



## David's Fear of the Lord: The Righteous Are Rewarded (1 Sam 26)

*Notes: Week Fifteen*

1 Samuel 26 (HCSB)

### David Again Spares Saul

**26** Then the Ziphites came to Saul at Gibeah saying, “David is hiding on the hill of Hachilah opposite Jeshimon.” <sup>2</sup> So Saul, accompanied by 3,000 of the choice men of Israel, went to the Wilderness of Ziph to search for David there. <sup>3</sup> Saul camped beside the road at the hill of Hachilah opposite Jeshimon. David was living in the wilderness and discovered Saul had come there after him. <sup>4</sup> So David sent out spies and knew for certain that Saul had come. <sup>5</sup> Immediately, David went to the place where Saul had camped. He saw the place where Saul and Abner son of Ner, the general of his army, were lying down. Saul was lying inside the inner circle of the camp with the troops camped around him. <sup>6</sup> Then David asked Ahimelech the Hittite and Joab’s brother Abishai son of Zeruiah, “Who will go with me into the camp to Saul?”

“I’ll go with you,” answered Abishai.

<sup>7</sup> That night, David and Abishai came to the troops, and Saul was lying there asleep in the inner circle of the camp with his spear stuck in the ground by his head. Abner and the troops were lying around him. <sup>8</sup> Then Abishai said to David, “Today God has handed your enemy over to you. Let me thrust the spear through him into the ground just once. I won’t have to strike him twice!”

<sup>9</sup> But David said to Abishai, “Don’t destroy him, for who can lift a hand against the LORD’s anointed and be blameless?” <sup>10</sup> David added, “As the LORD lives, the LORD will certainly strike him down: either his day will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish. <sup>11</sup> However, because of the LORD, I will never lift my hand against the LORD’s anointed. Instead, take the spear and the water jug by his head, and let’s go.”

<sup>12</sup> So David took the spear and the water jug by Saul’s head, and they went their way. No one saw them, no one knew, and no one woke up; they all remained asleep because a deep sleep from the LORD came over them. <sup>13</sup> David crossed to the other side and stood on top of the mountain at a distance; there was a considerable space between them. <sup>14</sup> Then David shouted to the troops and to Abner son of Ner: “Aren’t you going to answer, Abner?”

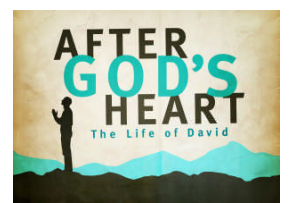
“Who are you who calls to the king?” Abner asked.

<sup>15</sup> David called to Abner, “You’re a man, aren’t you? Who in Israel is your equal? So why didn’t you protect your lord the king when one of the people came to destroy him? <sup>16</sup> What you have done is not good. As the LORD lives, all of you deserve to die since you didn’t protect your lord, the LORD’s anointed. Now look around; where are the king’s spear and water jug that were by his head?”

<sup>17</sup> Saul recognized David’s voice and asked, “Is that your voice, my son David?”

“It is my voice, my lord and king,” David said. <sup>18</sup> Then he continued, “Why is my lord pursuing his servant? What have I done? What evil is in my hand? <sup>19</sup> Now, may my lord the king please hear the words of his servant: If it is the LORD who has incited you against me, then may He accept an offering. But if it is people, may they be cursed in the presence of the LORD, for today they have driven me away from sharing in the inheritance of the LORD saying, ‘Go and worship other gods.’

<sup>20</sup> So don’t let my blood fall to the ground far from the LORD’s presence, for the king of Israel has come out to search for a flea, like one who pursues a partridge in the mountains.”



<sup>21</sup> Saul responded, “I have sinned. Come back, my son David, I will never harm you again because today you considered my life precious. I have been a fool! I’ve committed a grave error.”

<sup>22</sup> David answered, “Here is the king’s spear; have one of the young men come over and get it. <sup>23</sup> May the LORD repay every man for his righteousness and his loyalty. I wasn’t willing to lift my hand against the LORD’s anointed, even though the LORD handed you over to me today. <sup>24</sup> Just as I considered your life valuable today, so may the LORD consider my life valuable and rescue me from all trouble.”

<sup>25</sup> Saul said to him, “You are blessed, my son David. You will certainly do great things and will also prevail.” Then David went on his way, and Saul returned home.

## Holman Christian Standard Bible - *Study Bible*<sup>1</sup>

### 1 Samuel 26

**26:1** The Ziphites (see note at [23:19](#)) came to Saul at Gibeah with a report that David had returned to his earlier hiding place in Judah.

**26:3** If Saul was on the hill of Hachilah, it would mean he had chosen high ground for his camp, which provided him better protection.

**26:5** David's place designates a safe vantage point (probably higher—see note at [v. 6](#)) from which David could see Saul and Abner inside the inner circle of the camp.

**26:6** Ahimelech is described as a Hittite (i.e., foreigner), but his name is Hebrew or at least related to Hebrew. Joab's brother Abishai is introduced here; he would play an active role in David's kingship ([2Sam 10:10](#); [18:2-3](#); [23:18](#)). Go is literally "go down," implying David was at a higher point than Saul and thus at an advantage.

**26:8** Abishai must have whispered to David since he stood with him in the midst of Saul's army (but see [26:12](#)).

**26:9** On lift a hand against the LORD's anointed, see note at [24:6](#).

**26:10** David was content to leave Saul's life in the Lord's hands, a lesson that had just been reinforced in his dealings with Nabal ([25:39](#)).

**26:11** The spear and the water jug would provide evidence that David had been close enough to kill Saul.

**26:12** This deep sleep from the LORD was His specific intervention so He could teach Saul a further lesson about David's loyalty.

**26:13** The words on top of the mountain at a distance means this was a safe distance from Saul, but it provided good acoustics so David could call to the king.

**26:15** The phrase one of the people came to destroy him may refer to Abishai, who wanted to destroy Saul ([v. 8](#)), or hypothetically to David himself, who could have destroyed Saul as he stood over him.

**26:19** David could identify only two sources of Saul's desire to kill him—the LORD or the people. If the Lord, David wanted Saul to allow him to sacrifice a freewill offering to restore the broken fellowship between himself, God, and Saul. But if people had falsely accused him, David called on them to be cursed. Their false accusations had the effect of driving David away from the inheritance of the LORD, treating him as if he were not an Israelite.

**26:20** David compared himself to a flea or a partridge (see note at [24:14](#)) to suggest Saul's pursuit of him was a waste of resources.

**26:21** Saul's words sounded repentant, but Saul's past actions raised serious doubts in David's mind about their genuineness.

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1. Jeremy Royal Howard, ed., *HCSB Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "1 Samuel 26".

[26:22](#) David's suggestion that one of the young men of Saul retrieve the king's spear was a tactful way of saying he was not returning with Saul.

[26:23-24](#) David called on the Lord to repay those involved (especially him and Saul) as God saw their hearts. David didn't ask for Saul to consider his life valuable; he asked for the Lord to do so.

[26:25](#) Saul's words appear to be an admission that God had great things in store for his son-in-law. The two went on their way, having spoken the last words they would ever say to each other.

## English Standard Version - *Study Bible*<sup>2</sup>

### 1 Samuel 26

[26:1-25](#) *David Spares Saul at the Hill of Hachilah.* This chapter resembles [ch. 24](#), but there are too many differences to say that they are different versions of the same event. The location is different, and it is difficult to see how an encampment in the open air could be the same as one that occurred in a cave.

[26:1](#) The **Ziphites** are no happier to have David among them now than they were in [23:19](#).

[26:6](#) **Ahimelech the Hittite** is mentioned nowhere else in Scripture; he may have been a hired warrior. **Joab's brother Abishai the son of Zeruiah.** Zeruiah was David's sister ([1 Chron. 2:16-17](#)), so Joab and Abishai were David's nephews. For the family background, see note on [2 Sam. 2:13](#).

[26:8-9](#) **God has given your enemy into your hand.** Abishai uses the same arguments as David's men in [24:4](#), and David again refuses, adding that God will surely strike Saul instead, a lesson he perhaps learned from the death of Nabal ([25:39](#)).

[26:11-12](#) **"take now the spear...." So David took the spear.** The narrator can say that David took the spear because he was the one who ordered it to be taken. Similarly, Abiathar told David that Saul had killed the priests ([22:21](#)), although Doeg did the actual killing.

[26:16](#) **you deserve to die, because you have not kept watch over your lord.** The "you's" are all plural here in Hebrew—David is accusing Saul's men collectively.

[26:19-20](#) As in [10:1](#), **heritage** seems to refer both to Israel as the inherited land and to the people as the covenant community (see also [2 Sam. 14:16](#); [20:19](#); [21:3](#)). Chasing David away from the Lord's heritage so that he may have no **share** of it and trying to force him to **serve other gods** is a capital offense against the Lord of Israel, who owns the land of Israel and rules his people Israel through his representative, the king. Those who commit this sin should be **cursed before the LORD**. This is what David is conveying to Saul, **the king of Israel** ([1 Sam. 26:20](#)). David seems to be near the end of his endurance. "Serve other gods" reflects the common Near Eastern idea that a god could be worshiped only on its own soil ([2 Kings 5:17](#)) and also perhaps the idea that one worships the god of the people among whom one lives. This is not David's own view, but his report of the views of others who were **saying** this. First and Second Samuel do not envisage a limitation to the power of the Lord. Certainly God is portrayed as being able to work in Philistia ([1 Samuel 4-6](#)), and God even seems to be directing the moves of the Philistine rulers ([23:27](#); [29:4](#)). When David is actually in Philistia, he does in fact worship the Lord ([30:6-8](#); see also note on [29:6](#)). **Partridge** is literally a "calling [bird]." Abner had asked who was "calling" the king ([26:14](#)), so David wryly compares himself to "the caller."

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2. Lane T. Dennis, ed., *ESV Study Bible, The: English Standard Version*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Bibles, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "1 Samuel 26".

## NLT Life Application Study Bible<sup>3</sup>

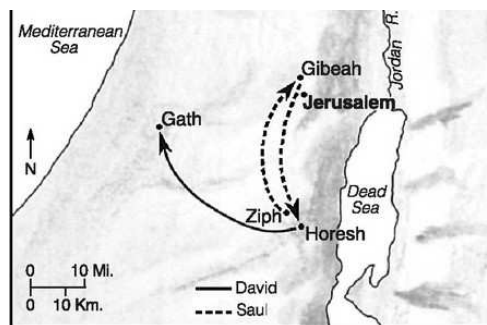
### 1 Samuel 26

**26:5-9** Abishai showed great courage when he volunteered to go into Saul's camp with David. In the heat of emotion, Abishai wanted to kill Saul, but David restrained him. Although Abishai was only trying to protect David, his leader, David could not hurt Saul because of his respect for Saul's authority and position as God's anointed king. Abishai may have disagreed with David, but he also respected the one in authority over him. Eventually he became the greatest warrior in David's army ([2 Samuel 23:18, 19](#)).

**26:8ff** The strongest moral decisions are the ones we make before temptation strikes. David was determined to follow God, and this carried over into his decision not to murder God's anointed king, Saul, even when his men and the circumstances seemed to make it a feasible option. Who would you have been like in such a situation—David or David's men? To be like David and follow God, we must realize that we can't do wrong in order to execute justice. Even when our closest friends counsel us to do something that seems right, we must always put God's commands first.

**26:9** Why did David refuse to kill Saul? God had placed Saul in power and had not yet removed him. David did not want to run ahead of God's timing. We are in similar situations when we have leaders in church or government who are unfaithful or incompetent. It may be easy for us to criticize or move against a leader oblivious to God's hidden purposes and timing. Determining not to do wrong, David left Saul's destiny in God's hands. While we should not ignore sin or sit back and allow evil leaders to carry on their wickedness, neither should we take actions that are against God's laws. We should work for righteousness while

**26:15, 16** David could have killed Saul and Abner, but he would have disobeyed God and set into motion possible cycles of vengeance and assassination. Instead, he took a spear and water jug, showing that he could have killed the king but had not done it. And he made the point that he had great respect for both God and God's anointed king. When you need to make a point, look for creative, God-honoring ways to do so. It will have a more significant impact.



*Saul Chases David the Men of Ziph Again Betrayed David to Saul, Who Was in His Palace in Gibeah.*

*Saul Took 3,000 Troops to the Area Around Horesh in Order to Find David. David Could Have Killed Saul, but He Refused.*

*Saul, Feeling Foolish at David's Kindness, Returned to Gibeah, and David Went to Gath.*

**26:25** Saul had opportunities to kill David, but he never did. Why? First, every time David and Saul were face to face, David did something generous for Saul. The king did not want to respond to David's kindness with cruelty in front of all his men. Second, David had a large following in Israel. By killing him, Saul would risk his hold on the kingdom. Third, God had appointed David to become king of Israel and was protecting him.

## Life Essentials Study Bible<sup>4</sup>

*A Principle to Live By*  
**Respect Plus Accountability**  
*from [1 Samuel 26:1-25](#)*

*We are to respect those who have spiritual leadership roles in the church,  
but they must still be held accountable for irresponsible and sinful actions.*

Once again, David had an opportunity to destroy his enemy. But once again, David refused to harm the king since he was “the Lord’s anointed” ([v. 23](#)).

Today, some Christians have used this Old Testament illustration and others like it to exhort and even condemn fellow believers who dare raise any questions about the attitudes and actions of spiritual leaders. Referencing David’s behavior, they say, “How dare you criticize the Lord’s anointed?”

It’s true that all believers are to respect and honor spiritual leaders. Paul made this very clear:

*Now we ask you, brothers, to give recognition to those who labor among you and lead you in the Lord and admonish you, and to regard them very highly in love because of their work. ([1Th 5:12-13a](#); see also [Heb 13:17](#).)*

However, Paul balanced this exhortation with another. While warning Timothy not to receive false accusations, he also emphasized that all spiritual leaders are to be held accountable to God’s standard of righteousness:

*Don’t accept an accusation against an elder unless it is supported by two or three witnesses. Publicly rebuke those who sin, so that the rest will also be afraid. ([1Tm 5:19-20](#))*

Elders were to hold each other accountable. The public rebuke was to be done in the presence of the other spiritual leaders in the church. No one was to be a law unto himself.

### Reflection and Response

**Why is it dangerous to use David’s refusal to harm “the Lord’s anointed” ([1Sm 26:23](#)) as a prohibition against holding spiritual leaders responsible for their actions?**

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4. Gene Getz, *Life Essentials Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2011), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 385.