

# FIRST SAMUEL

## Chapter 24

*David Spares Saul's Life*

When Saul returned from following the Philistines, he was told, "Behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi." 2 Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel and went to seek David and his men in front of the Wildgoats' Rocks. 3 And he came to the sheepfolds by the way, where there was a cave, and Saul went in to relieve himself. Now David and his men were sitting in the innermost parts of the cave. 4 And the men of David said to him, "Here is the day of which the LORD said to you, 'Behold, I will give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it shall seem good to you.'" Then David arose and stealthily cut off a corner of Saul's robe. 5 And afterward David's heart struck him, because he had cut off a corner of Saul's robe. 6 He said to his men, "The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD's anointed, to put out my hand against him, seeing he is the LORD's anointed." 7 So David persuaded his men with these words and did not permit them to attack Saul. And Saul rose up and left the cave and went on his way. 8 Afterward David also arose and went out of the cave, and called after Saul, "My lord the king!" And when Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his face to the earth and paid homage. 9 And David said to Saul, "Why do you listen to the words of men who say, 'Behold, David seeks your harm'?" 10 Behold, this day your eyes have seen how the LORD gave you today into my hand in the cave. And some told me to kill you, but I spared you.[c] I said, 'I will not put out my hand against my lord, for he is the LORD's anointed.' 11 See, my father, see the corner of your robe in my hand. For by the fact that I cut off the corner of your robe and did not kill you, you may know and see that there is no wrong or treason in my hands. I have not sinned against you, though you hunt my life to take it. 12 May the LORD judge between me and you, may the LORD avenge me against you, but my hand shall not be against you. 13 As the proverb of the ancients says, 'Out of the wicked comes wickedness.' But my hand shall not be against you. 14 After whom has the king of Israel come out? After whom do you pursue? After a dead dog! After a flea! 15 May the LORD therefore be judge and give sentence between me and you, and see to it and plead my cause and deliver me from your hand." 16 As soon as David had finished speaking these words to Saul, Saul said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" And Saul lifted up his voice and wept. 17 He said to David, "You are more righteous than I, for you have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil. 18 And you have declared this day how you have dealt well with me, in that you did not kill me when the LORD put me into your hands. 19 For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go away safe? So may the LORD reward you with good for what you have done to me this day. 20 And now, behold, I know that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand. 21 Swear to me therefore by the LORD that you will not cut off my offspring after me, and that you will not destroy my name out of my father's house." 22 And David swore this to Saul. Then Saul went 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 said to you.* 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). (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** *he is the anointed of the LORD.* Because Saul's royal office carried divine sanction by virtue of his anointing, 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)

*Saul wept*. 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 offspring*. 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 plac. 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)