FIRST SAMUEL

Chapter 24

*David Spares Saul’s Life*

**After Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, “David is in the Desert of En Gedi.” 2 So Saul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel and set out to look for David and his men near the Crags of the Wild Goats. 3 He came to the sheep pens along the way; a cave was there, and Saul went in to relieve himself. David and his men were far back in the cave. 4 The men said, “This is the day the Lord spoke of when he said to you, ‘I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish.’ ” Then David crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul’s robe. 5 Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe. 6 He said to his men, “The Lord forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the Lord’s anointed, or lift my hand against him; for he is the anointed of the Lord.” 7 With these words David rebuked his men and did not allow them to attack Saul. And Saul left the cave and went his way. 8 Then David went out of the cave and called out to Saul, “My lord the king!” When Saul looked behind him, David bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. 9 He said to Saul, “Why do you listen when men say, ‘David is bent on harming you’? 10 This day you have seen with your own eyes how the Lord delivered you into my hands in the cave. Some urged me to kill you, but I spared you; I said, ‘I will not lift my hand against my master, because he is the Lord’s anointed.’ 11 See, my father, look at this piece of your robe in my hand! I cut off the corner of your robe but did not kill you. Now understand and recognize that I am not guilty of wrongdoing or rebellion. I have not wronged you, but you are hunting me down to take my life. 12 May the Lord judge between you and me. And may the Lord avenge the wrongs you have done to me, but my hand will not touch you. 13 As the old saying goes, ‘From evildoers come evil deeds,’ so my hand will not touch you. 14 “Against whom has the king of Israel come out? Whom are you pursuing? A dead dog? A flea? 15 May the Lord be our judge and decide between us. May he consider my cause and uphold it; may he vindicate me by delivering me from your hand.” 16 When David finished saying this, Saul asked, “Is that your voice, David my son?” And he wept aloud. 17 “You are more righteous than I,” he said. “You have treated me well, but I have treated you badly. 18 You have just now told me of the good you did to me; the Lord delivered me into your hands, but you did not kill me. 19 When a man finds his enemy, does he let him get away unharmed? May the Lord reward you well for the way you treated me today. 20 I know that you will surely be king and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hands. 21 Now swear to me by the Lord that you will not cut off my descendants or wipe out my name from my father’s family.” 22 So David gave his oath to Saul. Then Saul returned home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.**

**24:2** *three thousand chosen men*. Select troops outnumber David’s troops five to one. (TLSB)

*Wildgoats’ Rocks*. Ibex live on these cliffs, illustrating their ruggedness. (TLSB)

**24:3** *relieve himself*. Need for privacy brought Saul into the cave, where he would be alone and unguarded. (TLSB)

*his men*. All 600 men required a large cave or complex of caves, though most of them may have been sheltering elsewhere. (TLSB)

**24:4** *This is the day the Lord spoke of when he said.* There is no previous record of the divine revelation here alluded to by David’s men. Perhaps this was their own interpretation of the anointing of David to replace Saul (see 16:13–14), or of assurances given to David that he would survive Saul’s vendetta against him and ultimately become king (see 20:14–15; 23:17). If the alternative given in the NIV text note is taken, the reference would not be to a verbal communication from the Lord but to the providential nature of the incident itself, which David’s men understood as a revelation from God that David should not ignore. (CSB)

This promise is not recorded earlier in the Bible. (TLSB)

*as it shall seem good to you*. In the minds of the men, this meant killing Saul, but David showed godly restraint. (TLSB)

**24:5** *David’s heart struck him*. Though he had acted with moderation, David still had a sense of having violated God’s anointed. (TLSB)

**24:6** *for he is the anointed of the Lord*. Because Saul’s royal office carried divine sanction by virtue of his anointing (see note on 9:16), David is determined not to wrest the kingship from Saul but to leave its disposition to the Lord who gave it (see vv. 12, 15; 26:10). (CSB)

Although God subsequently revoked His choice (13:13–14), and David himself had already been anointed (16:13), it was not for him to force the succession or to disrespect the anointed. (TLSB)

**24:7** *with these words*. David used words of persuasion to convince his men, while Saul ensured compliance through fear. (TLSB)

**24:8** David’s homage exposes him to vulnerability. Nevertheless, his reverence for the Lord and His anointed outweighs the danger. (TLSB)

**24:9** Rhetorical question conveys deferential rebuke. Saul should not listen to his men, because their words are untrue. Unfortunately, the cowardly reinforcement of a despot’s paranoia is a common response. (TLSB)

**24:10** *my hand*. Wordplay begins in this verse. The Lord left Saul at David’s mercy (“in his hand”), but David would not extend that hand against Saul. David repeats the reasons he gave at the time (v 6). Ambr: “All learned to observe faith to their king and not to seize the kingdom, but to fear and reverence him. Thus what is virtuous was preferred to what was useful, and then usefulness followed on what was virtuous” (*NPNF* 2 10:77). (TLSB)

**24:11** *my father.* Saul was David’s father-in-law (see 18:27). (CSB)

*in my hands*. Saul had expected to find treason in David’s hands, which held only a piece of cloth testifying to the very opposite. (TLSB)

**24:12** *may the Lord* *avenge me*. Does not necessarily mean that David wished Saul ill. David leaves vengeance to God rather than seeking to manipulate it. Cf Rm 12:19. (TLSB)

**24:13** *proverb of* *the ancients*. Anticipates Jesus’ teaching (Mt 15:18–20). (TLSB)

**24:14** *dead dog!*… *flea!* With modest and self-effacing words, David indicates he is not worth pursuit by the king of Israel. As scavengers, dogs were despised. Nothing was more useless or unclean than a dead dog. (TLSB)

**24:15** The Lord is called on as a perfectly qualified judge and as David’s advocate; see similar roles of Christ (1Jn 2:1) and the Spirit (Jn 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). (TLSB)

**24:16** *my son*. Saul returns the affection of David (v 11). (TLSB)

*he wept aloud.* Saul experiences temporary remorse (see 26:21) for his actions against David but quickly reverts to his former determination to kill him (see 26:2). (CSB)

His tears are those of regret, though these feelings quickly give way to baser ones. Luth: “This is the way hypocrites act. They feign friendship until an opportunity to inflict harm presents itself” (AE 1:271). Chem: “The repentance … does not consist only in recognizing or confessing their sins and certainly not in persevering or continuing in them.… Saul returned to his vomit and again persecuted David.… Scripture says, we must certainly cease from evil and desist from sinning. For what kind of nonsense is it to devise for ourselves a license to sin?” (*LTh* 2:681). (TLSB)

**24:17** *righteous*. See p 843. *repaid*. God repays evil (Rm 12:19); we should not pursue personal revenge (Rm 12:17). David went further, doing good to those who hated him (cf Lk 6:27–35). (TLSB)

**24:18–19** Saul acknowledges the extraordinary and unnatural character of David’s mercy and asks for the Lord to repay him for the good he has done, which agrees with David’s request. (TLSB)

**24:20** *in your hand*. Final play on the word “hand” finds Saul prophesying that his kingdom shall, in fact, be the thing established in David’s hand. This confirms what Jonathan has already declared his father knew (23:17). (TLSB)

**24:21** *not cut off my descendants.* See notes on 20:14–15. (CSB)

Final loss, not only to himself, but to his family, whose name would thereby die out. (TLSB)

**24:22** *swore*. David kept his promise by offering protection to Jonathan’s son Mephibosheth (2Sm 9). (TLSB)

*stronghold.* An inaccessible place (see note on 22:4). From previous experience David did not place any confidence in Saul’s words of repentance. (CSB)

Perhaps Engedi, or a return to the cave of Adullam (22:1). (TLSB)

**Ch 24** David’s compassion for vulnerable Saul is motivated by respect for God and His anointed. It is met warmly by Saul, resulting in a temporary truce. Today, be ready to show compassion even to your enemies, as God in Christ has demonstrated His undeserved love to you. • Gracious Lord, thank You for sending Your true Anointed One to bring mercy to me while I was Your enemy. Amen. (TLSB)