

David Spares Saul's Life

1 Samuel 24

1 Samuel 24 - "Now it happened, when Saul had returned from following the Philistines, that it was told him, saying, "Take note! David is in the Wilderness of En Gedi."² Then Saul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel, and went to seek David and his men on the Rocks of the Wild Goats.³ So he came to the sheepfolds by the road, where there was a cave; and Saul went in to attend to his needs. (David and his men were staying in the recesses of the cave.)⁴ Then the men of David said to him, "This is the day of which the LORD said to you, 'Behold, I will deliver your enemy into your hand, that you may do to him as it seems good to you.'" And David arose and secretly cut off a corner of Saul's robe.⁵ Now it happened afterward that David's heart troubled him because he had cut Saul's robe.⁶ And he said to his men, "The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the LORD's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the LORD."⁷ So David restrained his servants with these words, and did not allow them to rise against Saul. And Saul got up from the cave and went on his way.

⁸ David also arose afterward, went out of the cave, and called out to Saul, saying, "My lord the king!" And when Saul looked behind him, David stooped with his face to the earth, and bowed down.⁹ And David said to Saul: "Why do you listen to the words of men who say, 'Indeed David seeks your harm'?"¹⁰ Look, this day your eyes have seen that the LORD delivered you today into my hand in the cave, and someone urged me to kill you. But my eye spared you, and I said, 'I will not stretch out my hand against my lord, for he is the LORD's anointed.'¹¹ Moreover, my father, see! Yes, see the corner of your robe in my hand! For in that I cut off the corner of your robe, and did not kill you, know and see that there is neither evil nor rebellion in my hand, and I have not sinned against you. Yet you hunt my life to take it.¹² Let the LORD judge between you and me, and let the LORD avenge me on you. But my hand shall not be against you.¹³ As the proverb of the ancients says, 'Wickedness proceeds from the wicked.' But my hand shall not be against you.¹⁴ After whom has the king of Israel come out? Whom do you pursue? A dead dog? A flea?¹⁵ Therefore let the LORD be judge, and judge between you and me, and see and plead my case, and deliver me out of your hand."

¹⁶ So it was, when David had finished speaking these words to Saul, that Saul said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" And Saul lifted up his voice and wept.¹⁷ Then he said to David: "You are more righteous than I; for you have rewarded me with good, whereas I have rewarded you with evil.¹⁸ And you have shown this day how you have dealt well with me; for when the LORD delivered me into your hand, you did not kill me.¹⁹ For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him get away safely? Therefore may the LORD reward you with good for what you have done to me this day.²⁰ And now I know indeed that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand.²¹ Therefore swear now 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 house."²² So David swore to Saul. And Saul went home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold."

Background Notes

In 1 Samuel 23, King Saul and his army had just about surrounded David and his men, and it looked like all hope was gone. But God delivered David! It just “so happened” that the Philistines invaded the land, and Saul and the army had to go and deal with that threat. 1 Samuel 23:26-29 - *“Then Saul went on one side of the mountain, and David and his men on the other side of the mountain. So David made haste to get away from Saul, for Saul and his men were encircling David and his men to take them. ²⁷ But a messenger came to Saul, saying, “Hurry and come, for the Philistines have invaded the land!” ²⁸ Therefore Saul returned from pursuing David, and went against the Philistines; so they called that place the Rock of Escape. ²⁹ Then David went up from there and dwelt in strongholds at En Gedi.”*

En Gedi means “the fountain of the young goat.” When you visit En Gedi even today, you can see ibex, or wild goats, roaming the steep, rocky hillsides. En Gedi is located in steep hills along the west side of the Dead Sea. It was an excellent place for David to hide out because of the caves and easily defended strongholds in the rocks. In addition, there is a good supply of fresh water from springs and streams in that part of the Judean wilderness.

Well, it wasn't long before King Saul dealt with the Philistines and resumed his pursuit of David. He heard that David was camped at En Gedi, and he came with 3000 chosen soldiers from his special forces to try, once again, to capture David. David and his men were hiding in a large cave that had inner recesses. Saul came into the cave either to take a rest or to relieve himself. The Hebrew phrase used here means literally to “cover his feet,” and is probably a euphemism for the way a robe would cover your feet when you are relieving yourself. In any case, David had a golden opportunity to eliminate King Saul once and for all. Instead he only cut off the edge of Saul's robe - and later he felt guilty about even doing that to the king.

Doctrinal Points

1. Godly people let the Lord plead their cause.

Romans 12:19 - *“Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.”* David didn't know Romans 12:19 because Romans was not yet written, but David knew and practiced that biblical principle. David knew that God would plead his cause. *“Therefore let the LORD be judge, and judge between you and me, and see and plead my case, and deliver me out of your hand” (v15).* Because Saul was not just fighting David, but fighting the Lord, it was only a matter of time before the Lord removed Saul and delivered David. David knew that he had been anointed as the next king of Israel, so he could wait for the Lord to act on his behalf. God had installed Saul as the anointed king, and Saul was still king. How could David dare to remove Saul before it was God's time?

If we had been David, how many of us would have listened to the advice of our friends, and decided that this was a God-given opportunity (sent by the Lord Himself!) to eliminate our enemy once and for all. I'm afraid I would have thought that

way. How about you? But David rose above such “me first” thinking. He saw the bigger picture. David knew that Saul was fighting God, and he knew that Saul was no match for the Lord. All David had to do was depend on the Lord and wait.

If only we could do the same. Too often, because of pride and impatience, we take matters into our own hands. We take our own revenge – sometimes even thanking the Lord for the opportunity to take our own revenge, of all things! If we’re walking with the Lord, we don’t have to take our own revenge or plead our own cause. When we’re walking with the Lord, those who are against us are fighting against the Lord, to one degree or another. We don’t have to take our own revenge. Remember Romans 12:19 *“Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.”* Never take your own revenge!

As the perfect Man, the Lord Jesus never took revenge. 1 Peter 2:23 says, *“when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously...”* Godly people let the Lord plead their cause.

2. Ungodly people say one thing and do another.

Verses 16-18: *“So it was, when David had finished speaking these words to Saul, that Saul said, “Is this your voice, my son David?” And Saul lifted up his voice and wept. ¹⁷ Then he said to David: “You are more righteous than I; for you have rewarded me with good, whereas I have rewarded you with evil. ¹⁸ And you have shown this day how you have dealt well with me; for when the LORD delivered me into your hand, you did not kill me.”*

Now if we didn’t know the rest of the story, we would assume that King Saul had genuinely repented and changed his ways - right? After all, he wept (v16) and he acknowledged that David was right and he was wrong (v17). Saul realized that the Lord had delivered him into David’s hand, and David could easily have killed him. But David showed mercy (v18-19). Saul knew that David would be the next king (v20), and he was willing to acknowledge that truth by making an agreement with David (v22). So, David swore to be loyal and kind to Saul’s descendants, and Saul went home - but David and his men went up to the stronghold.

But ungodly people say one thing and do another. It wasn’t long before Saul was pursuing David again, as we’ll see in 1 Samuel 26. David knew that ungodly people say one thing and do another, and that’s why David and his men went up to the stronghold when Saul went home. By the way, “the stronghold” may be a reference to Masada. The Hebrew word for “stronghold” is *masada*.

In the last verse of 1 Samuel 23, David was staying in the strongholds of En Gedi. But now it appears that he moved about ten miles south to “the stronghold,” perhaps Masada. Masada is a natural fortification, and easily defended, as we know from later history. David went up to the stronghold because he didn’t trust King Saul. Why? Because ungodly people say one thing and do another.

This is still true today. Many Christians have been hurt, disappointed, burned or ripped off because they put their trust in ungodly people or ungodly institutions or ungodly organizations. Be careful whom you trust, because ungodly people say one thing and do another.

Practical Application

Wait for the Lord in all areas of life.

Although we don't know exactly when David wrote Psalm 28, throughout the whole Psalm we see David reflecting on many of the experiences he went through when he was escaping from King Saul. Listen to verses 2-3: *"Hear the voice of my supplications when I cry to You, when I lift up my hands toward Your holy sanctuary. Do not take me away with the wicked and with the workers of iniquity, who speak peace to their neighbors, but evil is in their hearts."*

And in Psalm 27:14 David wrote, *"Wait on the LORD; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart. Wait, I say, on the LORD!"*

David learned to wait for the Lord from his experiences with King Saul. Even when he had an opportunity to eliminate King Saul, David waited for the Lord - and so should we! This is one reason why God permits us to go through testing and trying situations. Will we wait for the Lord? Now unfortunately David, like the rest of us, did not always wait for the Lord in all areas of life. David didn't wait for the Lord in his affair with Bathsheba; he let his passions take control.

What about us? Let's wait for the Lord in all areas of life!