

David Spares Saul Again

1 Samuel 26:1–12 ESV

¹ 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.

Introduction

Last week’s sermon concluded our time in [1 Samuel 25](#).

Similar to [1 Samuel 17](#), where David faces Goliath, [1 Samuel 25](#) takes an important place in the structure of 1 Samuel.

I reminded y’all last week that [1 Sam 25](#) is a microcosm of David’s struggle with Saul.

This means that we are to read both David’s struggle with Nabal and his struggle with Saul in light of one another.

So it shouldn’t come as any surprise to us that immediately after David’s struggle with Nabal he is once again confronted with Saul.

Indeed, David’s confrontation with Saul here in [1 Samuel 26](#) is almost exactly the same as what happened between David and Saul in [1 Samuel 24](#).

In both chapters Saul is informed of David’s location by the Ziphites.

In both chapters Saul takes 3,000 chosen men.

In both chapters Saul is in the dark

He's in the dark cave in ch. 24 and he is sleeping in the dark here in ch. 26.

In both chapters David's men encourage him to take Saul's life.

In both chapters David takes something from Saul to show that he spared his life.

In both chapters Saul uses the same expression, "Is this your voice, my son David?"

In both chapters David compares Saul's pursuit of him to pursuing a flea.

And, In both chapters Saul confesses his sin and declares that David will be blessed.

Whenever stories repeat like this in the Bible we must learn to take particular note of the difference in the stories.

It is these differences that the Bible wants us to pay attention to.

And the chief differences between this account in chapter 26 and the similar account in chapter 24 is the location & the people.

Indeed, the location and the people will be the way I organize this morning's sermon.

In the first part of my sermon I will explain the significance of Saul's camp.

And in the second part of my sermon I will explain the significance of those helping Saul.

1. Saul's Camp

2. Saul's Help

Saul's Camp

You'll recall from chapter 24 that David spares Saul's life the first time in a cave.

David and his men were hiding in the cave when Saul came in to relieve himself.

In ch. 24 Saul stumbled into David's hand.

Here David and Abishai go into Saul's camp.

While in the broader picture David is being hunted by Saul, in this instance, he is the one hunting.

To fully appreciate the significance of Saul's camp it is important to remember some of the themes that I have already surfaced in the previous chapter.

Near the end of last week's sermon I made the point that there was an allusion to the Fall of Adam in the Garden of Eden when David took multiple wives.

Nabal lived in Carmel, which means orchard; a garden-like place.

And the language used to describe David's taking Abigail and Ahinoam is the same language used in Genesis to describe taking the forbidden fruit.

Chapter 26 continues to employ this Garden imagery.

Like Adam, David is kicked out of the garden-like Carmel after his fall.

Verse 3 shows that David is in the wilderness.

Biblical Theology of the Garden and Tabernacle

Here is where the details that describe Saul's camp become so significant

Verse 5 states that David saw the place where Saul lay.

“Saul was lying within the encampment, while the army was encamped around him.”

Verse 7 provides the detail of Saul's spear being by his head.

And verses 11-12 point out that there was also a jar of water by Saul's head.

At first glance these might seem like insignificant details.

But upon further reflection they open up the scene to us.

In order to understand Saul's camp you must know what the Bible has already taught about the Garden and the Tabernacle up to this point.

In [Genesis 1-2](#) the Garden is described as the center of a three-level world.

There is the Garden at the center » The land of Eden around the Garden » and then there is the rest of the world (that the waters of the Garden flow out to).

The description of the Garden in Genesis present the Garden as a holy sanctuary where man meets with God.

Of course, man's privilege of meeting with God in Garden was revoked in the Fall.

But after the Fall, God began the process of restoring man's access to His presence.

This is where the Tabernacle comes in.

When Moses ascended Mt. Sinai in Exodus he didn't only receive the 10 Commandments from God.

Moses also received instructions for building the Tabernacle.

These instructions are described in [Exodus 26-30](#).

When you read through these instructions, it is clear that the Tabernacle is a new Garden of Eden.

Its walls are embroidered with edenic trees and guardian cherubim.

But most importantly, it was the place where humanity had access to God's presence.

This is an important first step.

But Numbers and Deuteronomy take things a step further.

In Numbers & Deuteronomy we see that structure of the Tabernacle isn't the only thing God is concerned with.

There we learn that the entire nation of Israel would camp around the Tabernacle like an army.

What becomes clear in Numbers and Deuteronomy is that the camp of Israel around the Tabernacle was a war camp.

Israel was learning to be God's "host", His army that was encamped around him.

1 Samuel assumes this background when it describes Saul's camp here in ch. 26

The way Saul is described as sleeping in the center of the encampment with his army encircled around him resonates with the way that Israel camped around the Tabernacle.

A Garden & A Threat

So if you are tracking with me, what we have here is Saul's camp mirroring the camp of Israel around the Tabernacle in Numbers and Deuteronomy.

This means that Saul's tent is something like the Tabernacle at the center of the camp with the king inside.

And, the Tabernacle is a picture of the Garden in Eden.

Given that garden imagery was already employed in the last chapter, it isn't a surprise that these themes are being expanded upon here.

In fact, some scholars have drawn connections between the spear and jar of water by Saul's head with the trees and waters of the Garden of Eden.

All of this paints a picture that drives us to the point of this passage: Which is the failure of Saul's men to help him.

This brings us to our second point: Saul's Help

Saul's Help

Remember, whenever you have two similar stories, it is the differences that are key.

Chapter 24, only highlights two people, David and Saul.

But chapter 26 draws our attention to other characters; specifically Abner.

Abner is the one who is supposed to be Saul's chief military helper helper, the captain of Saul's bodyguard.

But Abner is not a suitable helper.

Perhaps you are picking up on the significance of the language I'm using.

We are in a "Garden of Eden" setting.

And Saul doesn't have a suitable helper.

Saul doesn't have a suitable Eve!

Here, it isn't talking about a domestic helper, a wife, but a military comrade and helper.

What makes this point so strongly in our passage is verse 12.

When David takes the spear and the jar from beside Saul's head no one in Saul's camp awoke because "**a deep sleep from the LORD had fallen upon them.**"

That last phrase, “a deep sleep from the LORD” is a very technical Hebrew term that only occurs a few other places in the OT.

The most *famous* place that it occurs is in [Genesis 2 in the Garden](#).

Specifically it occurs when God puts Adam into a deep sleep in order to build a “helper” from Adam’s side.

God had brought all the animals to Adam and it was clear that there was no helper fit for him.

So God put Adam into a deep sleep in order to build Eve from Adam’s side so she could be a suitable helper for him.

Abner Is Not A Suitable Helper For Saul

One of the things that this passage reveals is that Abner is *not* a suitable helper for king Saul.

He is supposed to be Saul’s body guard and he allows two men into the royal tent where Saul is sleeping.

David and Abishai could have easily killed Saul.

Indeed Abishai tries to kill Saul.

David has to intervene to keep Abishai from pinning Saul with his own spear even as Saul had tried to pin David with his spear two times already.

In this passage we are once again reminded of the folly of king Saul in turning against David.

Back in [1 Samuel 22](#) *David* was set up as the captain of Saul’s guard, David used to be in Abner’s position

What we see here and in chapter 24 is that David is willing and able to protect Saul.

Even when it would have been advantageous for David to kill Saul, he chose instead to protect him.

Abner cannot protect Saul, but David can.

But Saul has despised the help of the Lord.

The Importance of Help

So perhaps up to this point it may not seem as though this passage offers much practical import to your life.

But as we consider things further, it becomes pretty clear that there is a theme with Saul here that is carrying over from the story of Nabal.

Both men scorned the God-given help around them.

By way of practical application, you should learn from the folly of Saul and Nabal.

You should not neglect the help God has given you.

Of course this passage alludes to the help God gave Adam in making Eve.

Husbands, God has given your wife to you as a help to you.

Do not scorn the help that God has given you.

And of course the application can be extended out from here.

Each of us need help and are called upon to provide help for others.

Do not scorn those whom God has put in your life to help you and do not neglect to provide help to others when God has placed you in such a position.

Indeed this is one of the primary functions of the life of the Church.

We are called upon to help and be helped by one another.

To each of you God has given various gifts.

But those gifts are for the building up of the body.

Be ready to receive the gifts of others and be ready to share what God has given you with others.

THE Helper

Of course this idea of help and gift should draw your mind to the way the New Testament employs these terms.

In the New Testament both of these terms are connected with the Holy Spirit.

In John's Gospel the Holy Spirit is described as the "paraclete".

The "helper" who will come to help the Church when Jesus ascends to the right hand of the Father.

Moreover, the New Testament speaks of the gifts of the Spirit, the "charisma" of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the gift to the Church.

And as the Church walks in the gift of the Spirit, the Church lends help to one another and to the world.

But the New Testament also warns against "grieving" or "quenching" the gift of the Spirit.

The Spirit is our ultimate helper.

We must not quench the help of the Spirit or grieve the Spirit but rather we must walk by the Spirit.

We must walk as Jesus walked, carrying out his ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit.

And as we do so we will be able help one another even as God in Christ has helped us.

Ultimately, Christ helps us by giving himself for us.

And this is how we help one another.

We help one another by giving ourselves, our own Spirit-given gifts, to one another.

Indeed we see a picture of this as we come to the Table.

In the bread and wine we see Christ giving himself to us.

And what do we do? We take this gift and we give it to one another.

As we each partake in the gift of God we also share it with one another.

This morning we are in God's camp.

We have been lifted up to the heavenly holy place.

And there we have a helper and advocate.

Jesus Christ the righteous who not only intercedes for us, but who invites us to his table and gives us the right to be children of God!

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit! AMEN!