of his personality, authority, etc. A husband could divorce his wife by cutting off the hem of her robe. A nobleman would authenticate his name on a clay tablet by pressing his hem on the clay.

- Cf. the "train" (*shawl*) of God on His Throne (Is 6:1)
- God's Covenant with Israel (Ezek 16:8; Ex 39:25-26)
- Fringes on Levitical garments (Num 15:38-39; Deut 22:12; Ex 28:33-34)
- Lord's hem sought for healing (Matt 14:36; Mark 6:56; Luke 8:44)
- Goal of the woman with issue of blood (Matt 9:20-21; Mark 5:31)
- Ruth & Boaz: a request to exercise his right and responsibility (Ruth 3:9)

6 So he said to his men, "Far be it from me because of the LORD that I would do this thing to my lord, the LORD'S anointed, to reach out with my hand against him, since he is the LORD'S anointed."

6 So he said to his men, "Far be it from me because of the LORD that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, since he is the LORD's anointed."

6 He told his men, "God forbid that I should do this thing to your majesty, the LORD's anointed, by stretching out my hand against him, since he's the LORD's anointed."

6 And he said unto his men, The LORD forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the LORD'S anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the LORD.

- David repented openly of his rash deed of cutting Saul's robe; for he had not shown proper respect for the Lord's anointed

— David, "a man after God's own heart," was willing for God to take care of Saul (Rom 12:19-21)

— David realized that it was God's place to remove Saul, not his

— David refused to take revenge for the trouble, fear and danger that Saul had caused him (Prov 16:32), instead remaining sensitive to God's will since he committed himself to doing so

7 And David rebuked his men with *these* words and did not allow them to rise up against Saul. And Saul got up, left the cave, and went on *his* way.

7 David persuaded his men with *these* words and did not allow them to rise up against Saul. And Saul arose, left the cave, and went on *his* way.

7 David restrained his men with his words and did not allow them to rebel against Saul. Saul got up from the cave and started off.

7 So David stayed his servants with these words, and suffered them not to rise against Saul. But Saul rose up out of the cave, and went on his way.

Both Saul and David had received advice from their loyal men to kill the other. Both groups thought and felt they were right. Both sought revenge. Both were guilty of bending God's Word and circumstances to fit their own desires. However, David, a man after God's own heart, knew God's righteousness is greater than personal revenge. David made the loving choice to seek Saul's good instead of his harm. At the risk of his own life, David confronted Saul with the goal of reconciliation.

**8** Afterward, however, David got up and went out of the cave, and called after Saul, saying, "My lord the king!" And when Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his face to the ground and prostrated himself.

8 Now afterward David arose and went out of the cave and called after Saul, saying, "My lord the king!" And when Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his face to the ground and prostrated himself.

8 Then David got up, went out of the cave, and called out to Saul: "Your majesty!" Saul looked behind him, and David bowed down with his face to the ground and prostrated himself.

8 David also arose afterward, and went out of the cave, and cried after Saul, saying, My lord the king. And when Saul looked behind him, David stooped with his face to the earth, and bowed himself.

- Confronted with his sin, David repented and did the next right thing...

- David and his men had been safe in the cave, but then David boldly stepped out to speak to Saul once the king had gone some distance away

9 And David said to Saul, "Why do you listen to the words of men who say, 'Behold, David is seeking to harm you'?"

9 David said to Saul, "Why do you listen to the words of men, saying, 'Behold, David seeks to harm you'?"

9 Then David told Saul, "Why do you listen to the words of those who say, 'Look, David is trying to harm you?'"

9 And David said to Saul, Wherefore hearest thou men's words, saying, Behold, David seeketh thy hurt?

10 Behold, this day your eyes have seen that the LORD had handed you over to me today in the cave, and *someone* said to kill you, but I spared you; and I said, 'I will not reach out with my hand against my lord, because he is the LORD'S anointed.'

10 Behold, this day your eyes have seen that the LORD had given you today into my hand in the cave, and some said to kill you, but *my* eye had pity on you; and I said, 'I will not stretch out my hand against my lord, for he is the LORD's anointed.'

10 Look, this very day you saw with your own eyes that the LORD gave you into my control in the cave, and one of my men told me to kill you, but I had pity on you and responded, 'I won't lift my hand against his majesty because he's the LORD's anointed.'

10 Behold, this day thine eyes have seen how that the LORD had delivered thee to day into mine hand in the cave: and some bade me kill thee: but mine eye spared thee; and I said, I will not put forth mine hand against my lord; for he is the LORD'S anointed.

11 So, my father, look! Indeed, look at the edge of your robe in my hand! For by *the fact* that I cut off the edge of your robe but did not kill you, know and understand that there is

no evil or rebellion in my hands, and I have not sinned against you, though you are lying in wait for my life, to take it.

11 Now, my father, see! Indeed, see the edge of your robe in my hand! For in that I cut off the edge of your robe and did not kill you, know and perceive that there is no evil or rebellion in my hands, and I have not sinned against you, though you are lying in wait for my life to take it.

11 Look, my father, look! The corner of your robe is in my hand. Indeed, by my cutting off the corner of your robe and not killing you, you may know and understand that I have no evil intent or transgression—I haven't wronged you, even though you are hunting me to take my life.

11 Moreover, my father, see, yea, see the skirt of thy robe in my hand: for in that I cut off the skirt of thy robe, and killed thee not, know thou and see that there is neither evil nor transgression in mine hand, and I have not sinned against thee; yet thou huntest my soul to take it.

12 May the LORD judge between you and me, and may the LORD take vengeance on you for me; but my hand shall not be against you.

12 May the LORD judge between you and me, and may the LORD avenge me on you; but my hand shall not be against you.

12 May the LORD judge between me and you, and may he take vengeance on you for me, but I won't be attacking you.

12 The LORD judge between me and thee, and the LORD avenge me of thee: but mine hand shall not be upon thee.

- David called on God to judge his actions and to reward him for his dealings with Saul (by taking vengeance on Saul for his dealings with David)

— David promised he would not take God's role by judging Saul or rewarding him in kind for his evil deeds

13 As the proverb of the ancients says, 'Out of the wicked comes wickedness'; but my hand shall not be against you.

13 As the proverb of the ancients says, 'Out of the wicked comes forth wickedness'; but my hand shall not be against you.

13 Just like the ancient proverb says, 'From wicked people comes wickedness,' but I'm not against you.

13 As saith the proverb of the ancients, Wickedness proceedeth from the wicked: but mine hand shall not be upon thee.

14 After whom has the king of Israel gone out? Whom are you pursuing? A dead dog, a single flea?

14 After whom has the king of Israel come out? Whom are you pursuing? A dead dog, a single flea?

14 After whom is the king of Israel going out? Whom are you pursuing? A dead dog or a single flea?

14 After whom is the king of Israel come out? after whom dost thou pursue? after a dead dog, after a flea.

- David may have compared himself to a dead dog or a single flea to help Saul realize that he viewed himself as harmless and insignificant

15 May the LORD therefore be judge and decide between you and me; and may He see and plead my cause and save me from your hand."

15 The LORD therefore be judge and decide between you and me; and may He see and plead my cause and deliver me from your hand."

15 May the LORD act as judge, and may he decide between me and you. May he see, may he plead my case, and may he vindicate me in this dispute against you."

15 The LORD therefore be judge, and judge between me and thee, and see, and plead my cause, and deliver me out of thine hand.

- How shocked Saul must have been to hear the voice of his son-in-law! David explained that Saul was listening to lies (v9) and that he could have lost his life in the cave but for David's kindness (v10-11).

- The piece of the robe was evidence enough that David was telling the truth.

The object lesson that David presented to Saul had a double application. David proved that he was not trying to kill Saul, because Saul was the Lord's anointed. Furthermore he showed that it was inappropriate for Saul to seek to kill him because he, too, was the Lord's anointed, as Saul now knew (v20). David modeled for Saul what the king's dealings with him should have been.

**16** When David had finished speaking these words to Saul, Saul said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" Then Saul raised his voice and wept.

**16** When David had finished speaking these words to Saul, Saul said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" Then Saul lifted up his voice and wept.

**16** When David had finished saying these things to Saul, Saul asked, "Is this your voice, my son David?" Then Saul cried loudly

**16** And it came to pass, when David had made an end of speaking these words unto Saul, that Saul said, Is this thy voice, my son David? And Saul lifted up his voice, and wept.

- Picture the pitiful Saul as he stands before one who is his better  
— His weeping and admission of guilt were but shallow, passing emotions; they did not really come from his heart. He was only too glad to acknowledge David's kindness. After all, David had spared his life!

17 And he said to David, "You are more righteous than I; for you have dealt well with me, while I have dealt maliciously with you.

17 He said to David, "You are more righteous than I; for you have dealt well with me, while I have dealt wickedly with you.

17 to David, "You are more righteous than I am, because you have treated me well even though I've treated you poorly.

17 And he said to David, Thou art more righteous than I: for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil.

18 You have declared today that you have done good to me, that the LORD handed me over to you and yet you did not kill me.

18 You have declared today that you have done good to me, that the LORD delivered me into your hand and yet you did not kill me.

18 You have explained how you treated me well, in that the LORD delivered me into your hand but you didn't kill me.

18 And thou hast shewed this day how that thou hast dealt well with me: forasmuch as when the LORD had delivered me into thine hand, thou killedst me not.

- There is no greater tribute than one that comes from an adversary

19 Though if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go away unharmed? May the LORD therefore reward you with good in return for what you have done to me this day.

19 For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go away safely? May the LORD therefore reward you with good in return for what you have done to me this day.

19 For who would find his enemy and then send him away safely? May the LORD repay you for what you have done for me today.

19 For if a man find his enemy, will he let him go well away? wherefore the LORD reward thee good for that thou hast done unto me this day.

- Saul even called on the Lord to reward David with blessing for his treatment of the king

20 Now, behold, I know that you will certainly be king, and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hand.

20 Now, behold, I know that you will surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hand.

20 Now I know for certain that you will be king, and that the kingdom will be established under your authority.

20 And now, behold, I know well that thou shalt surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in thine hand.

- Saul confessed that he realized that David's ultimate succession to the throne of Israel was inevitable (Cf. 23:17)

— This verse demonstrates the perversity of Saul's heart: he admitted that David was the rightful king, yet he persisted in opposing him!

21 So now swear to me by the LORD that you will not cut off my descendants after me, and that you will not eliminate my name from my father's household."

21 So now swear to me by the LORD that you will not cut off my descendants after me and that you will not destroy my name from my father's household."

21 Now swear to me by the LORD that you will never eliminate my descendants after me, and that you won't erase my name from my father's family."

21 Swear now therefore unto me by the LORD, that thou wilt not cut off my seed after me, and that thou wilt not destroy my name out of my father's house.

- Finally, Saul asked David not to cut off his descendants when he came to power

— As noted earlier, it was customary in the ancient Near East for a new king to kill all the descendants of the ruler whom he replaced. This prevented them from rising up and reestablishing the dead king's dynasty.

— David had already promised Jonathan that he would not kill his descendants (20:14-17), and he now made the same promise to Saul (v22)

— To cut off someone's name meant to obliterate the memory of him. David even agreed to spare Saul's reputation in Israel (Cf. 2 Sam 1:17-27).

- David kept his promises to Saul and even vindicated Saul's honor after Saul's death

— This beautifully illustrates Christ's words in Matt 5:10-12. For David to show kindness to Saul, and to pray for him, was a greater victory than to overcome the Philistines.

— We can be sure, if we obey the Lord, that He will take care of our enemies for us in His good time

22 And David swore *an oath* to Saul. Then Saul went to his home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.

22 David swore to Saul. And Saul went to his home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.

22 David made this vow to Saul, and then Saul went home, while David and his men went up to the stronghold.

**22** And David swore unto Saul. And Saul went home; but David and his men gat them up unto the hold.

- God gave David the grace needed to show kindness to his enemy, and this is an even greater event than defeating the giant Goliath

- Saul's men had been lying about David and telling Saul that David was trying to slay him (v9)

If Psalm 7 fits into this event, as many believe, then Cush the Benjamite was chief of the liars. This experience gave David opportunity to prove to Saul and the leaders that he was not trying to slay Saul, but that he honored the king even though the king was out of the will of God.

### **Application**

This chapter helps us deal with the common temptation to get even, by showing us David's example of trusting God and not retaliating. It also deals with how we should view securing what God has promised us. David let God determine how and when he would become king. He refused the temptation to take matters into his own hands and thereby determine his destiny (Cf. 2 Kings 8:14-15). We see David growing in this chapter. He began by threatening the king, but then he backed off and declined to kill Saul. Finally he determined even to trust God to control Saul's descendants, as well as Saul himself, and to preserve Saul's memory in Israel. God presumably rewarded David for his trust and obedience by giving him a *peaceful conscience* immediately, and *safety* later, when his own son Absalom rose up against him.