

# FIRST SAMUEL

## Chapter 26

*David Spares Saul Again*

Then the Ziphites came to Saul at Gibeah, saying, "Is not David hiding himself on the hill of Hachilah, which is on the east of Jeshimon?" 2 So Saul arose and went down to the wilderness of Ziph with three thousand chosen men of Israel to seek David in the wilderness of Ziph. 3 And Saul encamped on the hill of Hachilah, which is beside the road on the east of Jeshimon. But David remained in the wilderness. When he saw that Saul came after him into the wilderness, 4 David sent out spies and learned that Saul had indeed come. 5 Then David rose and came to the place where Saul had encamped. And David saw the place where Saul lay, with Abner the son of Ner, the commander of his army. Saul was lying within the encampment, while the army was encamped around him. 6 Then David said to Ahimelech the Hittite, and to Joab's brother Abishai the son of Zeruiah, "Who will go down with me into the camp to Saul?" And Abishai said, "I will go down with you." 7 So David and Abishai went to the army by night. And there lay Saul sleeping within the encampment, with his spear stuck in the ground at his head, and Abner and the army lay around him. 8 Then Abishai said to David, "God has given your enemy into your hand this day. Now please let me pin him to the earth with one stroke of the spear, and I will not strike him twice." 9 But David said to Abishai, "Do not destroy him, for who can put out his hand against the LORD's anointed and be guiltless?" 10 And David said, "As the LORD lives, the LORD will strike him, or his day will come to die, or he will go down into battle and perish. 11 The LORD forbid that I should put out my hand against the LORD's anointed. But take now the spear that is at his head and the jar of water, and let us go." 12 So David took the spear and the jar of water from Saul's head, and they went away. No man saw it or knew it, nor did any awake, for they were all asleep, because a deep sleep from the LORD had fallen upon them. 13 Then David went over to the other side and stood far off on the top of the hill, with a great space between them. 14 And David called to the army, and to Abner the son of Ner, saying, "Will you not answer, Abner?" Then Abner answered, "Who are you who calls to the king?" 15 And David said to Abner, "Are you not a man? Who is like you in Israel? Why then have you not kept watch over your lord the king? For one of the people came in to destroy the king your lord. 16 This thing that you have done is not good. As the LORD lives, you deserve to die, because you have not kept watch over your lord, the LORD's anointed. And now see where the king's spear is and the jar of water that was at his head." 17 Saul recognized David's voice and said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" And David said, "It is my voice, my lord, O king." 18 And he said, "Why does my lord pursue after his servant? For what have I done? What evil is on my hands? 19 Now therefore let my lord the king hear the words of his servant. If it is the LORD who has stirred you up against me, may he accept an offering, but if it is men, may they be cursed before the LORD, for they have driven me out this day that I should have no share in the heritage of the LORD, saying, 'Go, serve other gods.' 20 Now therefore, let not my blood fall to the earth away from the presence of the LORD, for the king of Israel has come out to seek a single flea like one who hunts a partridge in the mountains." 21 Then Saul said, "I have sinned. Return, my son David, for I will no more do you harm, because my life was precious in your eyes this day. Behold, I have acted foolishly, and have made a great mistake." 22 And David answered and said, "Here is the spear, O king! Let one of the young men come over and take it. 23 The LORD rewards every man for his righteousness and his faithfulness, for the LORD gave you into my hand today, and I would not put out my hand against the LORD's anointed. 24 Behold, as your life was precious this day in my sight, so may my life be precious in the sight of the LORD, and may he deliver me out of all tribulation." 25 Then Saul said to David, "Blessed be you, my son David! You will do many things and will succeed in them." So David went his way, and Saul returned to his place.

**26:2** Saul's reconciliation with David in ch 24 was temporary. The true (evil) spirit (16:14) now asserts itself. (TLSB)

*three thousand.* Apparently Saul's standing army (see 24:2). (CSB)

Same size as force in 24:2, five times that of David. (TLSB)

**26:3** *saw.* Possibly figure of speech, based on news of Saul's advance. Cf v 4. (TLSB)

**26:4** *sent out spies.* Unlike the previous encounter, David proactively seeks his persecutor. (TLSB)

**26:5** *had encamped.* David arrived at Saul's camp during the night when the men were sleeping. (CSB)

*Abner.* Saul's cousin. (CSB)

Presence of Saul's army commander shows the seriousness of his intent. (TLSB)

**26:6** *Ahimelech the Hittite.* Not referred to elsewhere. Hittites had long resided in Canaan. Another Hittite in David's service was Uriah (see 2Sa 11:3; 23:39). (CSB)

Not to be confused with the priest of the same name in ch 22. (TLSB)

*Abishai son of Zeruiah, Joab's brother.* Zeruiah was an older sister of David (1Ch 2:16), so Abishai and Joab (and their brother Asahel, 2Sa 2:18) were David's nephews as well as trusted military leaders. Joab would long serve as the commander of his army. (CSB)

**26:7** David's 600 men got past 3,000 men by stealth, while the camp was asleep (v 12). (TLSB)

**26:8** *Abishai.* Impulsive warrior (cf 2Sm 16:9). (TLSB)

*God has given your enemy into your hand.* Exactly what David's companions suggested in the cave (24:4). (TLSB)

**26:9** David's response echoes what he said in the cave (24:6). To strike the Lord's anointed is to sin against the Lord. (TLSB)

**26:10** *the LORD will strike him.* As in previous encounter (25:36–39), vengeance is reserved for God. This does not necessarily mean that David hopes for it. (TLSB)

**26:11** *Take now the spear ... and the jar.* As in ch 24, evidence is secured to prove David's opportunity to kill Saul or, indeed, to show mercy. This spear is the very thing with which Saul had attempted to kill David (18:11). Ephr: "Let a man show mercy to his persecutors, as did Jesse's son to Saul" (NPNF 2 13:226). (TLSB)

*water.* Had to be carried; much needed in this arid region. (TLSB)

**26:12** *David took the spear and jar of water.* In this way he sought to prove again to Saul that he did not seek his life. (CSB)

*deep sleep from the LORD.* Same expression describes the stupor induced in Adam, sufficient anesthesia for God to remove Adam's rib. Sleep, however, is also a biblical metaphor for lack of spiritual alertness (cf Is 29:10). (TLSB)

**26:13** *other side.* A facing hill, separated by a safe distance. Deep crags are found throughout the region. (TLSB)

**26:14** *to the army.* David's accusation is leveled against the whole army, which had failed to guard its king. (TLSB)

**26:15** *Are you not a man?* Charge against Abner allows only two options: to admit incompetence or to admit indifference or worse. (TLSB)

**26:16** *you deserve to die.* Common punishment for dereliction of duty. God disabled Abner and his army (v 12). David demonstrates loyalty to the king by favorable comparison to Abner. (TLSB)

**26:17** *my son.* my lord, O king. David replies in kind. (TLSB)

**26:18** David's protest is more insistent than in previous encounter. He demands to know precisely what Saul might hold against him. (TLSB)

**26:19** *may he accept an offering.* David knows no reason why God should be angry with him; but if for some reason God is behind Saul's determined effort to kill him, David appeals for God to accept an offering of appeasement (cf. 16:5)—in any event, to let the matter be settled between David and God, without Saul's involvement. (CSB)

*if it is men.* Cf 24:9, where David had no doubt that Saul was listening to malicious or misguided men. (TLSB)

*may they be cursed before the LORD!* David commits any such men to the judgment of God. (CSB)

*in the heritage of the LORD.* David appeals to Saul's conscience by describing his present exclusion from the fellowship of God's people and from living at peace in the Lord's land. (CSB)

*Go, serve other gods.* In their view, to be expelled from the Lord's land was to be separated from the Lord's sanctuary (an OT form of excommunication) and left to serve the gods of whatever land one may settle in (see Jos 22:24–27). (CSB)

**26:20** *seek a single flea.* See 24:14. David suggests that Saul is making a fool of himself in his fanatical pursuit of an innocent and undesigning man. (CSB)

*one who hunts a partridge.* Exhausting chase for hunter and quarry. Birds were typically snared, not chased. (TLSB)

**26:21** *I have acted foolishly.* Saul confesses that his behavior has been not only unwise but also ungodly. (CSB)

David has professed his innocence, but Saul must confess his guilt. His mistake is rooted in foolishness, like Nabal's (ch 25). (TLSB)

**26:22** As a token of trust, David returns the spear that Saul had once hurled at him in anger. (TLSB)

**26:23** *the LORD gave you into my hand.* David may view the experience as a test. Although God provided the opportunity, David did not take vengeance. God, who always rewards righteousness, will reward David for this. (TLSB)

**26:24** David draws an analogy between the esteem he showed for the life of the undeserving Saul and that which he hopes God will show for his life in the challenging times ahead. How David's wish became reality is abundantly illustrated in 2Sm. (TLSB)

**26:25** *you will ... succeed.* Saul makes a veiled reference to his own conviction that David will replace him as king (see 24:20). (CSB)

Saul's prediction of David's future success is the final parallel with ch 24 (v 20). David left the matter there, but surely he had learned from the earlier experience that Saul's repentance might be short-lived. (TLSB)

**Ch 26** Saul again pursues David, who demonstrates that he is a faithful, forgiving servant. Jesus, the Son of David, directs us to forgive "seventy times seven" (Mt 18:22; without limit). He teaches this also by example, demonstrating His limitless forgiveness toward us. • Dearest Jesus, forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Grant us due patience with erring brothers and sisters. Amen. (TLSB)