

“A Christian Response to Toxic Abuse”
A sermon preached at Heritage Presbyterian Church
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21 July 2024
1 Samuel 24:1-15
1 Samuel 26:6-12, 21-25

1 Samuel 24 (note that the ET differs from the Hebrew text by 1 verse, so that ET 1-15 = MT 2-16; the sermon will use the ET
versification without referencing the MT)

¹When Saul returned from following the Philistines, he was told, “David is in the wilderness of En-gedi.” ²Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel, and went to look for David and his men in the direction of the Rocks of the Wild Goats. ³He came to the sheepfolds beside the road, 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. ⁴The men of David said to him, “Here is the day of which the LORD said to you, ‘I will give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it seems good to you.’” Then David went and stealthily cut off a corner of Saul’s cloak. ⁵Afterwards David was stricken to the heart because he had cut off a corner of Saul’s cloak. ⁶He said to his men, “The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the Lord’s anointed, to raise my hand against him; for he is the Lord’s anointed.” ⁷So David scolded his men severely and did not permit them to attack Saul. Then Saul got up and left the cave, and went on his way. ⁸Afterwards David also rose up and went out of the cave and called after Saul, “My lord the king!” When Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his face to the ground, and did obeisance.

⁹David said to Saul, “Why do you listen to the words of those who say, ‘David seeks to

do you harm’? ¹⁰This very day your eyes have seen how the LORD gave you into my hand in the cave; and some urged me to kill you, but I spared you. I said, ‘I will not raise my hand against my lord; for he is the Lord’s anointed.’ ¹¹See, my father, see the corner of your cloak in my hand; for by the fact that I cut off the corner of your cloak, and did not kill you, you may know for certain that there is no wrong or treason in my hands. I have not sinned against you, though you are hunting me to take my life. ¹²May the LORD judge between me and you! May the LORD avenge me on you; but my hand shall not be against you. ¹³As the ancient proverb says, ‘Out of the wicked comes forth wickedness’; but my hand shall not be against you. ¹⁴Against whom has the king of Israel come out? Whom do you pursue? A dead dog? A single flea? ¹⁵May the LORD therefore be judge, and give sentence between me and you. May he see to it, and plead my cause, and vindicate me against you.”

1 Samuel 26

⁶Then David said to Ahimelech the Hittite, and to Joab’s brother Abishai son of Zeruiah, “Who will go down with me into the camp to Saul?” Abishai said, “I will go down with you.” ⁷So David and Abishai went to the army by night; there Saul lay sleeping within the encampment, with his spear stuck in the ground at his head; and Abner and the army lay around him. ⁸Abishai said to David, “God has given your enemy into your hand today; now therefore let me pin him to the ground with one stroke of the spear; I will not strike him twice.” ⁹But David said to Abishai, “Do not destroy him; for who can raise his hand against the Lord’s anointed, and be guiltless?” ¹⁰David said, “As the LORD lives, the LORD will strike him down; or his day will come to die; or he will go down into battle and

perish. ¹¹The LORD forbid that I should raise my hand against the Lord's anointed; but now take the spear that is at his head, and the water jar, and let us go." ¹²So David took the spear that was at Saul's head and the water jar, and they went away. No one saw it, or knew it, nor did anyone awake; for they were all asleep, because a deep sleep from the LORD had fallen upon them.

²¹Then Saul said, "I have done wrong; come back, my son David, for I will never harm you again, because my life was precious in your sight today; I have been a fool, and have made a great mistake." ²²David replied, "Here is the spear, O king! Let one of the young men come over and get it. ²³The LORD rewards everyone for his righteousness and his faithfulness; for the LORD gave you into my hand today, but I would not raise my hand against the Lord's anointed. ²⁴As your life was precious today in my sight, so may my life be precious in the sight of the LORD, and may he rescue me from all tribulation."

²⁵Then 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.

I. Introduction

Over the last few Sundays, we have looked at the question of who would be the rightful king of ancient Israel. We saw in chapters 13-15 how Saul was initially selected by God but was subsequently rejected by God for his disobedience in chapters 13 and 15. We then saw two different narratives that tried to explain how David came into Saul's orbit. The first of these is contained at the end of 1 Samuel 16, which tells us that David came to be part of Saul's entourage because Saul would from time to time be possessed by an evil spirit from the LORD, and David's musical talent with the lyre would calm Saul and the evil spirit would leave him.

The second is located in chapter 17, which tells us that David won his way into Saul's entourage by defeating the Philistine champion Goliath in battle. And of course, both narratives are subsumed under the anointing of David by Samuel as Israel's next king in 1 Samuel 16:1-13.

So it is something of a disappointment, given this hunky-dory kind of introduction of these two individuals to each other, that 1 Samuel 18 tells of the deepening rift between them. Saul is in turn "very angry" (18:8), "afraid" (18:12), "in awe" (18:15), and "still more afraid" (18:29) of David as the chapter proceeds, in large part because David was successful in all his tasks. Why was David successful in all his tasks? Verse 14 tells us that "David has success in all his undertakings; for the LORD was with him." And the upshot is that by the end of the chapter, "Saul was David's enemy from that time forward" (18:29). And that in turn sets the stage for everything that happens in the rest of 1 Samuel.

But we also saw last week that even though a reading of 1 Samuel 18 which identifies Saul as the villain is entirely appropriate to the text, there is also a lesson for us from the figure of David, who did what we has told to do, even though he had to have wondered why Saul was sending him out on all these military missions. That theme will continue in these two passages, which - like other passages we've looked at in 1 Samuel - have some head scratching details about them.

II. Pivot to 1 Samuel

Consider, for example, our first narrative. We read in 1 Samuel 23 that Saul was hunting David without any success in several places: In Keilah (verse 8), and then in the wilderness of Ziph (verses 14), until finally David finally escapes to the strongholds of En-Gedi (1 Sam 23:29 = MT 1 Sam 24:1). 1 Samuel 24:1-2 tells us that Saul learns that David has escaped to En-Gedi

and so "Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel, and went to look for David and his men in the direction of the Rocks of the Wild Goats" (verse 2). The NRSV and the NIV both capitalize "Rocks of the Wild Goats" as if it were a place name, but commentators concur that we don't know where this place is located, and not every translation concurs with treating it as a place name since wild goats roam over and around rocks everywhere (see, e.g., Omanson and Ellington UBS Handbook 501-02 ["Most modern translations understand this to be a name, as in RSV and TEV ... While the exact location of this place is not certain, it was quite near Engedi"]; Smith old ICC 216 ["The *Wildgoat's Crags*, on the face of which he sought David, are not yet identified"]; McCarter AB 383, citing IDB 4:843 ["Although the site is not precisely known, it was in the limestone wilderness near En-gedi ... where ibexes are still plentiful"] the NJPS translations of 1985 and 2023 do not treat this as a place name, and neither does Alter in his translation of the Hebrew Bible). That reference to "three thousand chosen men" is not there by accident; the intention is to show the overwhelmingly more powerful nature of Saul's army versus David's, which consisted of about six hundred men, one fifth the size of Saul's army, according to 1 Samuel 23:13 (וַיִּקֶּם דָּוִד וַאֲנָשָׁיו כְּשֵׁשׁ־מֵאוֹת אִישׁ); the fact that Saul's men were "chosen" (בְּחֹרֶר) implies that they were the best of the best of Saul's military forces, and that is yet another way to emphasize the superiority of Saul's army.

But while all of that is normal and easily understandable, the next part of the story isn't. We read in verse 3 that "He" - that is, Saul - "came to the sheepfolds beside the road, where there was a cave; and Saul went in to relieve himself" (לְהִסָּךְ אֶת־רַגְלָיו; elsewhere only in Judg 3:24, אָךְ מִסִּיךְ הוּא אֶת־רַגְלָיו, "He must be relieving himself"). The Hebrew phrase is a euphemistic idiom and we all know what it means when a man is "relieving himself," right? <pause.....> (most commentators think he is pooping in this cave e.g., Klein WBC 239 ["As Saul went along the road, he came to sheepfolds, possibly low stone walls around the entrance to a cave (cf. Num 32:16, 24, 36; Zeph 2:6), and went into the cave to defecate"]; McCarter AB 383 ["to relieve himself. That is, 'to defecate'."]; Tsumura NICOT first edition 565 "The expression *cover his legs* ... is a euphemism for evacuating the bowels"]). But that's not all; the second part of the verse tells us that "David and his men were

sitting in the innermost parts of the cave." And though they have a conversation in which David is urged to kill Saul (verse 4, "Here is the day of which the LORD said to you, 'I will give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it seems good to you'"; note that nowhere is this saying from the Lord recorded in 1 Samuel 16-24; see Smith ICC 217 ["No such promise is recorded in the preceding narrative. The author probably had in mind later prophetic declarations"]; Klein WBC 239 ["The Bible does not present a record of the giving of this oracle though it would have been an appropriate promise at David's anointing"]; McCarter AB 383 [We have been told of no such promise"]; Tsumura NICOT first edition 566 ["No narrative about *the day of which the Lord said to you* is known to use"]; JSB Study Bible "The LORD's promise cited by David's men has not been mentioned before"]), David opts for a different course, and instead "David went and stealthily (כָּלַט; elsewhere only in Judg 4:21; 1 Sam 18:22; Ruth 3:7) cut off a corner of Saul's cloak."

If you "play out" quote unquote that narrative in your imagination, you may find that it raises a couple of questions. First of all, how does David cut that piece of Saul's robe, presumably with his sword, without Saul knowing about it (see, e.g., Brueggemann Interpretation 167 ["He approaches the king and uses his sword very close to the person of the king. We can hardly imagine how this act could have happened in the dark without detection. But it happens"])? Second, how does David sneak up on Saul without Saul hearing him? We will see in 1 Samuel 26, when a very similar scenario plays out, that "No one saw it, or knew it, nor did anyone awake; for they were all asleep, because a deep sleep from the LORD had fallen upon them" (1 Sam 26:12), but nothing of the kind is mentioned in chapter 24. I will confess, especially to our guests, that these are the kinds of questions that feed my insomnia and keep me up at night!

But no matter how those questions are answered, the rest of the narrative follows its expected course. David realizes that his actions toward Saul are wrong, so he "was stricken to the heart because he had cut off a corner of Saul's cloak" (verse 5). Because he realizes that his actions are wrong, he orders his men not to attack Saul (verse 7a), who is therefore still in the cave doing his business and not hearing any of this conversation, a third little detail which

strikes me again as being a little weird - how could Saul take so much time going to the bathroom that David and his men could have an unheard conversation, that David could then sneak up on Saul and cut off a corner of his robe without Saul knowing about it, and that David and his men could have a second conversation about the wrongness of what David did before Saul finishes answering nature's call? Saul finishes his business and exits the cave, and then "David also rose up and went out of the cave and called after Saul" in verse 8. There follows a speech from David in verses 9-15, a response from Saul in verses 16-21, and the report of a truce of sorts between David and Saul in verse 22.

Of these, it is the speech of David that carries the most weight for us this morning. In it, he acknowledges that while Saul has been told of David's desire to harm him, his actions in the cave disprove that claim. "This very day your eyes have seen how the LORD gave you into my hand," David says in verse 10; "and some urged me to kill you, but I spared you." David goes on to declare that while he *could have* killed Saul he *did not* kill Saul even though he had the chance to do so, and therefore rightly asserts he has not sinned against Saul even though Saul is hunting down David so that he could take his life (verse 11). David reminds Saul of an old proverb, otherwise unattested, that "Out of the wicked comes forth wickedness" (verse 13; compare Jesus' assertion in the Sermon on the Mount, Matt 7:17b-18 [|| Luke 6:43-45], "every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit") and prays that God will adjudicate between him and Saul in verse 15 ("May the LORD therefore be judge, and give sentence between me and you. May he see to it, and plead my cause (יִרְבֵּא אֶת־רִיבִי; see also Ps 119:154 ["Plead my cause {רִיבָה רִיבִי} and redeem me"]), and vindicate me against you (וַיִּשְׁפָּטֵנִי מִיָּדָה"; see also 2 Sam 18:31; Pss 26:1; 43:1)).

The same type of thing is reported in our second reading from 1 Samuel 26, so we will look over that text a little more quickly (see the notes at the end of the sermon manuscript for more detail about the

similarity between 1 Samuel 24 and 1 Samuel 26). Just as it happened before, Saul learns where David is hiding in chapter 26 verse 1. Just like in 1 Samuel 24, Saul takes his army of three thousand chosen men to look for David in verse 2. Just as we saw earlier, David has the chance to kill Saul, but now the circumstances are different. In 1 Samuel 24, Saul is relieving himself in the cave that David and his men are hiding in. In 1 Samuel 26, Saul "lay sleeping within the encampment, with his spear stuck in the ground at his head; and Abner and the army lay around him" according to verse 7. Note how weird that is: nobody is on watch and everybody is sleeping, which leaves the entire army open to being slaughtered! I doubt that is the way that the general of any army would want to be remembered. But at least Saul and Abner and the other unnamed leaders of the army have an excuse for being asleep; verse 12, which I mentioned a few minutes ago, tells us that "they were all asleep, because a deep sleep from the LORD had fallen upon them."

Given the vulnerable position of Saul, Abner, and literally everyone else, David is urged to kill Saul just as he was in chapter 24. But again, the detail is different. This time, the one urging him to authorize the killing of Saul is one of David's own leaders, Abishai, who repeats much of the language that we saw in chapter 24: "God has given your enemy into your hand today; now therefore let me pin him to the ground with one stroke of the spear; I will not strike him twice" (verse 8). Once again, David resists and tells Abishai, "Do not destroy him; for who can raise his hand against the Lord's anointed, and be guiltless?" in verse 9. And so to prove his innocence, David (or Abishai; the imperative in verse 11, "now take [סֶּפֶר הַיָּדָא] the spear that is at his head, and the water jug, and let us go [וְנֵלֶכְהָ לָנוּ]," is directed at Abishai; see, e.g., Smith ICC 231 ["Repeating his refusal, he directs Abishai to take the spear and the jug of water"]; Klein WBC 258 ["Despite his instructions to Abishai, v 12 makes clear that David was the one responsible for taking the spear and the jug"]; Alter, Hebrew Bible 2:288 ["David takes them himself, after having ordered Abishai to do it"]);

Hertzberg old OTL 209-10 ["David then orders Abishai to take Saul's spear with him. The jar of water, similarly taken as evidence, does not appear again as such until v. 22 ... It is also strange that after ordering the things to be taken, David then goes on to take them himself; in fact, Abishai is no longer mentioned after v. 12"]) leaves the sleeping beauties to themselves and takes "the spear that was at Saul's head and the water jug," and the deep sleep from the LORD was enough to make sure that no one woke up during David's and Abishai's walking through the camp.

The rest of the chapter will play out in similar fashion as in chapter 24, except that David has something not very nice to say about Abner in verses 15-16. But our main focus will be on David's speech to Saul in verses 18-20, which once again proclaims David's innocence of any charge of guilt on David's part, especially in verse 18, which says, "Why does my lord pursue his servant? For what have I done? What guilt is on my hand?" After Saul admits that David is right, calling himself a "fool" who has made "a great mistake," David doubles down on claim of innocence in verses 23-24, in which David says, "The LORD rewards everyone for his righteousness and his faithfulness; for the LORD gave you into my hand today, but I would not raise my hand against the Lord's anointed. As your life was precious today in my sight, so may my life be precious in the sight of the LORD, and may he rescue me from all tribulation." Our chapter ends with a blessing from Saul on David in verse 25: "Blessed be you, my son David! You will do many things and will succeed in them," after which we read that "David went his way, and Saul returned to his place." And there our chapter ends.

III. Pivot to Today

So there are a couple of different lessons for us this morning, again focussing on David and Saul. *David* represents the one who is the victim in any kind of toxically abusive relationship. I think it is safe to say that few of us - hopefully *none* of us! - have been hunted

down by someone else whose evil intentions toward us are such that they want to kill us. But it wouldn't be surprising if most of us - maybe all of us - have memories of people who have nonetheless treated us wrongly, badly, or abusively. One of the things that is both powerful and depressing at the same time is the availability via social media of reports of the toxic abuse of people by people who stand in authority over them. Just this last week, I learned that an aspiring teenage singer was expelled from her Christian school because she accepted an invitation to sing in a place that served alcohol ([Expelled, now excelling: Teen kicked out of school for singing at bars gets added to huge SC music festival](#), accessed 19 July 2024), even though there was no report that the singer consumed any alcohol. Former talk show host Ellen DeGeneres complained, in an on-air apology, that people accused her of being mean to her subordinates when really all she was is "demanding and impatient and tough" ([Ellen DeGeneres Quitting Hollywood After Comedy Tour: 'I'm Done'](#), accessed 19 July 2024). I don't know about you, but my math teacher background leads me to think that demanding plus impatient plus tough equals mean in most cases. Church pastors and leaders are being exposed on seemingly a weekly basis for their sexual abuse of church members, some as young as 11 or 12. And in each of these cases, the one in power stands for Saul. They have it, they are gonna do what they do with it, and no one is going to stop them.

But when we are the victims in that kind of situation, David stands as a constant reminder to us that violence is not the answer. Jesus tells us that though we have heard it said that we should love our neighbors and hate our enemies, we are called to love our neighbors and pray for those who persecute us (Matt 5:43-44). Like a good math teacher, Jesus says the same thing again in Luke 6 in a slightly different form: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you" (Luke 6:27-28). Paul proclaims

something similar in Romans 12, where he tells the church at Rome that "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads" (Rom 12:20). And the God who created the heavens and the earth kind of summarizes this sentiment for us all the way back in the book of Deuteronomy, where it is said of God, "Vengeance is mine" (Deut 32:35, 41, 43), a passage that Paul quotes in Romans 12(:19).

Those biblical commands to the followers of Jesus aren't very popular today, especially given the combative social and political climate we are in. Russell Moore, editor at Christianity Today, has lamented the fact that calls to love your neighbor are often set aside by today's pastors because those teachings are "weak" and they "don't work anymore" (Christianity Today Editor: Evangelicals Call Jesus "Liberal" and "Weak" | The New Republic, accessed 19 July 2024). To illustrate that, Pastor Joel Webbon in a sermon earlier this year said, "We cannot afford to be beautiful losers We need to win. I want to win. I want to reward my friends and crush my enemies" (<https://x.com/ryaneduff/status/1806028880521888241>, accessed 19 July 2024). A 2024 candidate for governor, in a speech given at a church, reminded their audience that we went to war against the Japanese after they bombed Pearl Harbor, and went to war against the Nazis during World War II, and in that context said, "We now find ourselves struggling with people who have evil intent.... Some folks need killing! It's time for someone to say it. It's not a matter of vengeance. It's not a matter of being mean or spiteful. It's a matter of necessity" (MAGA Gov Candidate's Ugly, Hateful Rant: "Some Folks Need Killing!" | The New Republic, accessed 19 July 2024). Given that church leaders are giving the command to love our enemies a pass, that preachers are calling that principle weak and

ineffective nowadays, and that political candidates are advocating that some folks need killing, is it any wonder why the example given us by David is so counter-cultural in this day and age?

So the choice for us this morning is clear: Who will be your role-model as you live your Christian life and you walk your walk of faith this week and in the weeks to come? Will you be like the power hungry Saul who wants to get rid of his enemy so badly that he hunts him down with his own personal army, leaving all his other royal duties behind? Or will you be like the righteous David, who not once *but twice* had the opportunity to eliminate his problem by killing Saul but chose not to? Will you follow the words of pastors who poo-poo the call to love our enemies and political candidates who advocate for the killing of certain people? Or will you follow the words of Jesus, Paul, and God, who tell us to love our enemies, pray for those who persecute you, and cede all desires for personal vengeance to God? I know who will be *my* role model - all the way to my cross, if that be God's will for my life. And I hope and pray that David will be yours too. Hallelujah! And amen.

Endnotes on the relationship between 1 Samuel 24 and 1 Samuel 26:

Smith, old ICC:

24:1–22. David's magnanimity.—Saul comes into David's power, but is spared and recognizes the generosity of his enemy. The incident is similar to the one narrated in 26. In both cases Saul is at the mercy of David, and in danger of being slain except for David's restraint of his men. In both, David's motive is reverence for the Anointed of Yahweh. In the second of the two accounts, David makes no allusion to having spared Saul before, and Saul is equally silent. We have reason to think, therefore, that we have two versions of the same story. It is natural to suppose that one belongs with each of the two documents which make up the bulk of the narrative already considered. Almost the only clue to the relation of one of these stories to the other is that in this chapter Saul is brought into David's power, whereas in 26 David takes upon himself the danger of going into the enemy's camp. The slight preponderance of probability seems to me to be on the side of the latter representation (chapter 26) as more original.

Henry Preserved Smith, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Samuel.*, International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1899), 216.

Klein, WBC:

It needs to be noted that the two chapters are probably alternate memories of one event. Neither Saul nor David indicate in chap. 26 that a similar incident had happened before. As Koch has argued, both have a similar outline (The Growth of the OT 142): A: David was in the wilderness fleeing from Saul; B: he had an opportunity to kill his pursuer; C: Someone suggested that this opportunity had been provided by Yahweh; D: Because David respected the anointed of Yahweh, he refused to kill Saul; E: He nevertheless, took a piece of evidence that showed what he could have done; F: Saul recognized David's innocence and superiority. The following table will show in more detail the many similarities in detail between the two accounts.

Chap. 24

Informers disclose David's location to Saul, v 2

Gibeah, Hachilah, Jeshimon, 23:19

3,000 select men from all Israel, seek David, v 3

on the road, v 4, cf. v 8

David and his men were sitting in the cave, v 4

David's men: Yahweh is providing an opportunity' to kill Saul, v 5

David cuts off the skirt of Saul's robe, v 5

David: May death be my lot if I harm Saul, v 7

David refers to Saul as "my lord" (vv 7, 9, and 11) and the anointed of Yahweh (vv 7, 7, and 11)

David warns about stretching out one's hand against Saul (v 7, 11)

David called to Saul, v 9

David asks Saul why he listens to men, v 10

David: Yahweh gave you into my hand, v 11, cf. v 5

"Today" as the time of David's innocence, vv 11, 19, 20

David protests his innocence by showing Saul the piece of his robe, v 12

David: There is no evil in my hand, v 12

David: I did not sin, v 12

David: You hunt my life, v 12; calls Saul the king of Israel, v 15

David: Whom are you pursuing, v 15

David: May Yahweh deliver (judge) me from your hand, v 16

Saul: Is this your voice my son?, v 17

סגר Qal, v 19; cf. 23:12, 20

Saul: May Yahweh repay your goodness, v 20; you are more righteous, v 18

Chap. 26

Ziphites inform Saul about David, v 1; cf. 23:14, 15, 19

Gibeah, Hachilah, Jeshimon, v 1

3,000 select men from Israel, seek David, v 2

on the road, v 3

David and his men were sitting in the desert, v 3

Abishai: God is providing an opportunity to kill Saul, v 8

David takes Saul's spear and water jug, v 12

David: May death be my lot if I harm Saul, v 11

David refers to Saul as "my lord" (vv 17, 18, 19; cf. vv 15, 16) and as the anointed of Yahweh (vv 9, 11, 16, 23)

David warns about putting out one's hand against Saul (vv 9, 11, 23)

David called to the soldiers and Abner, v 14

David suggests that human beings may have stirred Saul up, v 19

David: Yahweh gave you into my hand, v 23

"Today" as the time of David's innocence, vv 8, 19, 21, 23, 24

David protests his innocence by showing Saul the spear and water jug, v 16

David: What evil is in my hand?, v 18

Saul: I sinned, v 21

David: the king of Israel came to seek my life, v 20

David: Why does my lord pursue?, v 18, cf. v 20

David: May he deliver me from every trouble, v 24

Saul: Is this your voice my son?, v 17; cf. vv 21, 25

סגר, Piel, v 8

David: Yahweh will repay each man's righteousness, v 23

Saul: You will surely be king, 21

Saul: You shall surely accomplish your work
and have the upper hand, v 25

David and Saul go their respective ways, v 23

David and Saul go their respective ways, v 25

Ralph W. Klein, 1 Samuel, vol. 10, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1983), 236.

McCarter, AB:

This is the first of two stories in which David refuses an opportunity to take the life of his persecutor. Unlike the second, which is found in 26:1–25, this one is told in a highly tendentious way, recalling by its expansive and flowery speeches the extended insults and threats of the tale of David's single combat with the Philistine champion in c 17, or the earnest entreaty of Jonathan in 20:11–17, or (by way of anticipation) the prognostications of Abigail in 25:28–31. David is portrayed as innocent and pious in the extreme in his fastidious treatment of Saul and elaborate professions of reliance on Yahweh. In contrast, Saul's depiction is completely degrading. His role in the cave scene is ignoble, if not downright vulgar, and his own words in vv 18ff condemn his past behavior as unjust and indefensible. The certainty of David's succession is made explicit to a degree that the older narrative of David's rise consistently avoids, and the prediction of kingship is placed in the mouth of Saul himself. Saul's plea for his family in v 22, like the similar but longer plea made earlier by Jonathan (see the NOTE at 20:11–17 and especially the COMMENT on 20:1–21:1), not only looks ahead to subsequent events (esp. 2 Samuel 9) but also implies that the very survival of the house of Saul will be a result of the generosity and mercy of David.

This passage, then, belongs not to the older history of David's rise to power, but to the series of later expansions and elaborations that includes the overlay of the story of David and the Philistine champion (see the COMMENT on 17:1–11, 32–40, 42–48a, 49, 51–54 [§ XXIV-A]), as well as 20:11–17, 23, 40–42; 23:14–18, 19–24a; and 25:28–31. The growth of this section and its incorporation into the larger context seem to have been rather complex processes. As we have already seen (cf. the COMMENTS on 23:14–18 and 23:19–24:1), 24:2–23 should be read together with materials that precede it as a single narrative unit extending from 23:14–24:23. Viewed in this larger perspective the story shows clear signs of revision toward the pattern of the second (older) account of how David spared

Saul's life in 26:1–25. An expanded version of the introductory notice in 26:1 appears here in 23:19–24a, and the insertion of 24:5b–6, 12 introduces an element into the story to correspond to the business of the spear and cruse of water in c 26 (see the NOTE at vv 5b–6 above). Where the two accounts have internal features in common, the treatment in c 24 regularly looks exaggerated or overstated in comparison with that in c 26. In the present story, for example, David takes no initiative whatever in getting his opportunity to kill Saul; rather he is an innocent, passive participant, into whose power Yahweh delivers his enemy (cf. v 5). In c 26, on the other hand, David creates his own opportunity by leading a secret expedition into Saul's camp, and the divine direction of the affair, though still an important theme (cf. 26:8), must be understood in a more subtle way. Similarly, there is nothing in the spear and cruse of water incident in c 26 to correspond to David's outburst of pious compunction in 24:6–7 after taking the skirt of Saul's robe. Most pointed, however, is c 24's expanded version of Saul's blessing of David in 26:25; in 24:21–22 it has become an acknowledgment of David's future kingship and a plea for mercy on Saul's descendants. As we have already noted (the COMMENT on 3:14–18), these themes were introduced into the present account earlier by the prefaced report of Jonathan's visit at Horesh, an element to which there is no equivalent in 26:1–25.

If we must regard 23:14–24:23 as a tendentiously fashioned equivalent to 26:1–25, however, we are still entitled to wonder what traditional materials have gone into its production. As noted earlier (the COMMENT on 23:19–24:1), the Sela-hammahlekoth episode is probably an old etiological narrative that was absorbed into the whole. Was there a traditional account of an encounter between Saul and David on the Wild Goat Rocks near En-gedi? It seems quite possible that there was. If so, we may be sure that it included nothing about the cutting of Saul's robe and no explicit acknowledgment on Saul's part of David's future as king. Instead it illustrated in a subtle way David's respect for Yahweh's anointed and Saul's dim realization of the veracity of David's vows of loyalty. But the extreme degradation of Saul that we have found here seems inseparable from the story, and for this reason we cannot be confident about our ability to penetrate to an underlying account and discern its shape with certainty.

P. Kyle McCarter Jr., I Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary, vol. 8, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 385–387.

Tsumura, NICOT first edition:

7. David Spares Saul at the Hill of Hachilah (26:1–25)

The similarity between this episode and that in the cave near En-gedi in ch. 24 has been noted by scholars. In both episodes David was given an opportunity to kill Saul, which he refused to use. In both events God was directing the courses of David's and Saul's lives behind the scene according to his purposes.

Many scholars have thought that ch. 24 and ch. 26 are variants of the p 595 same original story. Some believe that ch. 24 is the older, others that ch. 26 is. But no definite answer has been given with regard to their relative dating.

Certainly the two episodes have a similar outline, which Koch describes as follows:

- (1) David was in the wilderness fleeing from Saul;
- (2) he had an opportunity to kill his pursuer;
- (3) someone suggested that this opportunity had been provided by Yahweh;
- (4) because David respected the anointed of Yahweh, he refused to kill Saul;
- (5) he nevertheless took a piece of evidence that showed what he could have done;
- (6) Saul recognized David's innocence and superiority.

However, the similarity has been somewhat overemphasized. There are many basic differences between them.

- (1) the wilderness of En-gedi ↔ the wilderness of Ziph
- (2) Saul appeared before David ↔ David sent spies to locate Saul
- (3) Saul was by himself ↔ Saul was with Abner and his soldiers
- (4) David took the skirt of Saul's robe ↔ David took Saul's spear and water jar
- (5) David called Saul behind him outside of the cave ↔ David called Abner and the soldiers from distance.

(6) Saul acknowledged David as the divinely appointed king to be ↔ Saul simply prays for blessing on David

Klein also notes that in ch. 24, after the event, “the account consists of a speech by David to Saul (vv. 10–16) and a response by Saul to David (vv. 17–22),” while in ch. 26, “after David escaped from Saul’s camp he spoke to Abner (v 14a), Abner responded (v 14b) and David replied again to Abner (vv. 15–16). Then Saul (vv. 17a, 21, 25a) and David (vv. 17b–20, 22–24) engage in a two-way conversation.” In this episode there are no “explicit statements about David’s future and overt or extreme demonstrations of his innocence and piety and of Saul’s abjection.”

A number of commentators explain the similarities between the two as the result of “a degree of assimilation in their early transmission-history.” However, the similarities illustrate the nature of the relationship between David and Saul, while, on the other hand, the differences show that there were two distinct occasions when David acted similarly toward Saul.

This is the last encounter between David and Saul. After this incident David will leave “the territory of Israel” (27:1) and serve the Philistines and return only after Saul is dead.

David Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007), 594–596.

Auld, new OTL:

[24:2–7] The books of Samuel, and especially 1 Samuel, report many situations from two or more perspectives. The downfall of the house of Eli is predicted twice. There are several apparently culminating stages in Saul’s becoming king. Saul comes twice under the influence of a band of prophets. David is freshly introduced twice to Saul. Saul’s death is twice narrated. But the reports in 1 Samuel 24 and 26 of David’s sparing Saul’s life when he has the opportunity to take it are in a class of their own. Despite offering the longest examples of such multiple narratives, they are also the most similar to each other. Of all the possible comparators, the briefer stories in 1 Samuel 10 and 19 of Saul and a band of prophets come closest. However, these are located at some distance from each other, and each has a distinct role to play in the larger narrative. At the same time it is relatively straightforward to argue that

the second depends on the first, and also that it plays something of a midrashic role: it explores and seeks to answer some of the puzzles in the earlier, shorter story. What are the physical manifestations of “acting the prophet”? And what exactly does the popular saying “Is Saul also among the prophets?” mean? Such comparison with 1 Sam 10 and 19, however, simply invites contrast.

First Samuel 24 and 26 occupy (compete for?) almost the same space in the larger narrative and are separated by only one (though itself quite extended) episode. And that episode, concerning David, Nabal, and Abigail, both separates them and is also intimately related to them both. When they are considered in isolation, it is much harder to decide which version of the sparing of Saul depends on which: readers of Samuel have debated that question for generations. And yet the simple critical conclusion that one is almost certainly primary in the narrative and the other secondary is underscored by two further and neighboring pairings. One of these is much briefer: the double notification of the death of Samuel (in 25:1, immediately after ch. 24; and in 28:3, one short episode after ch. 26). It seems reasonable to suppose that what has prompted the resumption (in 28:3) or secondary anticipation (in 25:1) of this notice of death and burial is the insertion of a block of new material, including a fresh version of the sparing of Saul and the innocence of David. The other is the double report of David’s seeking sanctuary from Saul with the Philistine Achish of Gath: first and briefly in 21:10–15, then at greater length in chs. 27–29. The resultant matching panels are reinforced by contrasts, such as David’s successful pair of double inquiries of Yahweh (23:1–5, 6–14) and Saul’s total failure to achieve communication with Yahweh by any method (28:3–25).

A. Graeme Auld, *I & II Samuel: A Commentary*, ed. William P. Brown, Carol A. Newsom, and Brent A. Strawn, 1st ed., *The Old Testament Library* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 274.

Campbell, FOTL:

Early in any discussion reflection on the relationships between ch. 24 (the “cave in the daytime” story) and ch. 26 (the “camp in the nighttime” story) is unavoidable. There is widespread agreement that one tradition is coming to expression in both stories. That one tradition is present seems clear. Saul, in pursuit of David, is found in David’s power and is spared by the man whose life he seeks; full-bodied

reconciliation ensues. More and more, commentators are agreeing that the interpreter's task is to find a meaning for these stories in their context, rather than to debate their mutual dependence and age.

The version in ch. 26 is ready-made for performance. It is night. David and Abishai penetrate Saul's camp and stand over Saul's sleeping body. One spear thrust will kill him. David takes the spear, disappears into the night, and cries out from across the intervening valley. The version in ch. 24 requires a lot more work on the part of the storyteller; there is not a close fit between the deed and the drama—[cf. II]. Saul has three thousand chosen men with him as he pops into the cave—surely in daytime. Why use a cave if it was night? David emerges from the cave, a bit behind Saul, and cries out to him. The storyteller has to make two aspects plausible. Saul, in broad daylight, asks the nighttime question: "Is this your voice, my son David?" (24:17 [NRSV, 24:16]; cf. 26:17). David, in broad daylight, is not seized by the three thousand who are out hunting for him. A storyteller would have to have David slip out of the cave unseen and gain a vantage point where he could not be trapped and would not be visible. Alter has Saul "blinded with tears"; but in the text the weeping comes afterwards, at the end of the verse, and the three thousand are still there to be dealt with (p. 151). Alter wrestles with the three thousand earlier (p. 148); the text does not attend to them. The biblical text reveals faithfully where it has come from; Alter reveals brilliantly where it might be taken.

Inside the cave, there is a pointer to the complexity in the telling that again leaves options open for the storyteller. David's men in the rear of the cave, seeing Saul in the light at the mouth of the cave, urge David to seize this God-given opportunity to do to his enemy Saul as it seems good to David—in a word, kill him! According to the text, David crept up sneakily and "cut off a corner of Saul's cloak" (24:5; NRSV, 24:4). The next verse is odd: "Afterward David was stricken to the heart because he had cut off a corner of Saul's cloak" (24:6; NRSV, 24:5). This is stretching credulity a bit far. The guerrilla chief has remorse over a bit of royal garment snipping. Appeal to royal mystique and the sacredness of all that is associated with the king is a distraction; the central issue is life or death, to kill or to spare. Later, David will wave the same corner of the cloak at Saul as proof of his goodness (24:12; NRSV, 24:11). The remorse is badly out of place in this context. But worse is to come. Having spared Saul's life

and cut the corner off his cloak instead, David is portrayed berating his men for their wickedness in wanting to attack Saul (24:7–8; NRSV, 24:6–7). If Joab were present with a speaking role in the story (cf. 2 Sam 19:2–9; NRSV, 19:1–8), he might well have pointed out to David that the heroics were in place before the garment snipping; they were completely out of place after it. So there is more to this scene than meets the eye. Storytellers, start your imaginations! Was there a version with no incitement to kill expressed in the cave? Was the incitement to kill Saul an extra option offered by the text?

There is little point in looking for a relationship of dependence between the two tellings. It is enough that there are two tellings of one tradition, each quite capable of standing on its own. As will be emphasized under “Meaning,” the involvement of both traditions in this narrative heightens the intensity of Saul’s enmity toward David and makes David’s move into exile utterly inevitable.

Antony F. Campbell, 1 Samuel, vol. 7, *The Forms of the Old Testament Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 251–252.

Brueggeman, Interpretation 166:

This chapter [1 Samuel 24:1-22] closely parallels chapter 26. Most likely the two accounts are traditional rendering of the same remembered incident.

Hertzberg old OTL 206:

It is evident that this narrative [[26:1-25] and 22:19 - 24:22 make use of the same material.