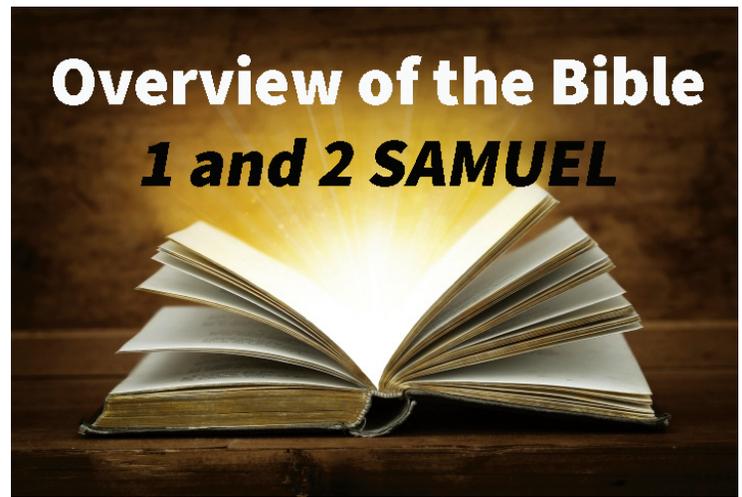


DAVID SPARES  
SAUL'S LIFE

1 Samuel 24  
*Lesson 65*

Wednesday, November 10, 2021  
*Pastor Blake Gideon*



**Big Idea** *The Lord vindicates his chosen servants when they look to him for justice.*

### The Text in Context

Chapter 23 ends with David's escaping from Saul, yet one suspects that this is but a respite in the unfolding conflict. Indeed, once he has dealt with the Philistine problem, Saul resumes his pursuit of David. This time divine providence hands David an opportunity to kill Saul, yet he refuses to do so. Instead, he confronts Saul, protests his innocence, and appeals to God for justice. Throughout this section of 1 Samuel, the narrator's purpose is to demonstrate beyond the shadow of a doubt that David, not Saul or one of his descendants, is the rightful king of Israel. The speech by Saul becomes Exhibit A in the narrator's defense. The heir apparent to Saul's throne, Jonathan, has already acknowledged David's destiny; now Saul himself confesses the truth. He admits that David is in the right and that he (Saul) has acted sinfully. Saul blesses David, asking the Lord to repay him for his good deed. He also admits that David will become king, and he even asks David to promise that he will not wipe out his family line. David's oath to Saul, by which he promises to spare Saul's descendants, is also important in the following story, for David's commitment to keep it (2 Sam. 9) demonstrates his faithfulness to both Jonathan and Saul, proving that he is not an usurper who masterminds their demise.

### Historical and Cultural Background

David's respect for Saul as the Lord's anointed ruler is consistent with God's choice of Saul and with the ancient Near Eastern concept of kingship as being divinely ordained. David also recognizes Saul as his "father" (v. 11). Saul is David's father-in-law, but the term may indicate more than a literal sense in this context. David may be addressing Saul as his benefactor and protector (cf. the use of the term "father" in Job 29:16; 31:18; Isa. 9:6; 22:21; 1 Cor. 4:15).

### Key Themes of 1 Samuel 24

- Though David can kill Saul, he refuses to do so, proving that he is loyal to Saul and is willing to wait for the Lord to give him the throne of Israel.
- David appeals to the Lord for justice and is vindicated when Saul exonerates and blesses him.

## Interpretive Insights

**24:4** *I will give your enemy into your hands.* The prophecy cited by the men is not recorded elsewhere in the history, though we have no reason to doubt their recollection. However, the prophecy does not state that David should or will kill his enemy. It simply says that he will gain the upper hand over his enemy, and it seemingly gives him permission to do as he sees fit or desires.

*[He] cut off a corner of Saul's robe.* David cuts off an edge of Saul's robe so he can offer it as proof that he had the opportunity to kill the king but spared his life (see v. 11). This incident echoes 1 Sam.15, where Saul tore Samuel's robe. Saul's robe is representative of his office. David's act is symbolic. Cutting off the corner of Saul's robe suggest that the kingdom is being torn from Saul and given to David.

**24:5** *David was conscience-stricken.* The verbs in verses 4–5 are used elsewhere of David's killing Goliath (see "cut" [*karat*] in 1 Sam. 17:51 and "strike" [*nakah*] in 17:46, 49–50). But here the terms are used of David's harmless removal of a strip of Saul's robe and of his own conscience's striking his soul with guilt. This use of the verbs highlights the irony of the scene. David can view Saul as an enemy and strike him dead. But he refuses to do so because he does not consider Saul to be an enemy. As far as David is concerned, Saul is still his "master" and "the LORD's anointed" (v. 6). His loyalty and innocence have never been so clearly revealed in the story as at this point.

**24:5-7** Even though David did not harm Saul physically, he still regrets his actions. Cutting off the corner of Saul's robe suggested that David would take Saul's royal robe by force. David repents of this action, recognizing that he is to wear the royal robe, it must come from the Lord's hand and not his own. David also sharply rebukes his men for their counsel. David's moral courage in this episode is remarkable.

**24:8** *My lord the king!* With this form of address David acknowledges Saul's position and his own submission to the king's authority. Yet the last time someone addressed Saul with the words "my lord," that person ended up dead despite making a powerful case for his innocence (see 22:12), so at this point there is tension in the plot.

**24:10** *The LORD delivered you into my hands.* There is irony here when one contrasts David's words with the narrator's statement in 23:14, "God did not give David into his hands."

*I will not lay my hand.* The Hebrew expression "lay/raise a hand" was last used in the story in 1 Samuel 22:17, which says that Saul's servants refused to "raise a hand" (*shalah yad*) against the Lord's priests. Their restraint, like David's, stands in stark contrast to Saul's murderous aggression against the priests and against David.

**24:11** *My father.* David goes out of his way to express Saul's authority over him. He addresses him as "my lord/master" three times (vv. 6, 8, 10), "king" once (v. 8), "king of Israel" once (v. 14), and "LORD's anointed" three times (vv. 6, 10). Here he uses yet another title, "my father," which suggests his dependence upon the king.

**24:12** *May the LORD judge.* David's determination to leave vengeance in God's hands (v. 12) stands in contrast to the earlier portrait of Saul, who was obsessed with getting revenge on his enemies (14:24; 18:25).

**24:16** *David my son.* Earlier in the story Saul called David by name several times (18:8, 11, 22, 25; 19:22), but then he began calling him simply “the son of Jesse” (20:27, 30–31; 22:7–8, 13 [22:17 is an exception]). But here Saul uses his proper name, followed by “my son.” The latter is a positive response to David’s cry, “my father” (v. 11).

*And he wept aloud.* This expression elsewhere describes a response of extreme sorrow (Gen. 21:16; 27:38; Judg. 2:4; 21:2; Ruth 1:9, 14; 1 Sam. 11:4; 2 Sam. 3:32; 13:36; Job 2:12). On at least one occasion feelings of guilt appear to be present (Judg. 2:4), but by itself the expression need not imply this. Usually there is a sense of loss or regret that prompts this emotional response.

**24:17** *You are more righteous than I.* This statement and the one made in 26:21 compose the most important evidence of David’s innocence in the entire story. Together they form a foundation for the narrator’s defense of David. Saul has accused David of betraying him and plotting against him, but these two confessions undercut those false charges.

**24:19** *May the LORD reward you.* This blessing, like David’s appeal for justice, sets the framework for the rest of the story. David’s success can be interpreted as the outworking and fulfillment of this well-deserved blessing.

**24:20** *I know that you will surely be king.* Jonathan has told David that his father knows David will be king (23:17). Now for the first time Saul publicly acknowledges that David is destined to rule Israel, and he even states this conviction emphatically (the infinitive absolute appears in the MT before the finite form of the verb).

*The kingdom of Israel will be established in your hands.* Saul finally acknowledges that the Lord’s pronouncement regarding his kingdom (13:14) will be realized.

**24:22** *So David gave his oath to Saul.* David’s positive response to Saul’s plea (v. 21), like his covenant with Jonathan (20:42), demonstrates his honesty in this matter. If he had designs on overthrowing Saul and seizing his throne, he would not agree to this. Usurpers typically kill the offspring of the former king to solidify their power.

Saul’s remorse is not genuine, and he will soon return to hunting David.

## **Theological Insights**

Saul has forfeited his leadership status (cf. 13:13–14; 15:28–29), and God has chosen David as his successor (16:12–13), but God has not yet actually removed Saul from the throne and replaced him with David. Confronted with an apparent golden opportunity to make God’s declared purpose a reality and avenge the wrongs Saul has committed against him, David refuses to kill Saul and instead appeals to God as judge. God vindicates him, for Saul acknowledges David’s innocence and even blesses him.

David’s appeal and Saul’s blessing are particularly important to the developing story line and to the narrator’s strategy: they provide a legal framework in which to interpret subsequent events. From this time forward, David’s ultimate and complete vindication is inevitable. His eventual success and Saul’s demise can be viewed as the outworking of God’s justice in response to David’s appeal and ironically as the fulfillment of Saul’s prayer of blessing (24:19b). The justice-vindication theme links this episode with the story of Hannah’s vindication. Like Hannah, David faces persecution and appeals to God.

As in Hannah's case, the Lord vindicates him by intervening on his behalf. Like that first episode in 1 Samuel, this episode encourages the exilic readers of the story, for it is another reminder that God does indeed vindicate his oppressed people when they turn to him for justice.

### Teaching the Text

1. *When the fulfillment of God's promise is delayed, God's chosen servants must resist the temptation to force the issue, and they must instead do what is right and wait for God's timing.* In this episode David's behavior is a model of how God's chosen servants should respond amid oppression. Resisting his men's interpretation of circumstances and refusing to impose his own spin on God's promise (v. 4), David chooses to respect Saul and to wait for the promise to materialize in God's own good time. He does not know when God will give him the throne, but he does know that it is wrong for him to lift his hand against the Lord's anointed and that he can trust God's just character. This is a relevant episode for all those who possess a promise from God but find themselves in a precarious position where the promise is delayed and may even seem to be in jeopardy. It encourages the oppressed people of God to wait on him and to take refuge in his justice, rather than trying to force the issue through their own efforts.
2. *When enduring oppression as one waits for God's promise to materialize, one must look to God for vindication.* In the face of injustice and persecution, David refuses to take vengeance into his own hands and appeals to God as the righteous Judge (v. 12). Though God does not yet give David the throne, he does vindicate him. Saul acknowledges David's innocence, pronounces a blessing upon him, and even assures him that his destiny will be realized. David's decision to look to God as his vindicator, rather than to follow the advice of his men, is a reminder that vengeance belongs to the Lord (Deut. 32:35; Rom. 12:17–21).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Robert B. Chisholm Jr., *1 & 2 Samuel*, ed. Mark L. Strauss, John H. Walton, and Rosalie de Rosset, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 158–163.