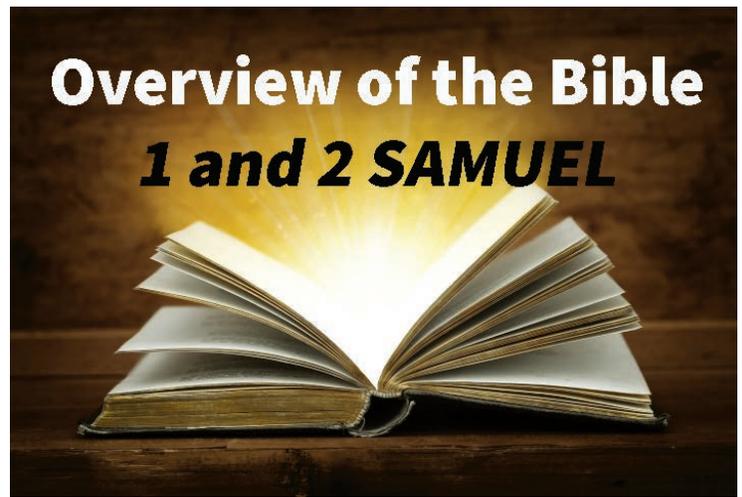


# DAVID SPARES SAUL'S LIFE - AGAIN

## 1 Samuel 26 Lesson 67

Wednesday, December 1, 2021  
Pastor Blake Gideon



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

### The Text in Context

For a second time in the story, the Ziphites report David's whereabouts to Saul (cf. 1 Sam. 23:19). Earlier Saul confessed David's innocence and even asked the Lord to bless David (1 Sam. 24:16–21), but now again the king is ready to hunt David down and kill him. David decides once more to demonstrate his loyalty to Saul. Though the Lord again seemingly delivers Saul into his hands, David refuses to strike the Lord's anointed. When Saul realizes that David has again spared his life, he confesses his sin and promises not to harm David in the future. David appeals to the Lord for vindication, and Saul blesses him and assures him of future success.

The similarity of this episode to the one recorded in 1 Samuel 24 is striking. The events are clearly distinct, as the many differences in incidental details indicate. However, at their thematic core the accounts are parallel. By recording both of these incidents, the narrator establishes beyond all doubt David's innocence and Saul's guilt.

### Key Themes of 1 Samuel 26

- Though David again has the opportunity to 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 again appeals to the Lord for justice and is vindicated when Saul exonerates and blesses him.

### Interpretive Insights

**26:5** *Then David set out and went to the place where Saul had camped.* On the earlier occasion, David did not seek an encounter with Saul. But in this second incident, David is the aggressor and actively seeks a confrontation with Saul so that he can reaffirm his innocence and once again challenge the king's unjust treatment of him.

**26:7** *With his spear stuck in the ground near his head.* This bit of detail heightens the tension of the plot, because the proximity of Saul's spear highlights the temptation David faces to rid himself of his enemy with one quick stroke. Saul's spear has been mentioned before: on two occasions he tried to kill David with it (18:10–11; 19:9–10), and once he threw it at David's best friend, his own son Jonathan, for supporting David (20:33). In 22:6 it is mentioned again just before Saul launches his campaign against David and murders the priests at Nob for allegedly siding with David. Saul's spear symbolizes the king's hostility toward David and the mortal danger that Saul represents for him. But now David could rid himself of this threat to his life by grabbing his enemy's spear and transferring its location from the ground to Saul's head.

**26:9** *The LORD's anointed.* See the comment on 24:6 above.

**26:10** *The LORD himself will strike him.* The verb translated "strike" (*nagap*) is the same one used in 25:38 to describe how the Lord "struck" Nabal dead. David has seen the Lord's vindication in Nabal's case, and he is confident that the Lord will take Saul's life in his own good time, whether by natural causes or in battle. David's words ominously foreshadow Saul's death (see chap. 31).

**26:12** *The LORD had put them into a deep sleep.* As in earlier incidents, the Lord's intervention on David's behalf is apparent (see 23:14, 27–28; 25:32, 38–39).

**26:17** *David my son.* See the comment on 24:16 above. Once again Saul's form of address is a spontaneous admission of David's loyalty.

*my lord the king.* As before, David goes out of his way to express his allegiance and submission to Saul (see the comment on 24:8 above). He addresses Saul as "my lord" three times (vv. 17–19), calls him "king" six times (vv. 15–17, 19–20, 22), refers to him as the Lord's "anointed" twice in Saul's hearing (vv. 16, 23), and describes himself as Saul's "servant" twice (vv. 18–19).

**26:19** *If the LORD has incited you against me.* David reasons that Saul's obsession with killing him is the result of either divine or human deception. David has good reason to suspect the Lord of deceiving Saul. After all, because of Saul's blatant disobedience, the Lord has decreed the demise of the king and his family (1 Sam. 13:13–14; 15:26–29). Shortly after this the Lord dispatched an evil spirit to torment Saul (16:14–16, 23; 18:10; 19:9). David was hired to bring relief to Saul whenever this spirit tormented him (16:23). On two occasions the spirit incited Saul to try to kill David (18:10–11; 19:9–10). In light of these experiences, one can easily conclude that Saul's unrelenting attempt to kill David is a sign of the Lord's disfavor with Saul. In other words, as an act of divine judgment, the Lord is prompting Saul to do this evil thing, as proof to everyone that the king is unfit to rule. If this is the case, David argues, then Saul should present an offering to God in an attempt to appease God's anger (cf. 3:14).

### Abishai, David's Nephew

Abishai is one of three sons of David's sister Zeruiah; the others are Joab and Asahel (2 Sam. 2:18; 1 Chron. 2:16). Abishai is a bold warrior (2 Sam. 21:16–17) and ready to kill at the drop of a hat (2 Sam. 3:30; 16:9–10; 19:21; 20:10). He and his brothers become a tremendous burden to David (2 Sam. 3:39; 16:10; 19:22).

The other option, from David's perspective, is that evil men are behind this, advising Saul to kill David (cf. 24:9). If this is the case, David prays that the Lord will judge these men, for the king's pursuit, prompted by their advice, is putting pressure on David to leave Judah. This is equivalent to depriving him of his rightful inheritance in the Lord's covenant community. Worse yet, they are essentially encouraging him to run away to another land and worship other gods, in direct violation of God's covenant (Deut. 11:16; 13:6–18; 17:2–7; Josh. 23:16). But David remains a loyal servant of the Lord, as his appeal makes clear (1 Sam. 26:20). If he must die, he wishes that it would be close to the Lord's presence. This confession of loyalty to the Lord is important, for David has already sought asylum in Philistine territory (21:9–15) and is about to do so again (27:1–12). By including this quotation, the narrator makes it clear that David has not renounced his God.

**26:21** *I have sinned.* This statement and the one made in 24:17 (see the comment there) 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. For the third time in the story the words "I have sinned" come from Saul's lips. When confronted by Samuel after his failure to wipe out the Amalekites, he twice acknowledged that he had sinned (15:24, 30). His son Jonathan warned him that taking David's life would be sin (19:4–5), and now Saul admits the truth of this. The verbal linking of this confession of guilt with the earlier one is a powerful literary device: by it the narrator characterizes Saul as a sinner. His sin in the Amalekite affair has prompted God to formally reject him as king and to withdraw his Spirit. Most of his energy after that incident has been directed toward David's demise, but by his own admission, his efforts have been sinful.

*Come back, David my son.* This invitation contributes to the narrator's depiction of David as innocent, for it shows that David, by Saul's own admission, is not a threat to him.

*I have acted like a fool.* This confession echoes Samuel's rebuke of Saul, following his decision to offer the sacrifice at Gilgal before Samuel's arrival (13:13). The verbal link between this verse and 13:13 (the only other passage in which this verb occurs in 1 Samuel) contributes to the narrator's characterization of Saul. Samuel's assessment of him on that earlier occasion is still true, by Saul's own admission.

**26:24** *so may the LORD value my life and deliver me from all trouble.* David's words echo his confident affirmation before his victory over Goliath (see 17:37, where the verb translated "deliver" in 26:24 occurs twice). The verbal link characterizes David as one who trusts in the Lord's protective power in both the past and the present, in contrast to Saul, who is depicted as a foolish sinner in both the past and the present (see v. 21).

**26:25** So David went on his way. Apparently, David's rejection of Saul's offer and promise (v. 21) is a wise decision, because 27:4 implies that Saul gives up his quest only when David flees to Gath.

### Theological Insights

Like the episode recorded in chapter 24, this account highlights David's refusal to promote his own interests, and his faith in God's justice and timing. Once more 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. It is especially significant that these are the last words Saul ever speaks to David. Again, David's appeal and Saul's blessing are significant to the narrator's strategy: they remind us that later events must be understood within a legal framework. David's 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. For the exilic readers of the story, this account reiterates the important theme that God does indeed vindicate his oppressed people when they turn to him for justice.

While there is thematic continuity between the two accounts, the episode in chapter 26 does exhibit at least two additional and distinctive elements. First, the verbal linking noted above highlights the narrator's characterization of Saul as a foolish sinner (cf. 26:21 with 13:13; 15:24, 30) and his depiction of David as one who trusts in God's power to deliver (cf. 26:24 with 17:37). Second, David's warning to Saul raises the possibility that God himself is deceiving Saul (26:19). We are reminded that, in addition to rejecting Saul and removing his enabling Spirit, God sent an "evil spirit" to oppress and oppose Saul. In this way observers will know that Saul no longer enjoys God's favor. God opposes his enemies in different ways. He sometimes allows sinners to pursue evil actions, which in turn prompt God's judgment (Rom. 1:18–32). He may even harden or deceive his enemies (Rom. 9:18; 2 Thess. 2:11–12). The sobering words of Hebrews 10:31 remind us that it is "a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

### Teaching the Text

The two primary themes in this episode are the same as those in chapter 24:

1. *When the fulfillment of God's promise is delayed, God's chosen servants must resist the temptation to force the issue and must instead do what is right and wait for God's timing.* As in the earlier episode, David's behavior is a model of how God's chosen servants should respond amid oppression. As we stated earlier, David's restraint is an example 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 God 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.* As we noted with regard to the earlier incident, David refuses to take vengeance into his own hands and appeals to God to reward him for his restraint by protecting him (vv. 23–24). As before, Saul acknowledges David's innocence, pronounces a blessing upon him, and even assures him of future success. David's decision to look to God as his vindicator, rather than following the advice of his men, is a reminder that vengeance belongs to the Lord (Deut. 32:35; Rom. 12:17–21).

## Illustrating the Text

### *The believer must wait on God's timing, maintaining integrity during the wait*

**Poetry: St. Patrick.** This prayer by St. Patrick (387–493), who was born in Scotland and traveled throughout Ireland while preaching the simple gospel of Jesus Christ, has been called one of the most powerful Christian poems written. It is a declaration of faith in which Patrick asks to be protected in the hour of need, and it was written in the first year of his missionary life. It echoes David's dependence on God as he refuses to take vengeance. One version of the prayer is as follows:

I bind myself today,  
To the power of God to guide me,  
The might of God to uphold me,  
The wisdom of God to teach me,  
The eyes of God to watch over me,  
The ear of God to hear me,  
The Word of God to speak for me,  
The hand of God to protect me,  
The way of God to lie before me,  
The shield of God to shelter me,  
The host of God to defend me,  
Christ with me, Christ before me,  
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,  
Christ at my right, Christ at my left,  
Christ in breadth, Christ in length, Christ in height,  
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,  
Christ in the mouth of every man who speaks to me,  
Christ in the eye of every man that sees me,  
Christ in the ear of every man who hears me.  
Salvation is the Lord's  
Salvation is the Lord's  
Salvation is the Lord's  
Let thy salvation, O Lord, be ever with us.

### *The believer must leave vengeance and vindication in God's hands*

**Film: *Death Sentence*.** Prudence is a virtue seldom discussed and not to be confused with goodness. C. S. Lewis said that prudence is taking the time and effort to think about what you are doing and what might come of it. Prudence contains discernment and acts wisely. *Death Sentence* (2007), a movie based on the novel by Brian Garfield, demonstrates the consequences of ignoring prudence, of taking vindication into one's own hands, the opposite of what is taught in 1 Samuel 26. It is a violent and disturbing film that tells the story of Nick Hume (played by Kevin Bacon), initially a mild-mannered executive with a perfect family and life. One horrifying night when his car breaks down in a dangerous area, he witnesses the brutal death of his son at the hands of a sociopathic gang. This event changes Hume forever. Embittered by grief, he eventually comes to a disturbing conclusion that he must go to any length to avenge his son's death. After the desire for vengeance has infected him, Hume gradually becomes like the evil characters who first victimized his son. The movie teaches the evil of such self-proclaimed vigilante justice.<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), 170–175.