

# 1 Samuel 24: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     1 Samuel chapter 24 When Saul returned from following the Philistines, he was told, Behold, David is in the wilderness of En-Gedi. 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.
- 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. 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. And afterward 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.
- 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. 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. And David said to Saul, Why do you listen to the words of men who say, Behold, David seeks your harm.
- [ 1 : 2 2 ]     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.
- 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. May the Lord judge between me and you. May the Lord avenge me against you. But my hand shall not be against you.
- As the proverb of the ancients says, Out of the wicked comes wickedness. But my hand shall not be against you. After whom has the king of Israel come out? After whom do you pursue?
- After a dead dog? After a flea? 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. As soon as David had finished speaking these words to Saul, Saul said, Is this your voice, my son David?
- [ 2 : 2 7 ]     And Saul lifted up his voice and wept. He said to David, You are more righteous than I, for you have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil. 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.
- 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. And now, behold, I know that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand.

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. And David swore this to Saul. Then Saul went home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.

In 1 Samuel chapter 24, David is on the run from Saul, and he has the first of three occasions when he has the opportunity to get revenge, but resists. On this, the first of three occasions, David is in a cave with his men, and Saul goes into the cave to relieve himself, or literally to cover up his feet.

In the darkness of the cave, David has the opportunity to assassinate Saul, and he resists it. This again might recall the story from the judges. Ehud, a Benjaminite judge, assassinates Eglon, the king of the Moabites, while Eglon's servants believe that he is covering his feet.

[ 3 : 49 ] The expression covering feet is also found in the story of Ruth, although the other way round, Ruth uncovers Boaz's feet. In that story, she lifts up the wing of his garment to uncover his feet, and then she requests that Boaz take her under the wing of his garment.

David here has the opportunity to strike out at Saul, to play the role of the assassin like Ehud, and he resists. However, he does cut off the wing of his robe.

The wing of the garment is seen in Numbers chapter 15, verses 37 to 41. The Lord said to Moses, Speak to the people of Israel and tell them to make tassels on the corners, or the wings, of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a cord of blue on the tassel of each corner.

And it shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the Lord, to do them, not to follow after your own heart and your own eyes, which you are inclined to whore after. So you shall remember and do all my commandments, The wings then are a sign of holiness, and wings are also a sign of authority.

I've already mentioned the story of Ruth and Boaz. Ruth coming under the wing of Boaz is Ruth coming under Boaz's care. Cutting off the corner of the garment would be a symbolic attack upon Saul's authority, much as in chapter 15 the garment of Samuel represented the kingdom that would be torn from Saul, so here the garment that Saul is wearing represents his authority.

[ 5 : 24 ] Garments are symbolic. For instance, the garments of the high priest are symbolically associated with the tabernacle. The tabernacle is a clothed building, and the high priest's garments are like a wearable tent.

David's cutting off of the corner of the garment then is a symbolic assault upon Saul. David immediately repents of this, however, and he restrains his men from attacking Saul.

He speaks directly to Saul outside of the cave. The corner of the robe is proof that he could have killed him, but didn't do so. David here seeks movement towards reconciliation.

He wants the hostilities between Saul and him to end. He addresses Saul as a subordinate. He bows to Saul. And he also speaks to Saul more intimately, as his father.

However, David's speech to Saul suggests at points that Saul is only pursuing him on false counsel, rather than because of Saul's own violence. This provides a way for Saul perhaps to save face, and at the very least is an extremely charitable construction placed upon things by David.

[ 6 : 25 ] Charitable, and probably to David's own knowledge, quite inaccurate. David insists that he is not worth pursuing, and he has no desire to kill Saul. He's a loyal subject. He's a servant of Saul and a family member.

He's not an enemy. One of the most important features of this passage is the way that it shows that David does not take judgment into his own hands. He does appeal, however, to God to judge between him and his pursuer Saul.

We can learn a lot from reading some of David's psalms alongside the story of 1 Samuel. David will not seek vengeance himself by his own hand, but he does seek the Lord to act on his behalf.

For instance, Psalm 54 was written around this time. O God, save me by your name, and vindicate me by your might. O God, hear my prayer, give ear to the words of my mouth.

For strangers have risen against me. Ruthless men seek my life. They do not set God before themselves. Behold, God is my helper. The Lord is the upholder of my life.

[ 7 : 25 ] He will return the evil to my enemies. In your faithfulness put an end to them. With a freewill offering I will sacrifice to you. I will give thanks to your name, O Lord, for it is good.

For he has delivered me from every trouble, and my eye has looked in triumph on my enemies. David here prays for God in his faithfulness to put an end to his enemies. However, he is not going to take vengeance into his own hands.

He entrusts the Lord with judgment against his enemy. Our ability to forgive and not seek vengeance has a lot to do with our trust in God to judge righteously on our behalf.

When we put things in God's hands, we don't have to take them up in our own hands. Saul recognises that David has been righteous to him, and merciful as well, not taking action when he could have done.

In 1 Samuel chapter 24, I also think we see many of the themes of the story of Esau and Jacob, perhaps especially themes from Genesis chapter 27, and the deception of Isaac.

[ 8 : 24 ] Saul is a wicked father figure, and David, in the darkness of the cave, approaches him, and Saul is blind in the darkness. David cuts off a corner of Saul's robe, something that, as we have seen, represents the kingdom.

However, immediately afterwards, David is troubled by his conscience, recognising that despite Saul's wickedness, he has acted wrongfully. And in the conversation that follows, where David's righteous restraint in seeking to take the inheritance for himself is revealed, Saul's words, Is this your voice, David my son?

Recall the interaction between Jacob and his blind father Isaac. Genesis chapter 27 verse 22, So Jacob went near to Isaac his father, who felt him and said, The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.

Saul's weeping as he realises his sin, and the devastating realisation that he has lost the blessing of God, and the birthright of the kingdom, recalls Esau's response in that chapter.

Esau said to his father, Have you but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father! And Esau lifted up his voice and wept. In verse 38, The chapter ends with Saul declaring that David is more righteous than he is, that the kingdom will be established in his hands, and blessing David.

[ 9 : 42 ] In different ways, Saul is playing both the role of Isaac, the one who ends up blessing the son, and the role of Esau, the one who loses the blessing and the birthright. David, as Jacob, has the opportunity to seize the blessing for himself, to kill the king, and to snatch the kingdom.

However, by refraining from doing so, he ends up receiving it nonetheless, and he also ends up receiving a blessing from Saul, quite unexpectedly. God will vindicate David for his righteousness in the matter, and he will judge Saul.

There may also be an echo of the story of David's own ancestors, Judah and Tamar here. Saul admits that David was more righteous than he. We might see a sort of reversal of Judah's self-condemnation, when he declares that Tamar was more righteous than he.

Saul now explicitly acknowledges that David is going to become the king. He requests that David not cut off his offspring, as David had cut off the corner of his garment. As the Lord preserves David from taking vengeance, in this and the following chapters, we see that the Lord will bring about justice in situations nonetheless.

Like David, rather than taking matters into our own hand, we should seek the Lord's face, call for him to act in our situations, and give up our attempts to set things right ourselves.

[ 11 : 04 ] A question to consider. What are some of the lessons that the story of David and Saul can teach us about the relationship between forgiveness, reconciliation and justice?

