

# **The Life of David**

## **David Spares Saul's Life**

*1 Samuel 24:1-22*

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# David Spares Saul's Life

## Scripture

David's journey to throne of Israel was a difficult one. The current king, Saul, was jealous of God's anointed one—David—and wanted to kill him. Though initially fearful of Saul, David's trust in God grew, and in his sovereign, providential care of him. We see this again as David spares Saul's life.

Let's read how David spares Saul's life in 1 Samuel 24:1-22:

<sup>1</sup>When Saul returned from following the Philistines, he was told, "Behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi."<sup>2</sup>Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel and went to seek David and his men in front of the Wild-goats' Rocks. <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>And afterward David's heart struck him, because he had cut off a corner of Saul's robe. <sup>6</sup>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."<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup>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. <sup>9</sup>And David said to Saul, "Why do you listen to the words of men who say, 'Behold, David seeks your harm'?" <sup>10</sup>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. I said, 'I will not put out my hand against my lord, for he is the Lord's anointed.'<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup> May the Lord judge between me and you, may the Lord avenge me against you, but my hand shall not be against you.<sup>13</sup> As the proverb of the ancients says, 'Out of the wicked comes wickedness.' But my hand shall not be against you.<sup>14</sup> After whom has the king of Israel come out? After whom do you pursue? After a dead dog! After a flea!<sup>15</sup> 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."

<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup> He said to David, "You are more righteous than I, for you have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil.<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup> And now, behold, I know that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand.<sup>21</sup> 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."<sup>22</sup> And David swore this to Saul. Then Saul went home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold. (1 Samuel 24:1-22)

## Introduction

*The Jackie Robinson Story* is the 1950 movie about the life, challenges, and achievements of baseball star Jackie Robinson. With the help and vision of Brooklyn Dodgers general manager Branch

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Rickey, he broke the professional baseball color barrier. Starring Jackie Robinson as himself, the movie depicts the prejudice and hatred Robinson had to endure and the depth of patience, courage, and self-control he displayed in the face of relentless adversity.

The clip begins in Branch Rickey's office. It is their first meeting. Rickey surprises Robinson by telling him he wants Robinson to try out for his team and possibly become the first black player in the major leagues.

Rickey asks, "What do you think, Jackie? Do you got guts enough to play the game no matter what happens? They'll shout insults at you. They'll come into you spikes first. They'll throw at your head."

"They've been throwing at my head for a long time, Mr. Rickey," Robinson responds.

Rickey fabricates a scenario: "Suppose I'm a player on the eve of an important game. Suppose I collide with you at second base, and when I get up, I say, 'You, you dirty black so-and-so.' What do you do?"

"Mr. Rickey, do you want a ballplayer who's afraid to fight back?" Robinson asks.

Rickey answers emphatically, "I want a ballplayer with guts enough *not* to fight back. You've got to do the job with base hits, stolen bases, and fielding ground balls, Jackie. Nothing else. Now, I'm playing you in the World Series, and I'm hotheaded. I want to win the game. So, I go into you spikes first. You jab the ball in my ribs and the umpire says 'out.' All I can see is your black face, that black face right over me. So, I haul off and punch you right in the cheek. What do you do?"

Robinson calmly thinks for a moment, then answers, "Mr. Rickey, I've got two cheeks."

Rickey is very happy with his answer. He briefly discusses the contract with Robinson. As Robinson is about to leave, Rickey tells him, "Remember one thing. No matter what happens on the ball

field, you can't fight back. That's going to be the hard part. You can't fight back."

Robinson does turn the other cheek and becomes a model of courage and humility.<sup>1</sup>

God was calling David to turn the other cheek, even though Saul was insanely jealous of David and wanted to kill him. God had chosen David to be the next king over Israel. But David was not coronated immediately. In fact, it was many years before he would become king. Saul was relentless in his pursuit to kill David, and David constantly had to evade capture and trust God.

But then one day an opportunity presented itself to David to take the kingship by force. Let's see what David did.

## Lesson

First Samuel 24:1-22 shows us God's constraint of his servant in the establishment of his kingdom.

Let's use the following outline:

1. A Test for God's Servant (24:1-7)
2. An Appeal to God's Justice (24:8-15)
3. An Assurance of God's Faithfulness (24:16-22)

### I. A Test for God's Servant (24:1-7)

First, let's look at a test for God's servant.

The last time we saw that Saul was just about to capture David when Saul received a message that the Philistines had made a raid against the land. So, Saul let David get away while he went and took care of the Philistines (23:24-29). David then went and lived in the strongholds—the caves—of Engedi (23:29).

Saul took care of the Philistines, and **was told, "Behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi"** (24:1). **Engedi** is on the

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2003/october/14628.html>.

western shore of the Dead Sea and has numerous caves and fresh-water springs. Apparently, farmers would take their sheep and goats to drink the water and shelter their sheep in the caves.

When Saul heard that David was at Engedi, he **took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel and went to seek David and his men in front of the Wildgoats' Rocks** (24:1). Don't miss the author's play on words: Saul took three thousand **"chosen"** men to hunt the Lord's "chosen" man, David. Setting oneself against the Lord and his Anointed One is utterly futile, as the Psalmist attests in Psalm 2:1-6, "Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed, saying, 'Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.' He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, 'As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.' "

When Saul and his elite army arrived at Engedi, Saul had to answer the call of nature. He saw **where there was a cave, and he went in to relieve himself** (24:3a).

Unbeknown to Saul, **David and his men were sitting in the innermost parts of the cave** (24:3b). That must have surprised them! And it was also tense. Outside the cave were three thousand elite soldiers; inside the cave were six hundred dregs of society. And between them was Saul, with his pants down.

Immediately, **the men of David** saw an unexpected opportunity and **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' "** (24:4a). The Lord had not actually said that, although he had said, "I will give the Philistines into your hand" (23:4), which is almost the same as, "I will give your enemy into your hand." Furthermore, David's men did not see much difference between the Philistines and Saul.

Moreover, Saul saw David as his “enemy” (cf. 19:17; 18:29). And if Saul saw David as his “enemy,” then would not Saul be David’s “enemy”? In any event, David’s men saw Saul’s presence in the cave as a wonderful stroke of providence, which is why they urged him to go and take care of Saul.

**Then David arose and stealthily cut off a corner of Saul’s robe** (24:4b). How he did it without making a noise so as to alert Saul, we are not told. He then went back to his men. But, no sooner had he returned to his men when **David’s heart struck him, because he had cut off a corner of Saul’s robe. 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”** (24:5-6). Even though Saul had been rejected by God, he was still **the Lord’s anointed**. Gerard Van Groningen writes:

Why did men consider the anointed to be inviolate, to be kept from attack, and to be preserved from degradation? The answer lies in the fact that once anointed, the individual was set apart or consecrated to God. A specific bond was established in relation to God, in separation from men and women in general, and from the common aspects of life in particular.

... Hence to touch, defile, and attack the anointed one was to approach the Lord himself and to seek to defile, harm, and remove the Lord from his rightful place.<sup>2</sup>

David’s men wanted him to attack Saul, whereas David realized that he should not have done anything to Saul. **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** (24:7).

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<sup>2</sup> Gerard Van Groningen, *Messianic Revelation in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 25. See his whole discussion, pp. 23–28. See also Roland de Vaux, “The King of Israel, Vassal of Yahweh,” *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1971), 152–66.

Let's reflect briefly on this portion of the incident. Saul was near the front of the cave doing his business. David's men 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' "** (24:4). Was this God's providence? Or was this God's test? How does one know the difference between the two? Gordon Keddie helps us here. He writes:

The meaning of this incident, surely, is that God was testing David. In a sense it was the ultimate test of trust. And it turned out to be the triumph of right principle over clear—and providential—opportunity. The "open door" was there. Many a modern Christian would point to these circumstances, say that "Everything is working out" and that "It seems to be the Lord's leading" that I take the indicated steps to secure the necessary solution to my problem. But an "open door" is not, in itself, proof of God's will. Circumstances, in God's providence, are not a substitute for the principles he has revealed in his Word, the Bible. The "open door" is susceptible of serious misinterpretation.<sup>3</sup>

Friends, the bottom line is that even circumstances must be evaluated in light of God's word, the Bible. Favorable circumstances may in fact be a test from God to see whether we follow the path of obedience that is mapped out for us in his word.

## II. An Appeal to God's Justice (24:8-15)

Second, look at the appeal to God's justice.

Soon after Saul left the cave, **David also arose and went out of the cave, and called after Saul, "My lord the king!"** Notice David's respectful address to Saul. **And when Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his face to the earth and paid homage** (24:9). David showed further respect in his actions.

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<sup>3</sup> Gordon J. Keddie, *Dawn of a Kingdom: The Message of 1 Samuel*, Welwyn Commentary Series (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 1988), 224.



Proverbs 15:1 says, “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” David modeled a “soft answer” in his speech to Saul. Though Saul was out to kill David, David spoke to Saul in a respectful manner.

Let me again quote Gordon Keddie, who writes:

David provided for all time a beautiful model of the way in which the Lord’s people ought to handle their vindication against injustice and injury. David heaped “burning coals” upon the hapless Saul. No sooner had Saul emerged from the cave than he was hailed by David in the most respectful of terms. The recognition of that voice and the instant realization of how near he had come to eternity must have pierced Saul’s heart like an arrow. But then to hear what David said! He pressed seven points upon his persecutor.

He declared his innocence of the charges falsely brought against him by those to whom Saul had listened (24:9).

He declared his commitment to principle, in that he had not raised his hand against the Lord’s anointed (24:10).

He presented practical proof of the truth of his words by producing the portion of robe he had cut off in the cave (24:11).

He solemnly declared that judgement belonged to the Lord and indicated that he had no intention of exacting justice by his own hand in the future (24:12).

He appealed to his known personal history as a proof of his harmlessness to Saul and a confirmation of the veracity of his words (24:13).

He expressed true humility (24:14).

He cast himself upon the mercy of God (24:15).<sup>4</sup>

David’s confidence was in the justice of God. He quickly realized—fortunately, before it was too late—that he could leave the timing of justice to God. He would trust in God’s timing for the establishment of his kingdom.

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<sup>4</sup> Gordon J. Keddie, *Dawn of a Kingdom: The Message of 1 Samuel*, 225.

### III. An Assurance of God's Faithfulness (24:16-22)

And third, notice the appeal to God's faithfulness.

**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 (24:16).** David's soft answer to Saul brought him to tears.

In what is Saul's longest speech to date, he made a number of points. First, Saul acknowledged David's righteousness. **He said to David, "You are more righteous than I, for you have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil" (24:17).** Matthew Henry makes an astute observation:

This fair confession was sufficient to prove David innocent, even his enemy himself being judge; but not enough to prove Saul himself a true penitent. He should have said, "You are righteous, and I am wicked," but the utmost he will own is this, "You are more righteous than I." Bad men will commonly go no farther than this in their confessions: they will own they are not so good as some others are; there are those that are better than they, and more righteous.<sup>5</sup>

Second, Saul knew that David would be king. He said, **"And now, behold, I know that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand"** (24:20). Saul admitted that David would succeed him as king.

And third, Saul wanted protection for his family. He said to David, **"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"** (24:21). It was common for kings to get rid of their rivals, as well as their families, to protect themselves. That was Saul's concern. But **David swore to Saul**

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Vol. II (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing Company, n.d.), 411.

that he would not destroy Saul's family. **Then Saul went home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold (24:22).**

God used Saul to assure David of God's faithfulness, as Saul acknowledged David's future kingship. Sometimes, assurances of God's faithfulness come from the enemy.

### Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the incident of David sparing Saul's life as set forth in 1 Samuel 24:1-22, let us trust God to establish his kingdom in his time and in his way.

David's kingdom was not established quickly or easily. David's men in the cave wanted to seize the kingdom for David by killing Saul. But David's refusal to do so was because he understood that his kingdom would be given to him by God and must not be taken by force. It was a recognition that the kingdom was really God's kingdom. So, David was teaching his men that if they wanted David as their king, they would have to trust God, just as he did, to establish his kingdom in his time and in his way.

David's actions remind us of his greater Son, Jesus. The Bible says of Jesus, "He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:22-23). Even Jesus trusted God to establish his kingdom in his time and in his way.

God is at work establishing the kingdom of all those who have Jesus as their Sovereign. We are called to enter into the kingdom by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And we live as citizens of the kingdom by worshiping and serving and sharing and loving as we are instructed in God's word.

So, dear friends, let us trust God to establish his kingdom in his time and in his way. Amen.

# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church  
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and membership in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike maturity,  
equip them for their ministry in the church  
and life mission in the world,  
in order to magnify God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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