

1 Samuel Chapter 24

David's decision here presents all Christians with a vital principle for dealing with adversaries: refuse revenge and risk reconciliation. No one is ever weak who stands in the truths of God's Word. Although David risked the ridicule of his own men, it was far more important that he maintain his integrity before the Lord, so he even "restrained" his men from hurting Saul.

1 Samuel 24:1 "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."

Having, as it should seem, got the victory over them, and driven them out of his country, and pursued them to their own.

"That it was told him, saying, behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi": In the strong holds of it, the high rocks and mountains in it (1 Sam. 23:29).

David had been trapped by Saul and his men on the western side of the desert of Judah. While Saul was gone to war with the Philistines, David crossed over to En-gedi. This was near the Dead Sea. The last thing we learned in the last lesson was that there were water and wild goats for food there. This is a place of many caves as well. Someone has been keeping up with David's every move, and he reported to Saul that he was at En-gedi.

1 Samuel 24:2 "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's paranoia was evidenced by the fact that he took 3,000 men to hunt David, which was five times the number of men in David's company (23:13).

"Three thousand chosen men" (see 26:2). These were the most skilled soldiers.

"Rocks of the wild goats": The location of this cave is unknown, although "wild goats" stresses the inaccessibility of the cave (Job 39:1; see the titles of Psalms 57, 142), which could also possibly refer to (1 Sam. 22:1).

Saul has five times as many men with him as David has. We see that Saul let no time pass after the battles with the Philistines. He is after David again. It seems he cannot rest, until he kills David.

1 Samuel 24:3 "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."

"This is a euphemism for having a bowel movement, as the person would crouch with his inner garment dropped to his feet.

It is so interesting that Saul chose the very cave where David was camped, to lie down and rest for the night. These caves were places where animals, or travelers, retreated to be safe from the storms and from robbers. It was so dark inside so that no one coming in could see five feet ahead of them. The advantage was to the person already in the cave. They had been acclimated to the light and could see everything, and everyone, coming into the cave. David and his men saw Saul when he lay down, and actually saw him cover up his feet. The men of David were in the cave, but further inside. They clung to the side of the cave to keep Saul from seeing them. "Sheepcotes" means enclosures.

Verses 4-6: "David," rather than seizing the hem of the king's "robe" (compare the note at 15:27-28), "cut" it "off," usually a mark of insubordination. However, David probably intended it as a sign of his loyalty; he had refused the opportunity to slay the king (compare 10-12). Yet, because Saul was the properly constituted authority in Israel (verse 8), to touch the king's robe was to touch the king; hence, David was conscience-stricken.

Verses 4-7: For David to "cut off a corner of Saul's robe" was both a literal and symbolic statement of his ability to usurp the throne. Perhaps David's subsequent regret helped him remain true to his conviction to wait until God gave him the throne.

1 Samuel 24:4 "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."

"The day of which the Lord said unto thee": David's men perhaps believed that God had providentially placed Saul in the same cave where they were hiding so David could kill the king. However, nothing revelatory had previously been said by the Lord that indicated He wanted David to lift a hand against Saul.

In spite of all that Saul had done to David, David still respected him as king. He had, at one time, been anointed of God. David's men believe that God has given Saul into David's hands to kill. However David does not do this. He cuts off the skirt of Saul while he is asleep, to let him know that he could have killed him. David believes that this will make Saul believe he is innocent of all charges.

1 Samuel 24:5 "And it came to pass afterward, that David's heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt."

"David's heart smote him": David was able to cut off a piece of Saul's robe undetected. However, touching Saul's clothing was tantamount to touching his person, and David's conscience troubled him on this account.

David was heartsick later, that he had cut off the skirt of Saul. He had feelings of guilt of humiliating Saul.

1 Samuel 24:6 "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."

“Lord forbid”: David recognized that the Lord Himself had placed Saul into the kingship. Thus, the judgment and removal of Saul had to be left to the Lord.

David is a man who is totally loyal to the LORD. His loyalty to Saul is based on the fact that Saul was the anointed of God. David even stresses the point to his men, that he should never raise his hand to destroy the anointed of God.

1 Samuel 24:7 "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."

Or pacified them, as the Targum, and made them quiet and easy in that he had not slain him, and reconciled their minds to his conduct, and restrained them from laying hands on him, by observing to them, that he was the anointed of the Lord.

"And suffered them not to rise against Saul": To take away his life; he not only argued with them, but laid his commands on them that they should not slay him.

"But Saul rose up out of the cave, and went on his way": He rose from his sleep, and went out of the cave unhurt, and proceeded on in the way he came to the sheepcotes, and which led on further (1 Sam. 24:3).

David's words about the importance of not raising your hand against the anointed saved Saul from David's men. The men really wanted to kill Saul. David was their leader and he kept them from doing it. Saul left the cave, never realizing that David and his men were in the cave.

1 Samuel 24:8 "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."

After Saul was leaving.

"And went out of the cave": Where he had been all the time that Saul had been in it.

"And cried after Saul": With a loud voice: my lord the king; by which titles Saul would know that he was called unto.

"And when Saul looked behind him": To see who it was that called unto him.

"David stooped with his face to the earth, and bowed himself": Giving reverence and honor to him as a king (1 Sam. 20:41).

Saul had travelled a little way from the cave, but not out of hearing distance. It appeared that Saul was not near his men, and David went out toward Saul. The idea was to prove to Saul that he did not intend to kill him. It was obvious David had the opportunity to kill him but would not, because he was the anointed of God. David even bowed to show that he still recognized Saul as king. He wanted Saul to realize he had no intention of killing him.

Verses 9-15: David believed Saul should be "avenged" for his sins, but he left the judgment to God.

1 Samuel 24:9 "And David said to Saul, Wherefore hearest thou men's words, saying, Behold, David seeketh thy hurt?"

David had many deadly enemies at the court of Saul, who evidently labored with success to deepen Saul's jealousy, and to widen the breach which already existed between the king and David. Doeg has been already mentioned as one of the more prominent of these slanderers; another was Cush the Benjamite, who was eluded to in the inscription which heads the seventh Psalm. The Ziphites and their representatives at the royal residence also belonged to this class of malicious foes spoken of here.

David was explaining to Saul that anyone who said he wanted to destroy Saul was lying. It was almost as if he was saying to Saul, How much more proof do you need?

1 Samuel 24:10 "Behold, this day thine eyes have seen how that the LORD had delivered thee today 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."

Or may see; there is full proof and evidence of it and which will be presently shown.

"How that the Lord had delivered thee today into mine hand in the cave": From whence they were both just come.

"But mine eye spared thee": A phrase signifying the taking pity on those whom we have it in our power to hurt. The eye is said to spare, because it affects the heart, and induces a person to spare. Lord avenge me of thee, rather, will avenge me; that is vindicate and deliver me from thy violent and unjust persecution. For he does not, in these words, pray God to punish Saul for the injuries he had done him, but to justify, clear, and protect himself. But my hand shall not be upon thee. He was resolved not to return evil for evil, or to avenge himself, but to leave it to God to do him right.

The LORD had placed Saul in the very cave where David and his men were hiding. The men thought David should kill Saul and be rid of their problem. David did not want to kill him because he was king, anointed thus of God. We must remember in all of this, that David had been anointed of the LORD as well. He would be king of Israel. It was just a matter of time.

1 Samuel 24:11 "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."

“Moreover, my father”: As he was through David’s marriage of his daughter.

“Neither evil nor transgression”: If David was a wicked rebel against the rule of Saul, as Saul had said (22:8, 13), he would have killed Saul when given this opportunity. The corner of the robe was proof to Saul that David was not his enemy.

In this David called Saul father. He was married to Saul's daughter and that made Saul his father-in-law. This was not an arrogant showing of the skirt with the bottom cut off. It was a way of showing Saul his good intentions. Saul was angry at David without a cause. David wanted to prove to Saul that he had no evil thoughts about him. David had not transgressed; he had only done good to Saul. Saul would have killed David, if David had been so near him.

1 Samuel 24:12 "The LORD judge between me and thee, and the LORD avenge me of thee: but mine hand shall not be upon thee."

“The Lord judge”: David called for the Lord Himself, the only fair and impartial Judge (Judges 11:27), to decide the fate of David and Saul (also verse 15).

Now we see that Saul has not responded positively to David. David now brings his case before the LORD. The LORD will have to judge between them. David is, in a sense, saying that he will not harm Saul. God will have to deal with Saul.

1 Samuel 24:13 "As saith the proverb of the ancients, Wickedness proceedeth from the wicked: but mine hand shall not be upon thee."

“Proverb”: A traditional pithy statement that evil deeds are perpetrated only by evil men. A similar point is made by Jesus (in Matt. 7:16, 20).

David was not wicked, or he would have killed Saul when he had the opportunity. Those who have a wicked heart do and say wicked things. David does not do or say wicked things. He has his heart stayed upon the LORD.

1 Samuel 24:14 "After whom is the king of Israel come out? After whom dost thou pursue? after a dead dog, after a flea."

“A dead dog, after a flea”: David hereby expresses his lowliness and entire committal of his cause to God, who alone is the judge and to who alone belongs vengeance.

Why does Saul need so many men to come against someone like David? Saul has five men to every one of David's. He classifies himself as a dead dog (harmless). The comparison of him as a flea is showing his small size compared to the size of Saul's strength.

1 Samuel 24:15 "The LORD therefore be judge, and judge between me and thee, and see, and plead my cause, and deliver me out of thine hand."

Signifying he did not desire to be judge in his own cause, but leave it with God to determine it for him in his providence.

"And see, and plead my cause”: Look with pity upon him, take his cause in his hand, plead it, and do him justice.

"And deliver me out of thine hand”: Which was a prayer of faith, believing he would do it in due time (see Psalm 7:6).

The LORD is on the side of David. Saul is aware of that. This is one of the reasons he has come against him. Saul knows the kingdom has been taken away from him and given to David. All of his effort to kill David is to keep the LORD's will in this from happening. The LORD will deliver David out of Saul's hand. He will fight for David, especially since David will not fight for himself.

Verses 16-22: Although “Saul” recognized the inevitability of David’s kingship, and entered into a covenant with “David” concerning the treatment of Saul’s family, Saul nevertheless resumed his persecution of David later (compare Chapter 26).

1 Samuel 24:16 "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."

He knew his voice though being at a great distance from him, he could not discern his face.

"And wept": Partly from the sense of his sin against God, and of his wicked and base carriage to David; (for there are some such temporary passions oft-times in hypocrites and ungodly men;) and principally from the remembrance of so great and so late a danger as he had now escaped; which commonly produced grief and tears (as 2 Sam. 13:36). Yet these may be tears of affection or tenderness (upon the sense of David’s kindness), rather than of grief.

Saul knows that David has spared his life. This is one of the moments when Saul realizes the love that David has for him is sincere. David has loved him as a father, honored him as king, and

respected him as God's anointed. For this moment, Saul has remorse for wanting to kill David. He is so moved by what David said, that he actually cries.

Verses 17-22: Saul had a moment of clarity in which he acknowledged that David was not a threat to him, but his jealousy so consumed him that he failed to act accordingly, and before long, he began hunting David again (26:2).

1 Samuel 24:17 "And he said to David, Thou [art] more righteous than I: for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil."

"Thou are more righteous than I": Upon hearing David's testimony, Saul was moved with emotion and acknowledged that David was more righteous than he was. His testimony to David's righteousness recognized David's right to the kingship.

This is a very true statement. David had done only good to Saul. Saul had no legitimate reason for the evil he had wanted to do to David.

1 Samuel 24:18 "And thou hast showed 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."

The cutting off of the skirt of his robe only, when his life was in his hand, was a clear proof and full demonstration of his dealing well with him, and might sufficiently convince him he had no ill design upon him.

"Forasmuch as when the Lord had delivered me into thine hand, thou killedst me not": This was a plain proof and evidence of his kindness to him, which he owns, and also the providence of God in this affair, which had delivered him into the hands of David. By which he might see the Lord was for David, and against him, and might have deterred him from seeking David's hurt hereafter; but it did not.

Saul is so overwhelmed that David did not kill him when it appeared the LORD placed him in the hands of David.

1 Samuel 24:19 "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."

Or "in a good way", in peace and safety, without doing him any hurt. This is not usual among men, and yet this was the present case. David had found his enemy Saul, which Saul tacitly owns, and yet had let him go unharmed away from him, without killing him.

"Wherefore the Lord reward thee good for that thou hast done unto me this day": He does not promise to reward him himself, but prays the Lord to reward him. And had he been sincere in it, he could not have done better for him. Some connect the former clause with this, after this

manner, "if a man find his enemy, and let him go away, the Lord will reward him. The Lord reward thee", etc. so the Syriac and Arabic versions.

The answer is no, it is not natural for a man to have his enemy at his own mercy, and then do him no harm. Saul speaks a blessing on David from the LORD, for his generosity in letting him live.

1 Samuel 24:20 "And now, behold, I know well that thou shalt surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in thine hand."

"Thou shalt surely be king": Saul emphatically acknowledged that David would be the ruler over the kingdom of Israel. Saul had already been told by Samuel that God would take the kingdom away from him and give it to a man after his own heart (13:14; 15:28). Jonathan had testified that Saul already knew that David would be king (23:17). However, this recognition did not mean that Saul was ready to give up the kingdom.

Saul had known from the beginning that David was to be the next king. This is actually what bothered him. Every time that David did some mighty feat, Saul became jealous. He had the kingdom torn from him and his son, because he did not and would not, obey the commandments of God. Saul was like many of us. He kept the commandments that were convenient to keep. He has finally admitted that David will be king.

1 Samuel 24:21 "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."

By the Word of the Lord, as the Targum.

"That thou wilt not cut off my seed after me": As was usually done in despotic governments in the eastern countries, and is at this day, when one is advanced to the throne of another, by whom issue is left, who may be rivals and competitors with him.

"And that thou wilt not destroy my name out of my father's house": By cutting off his seed, the same thing in different words repeated, for the confirmation of it. Children bear the names of their fathers, and by them their memory is perpetuated, and cutting off them is destroying the name of their parents.

Saul was such a proud man that this would be very important to him. He wanted to be remembered as being a great king. He really was in the physical sense. He just did not follow the will of the LORD. The people thought him to be a great king. He wants David's word that David will not destroy his name or his reputation. He wants his seed to be remembered, as well. That would be no problem for David, because Saul's son, Jonathan, was David's best friend. Saul had known for a long time that it was just a matter of time until he would be replaced as king. Samuel had given that very message from God, when he disobeyed God by saving Agag and the best of the animals, when God told him to destroy them all.

1 Samuel 24:22 "And David sware unto Saul. And Saul went home; but David and his men gat them up unto the hold."

“David swore unto Saul”: By solemn oath, David agreed to preserve Saul’s family and family name. While most of Saul’s family was later slain (2 Sam. 21:8-9), this pledge was fulfilled in the life of Mephibosheth (see note on 2 Sam. 21:7).

David did swear to Saul that these things would be so. They did not physically get back together though. Saul went home and David and his men went in their hold where they had been staying. David knew that Saul had been known to change his mind, even though he had made an agreement. This group of men following David continued with him.

1 Samuel Chapter 24 Questions

1. Where were David and his men, when he was trapped by Saul?
2. When the army of the Philistines attacked and Saul went to help, where did David go?
3. Where was En-gedi located?
4. How many chosen men did Saul take to go get David?
5. Where did Saul go to rest for the night?
6. What was interesting about the place that Saul chose to spend the night?
7. What were these places generally used for?
8. Why could Saul not realize that David's men were in this cave?
9. What does "sheepcotes" mean?
10. What did the men of David say, about Saul being in the cave with them?
11. What did David do to Saul?
12. Why did David do this, instead of killing him?
13. Why was David heartsick about this later?
14. Why is David so loyal to Saul?
15. What saved Saul from David's men?
16. In verse 8, what did David do, to let Saul know he could have killed him?
17. David _____ to show that he still recognizes Saul as king.
18. Who does David say that Saul has been listening to?

19. In verse 10, what is David explaining to Saul?
20. What must we remember in all of this about David?
21. What does David show Saul that proves he could have killed him?
22. Why did David call Saul father?
23. Who does David say will judge between them?
24. What is the proverb David speaks?
25. What is David asking Saul in verse 14?
26. What is one of the reasons Saul has come against David?
27. After David spoke to Saul, what did Saul reply?
28. What emotion does Saul show?
29. What is Saul so overwhelmed by?
30. How is Saul like many of us?
31. What does Saul ask David to swear to him?
32. Who thought Saul to be a great king?
33. Who was David's best friend?