

# CHAPTER 26

David's troubles from Saul here begin again; and the clouds return after the rain, when one would have hoped the storm had blown over, and the sky had cleared upon that side; but after Saul had owned his fault in persecuting David, and acknowledged David's title to the crown, yet here he revives the persecution, so perfectly lost was he to all sense of honour and virtue.

**I.** The Ziphites informed him where David was (v. 1), and thereupon he marched out with a considerable force in quest of him (v. 2, 3).

**II.** David gained intelligence of his motions (v. 4), and took a view of his camp (v. 5).

**III.** He and one of his men ventured into his camp in the night and found him and all his guards fast asleep (v. 6, 7).

**IV.** David, though much urged to it by his companions, would not take away Saul's life, but only carried off his spear and his cruse of water (v. 8-12).

**V.** He produced these as a further witness for him that he did not design any ill to Saul, and reasoned with him upon his conduct (v. 13-20).

**VI.** Saul was hereby convinced of his error, and once more desisted from persecuting David (v. 21-25). The story is much like that which we had (1 Samuel 24). In both David is delivered out of Saul's hand, and Saul out of David's.

## <0260>1 SAMUEL 26:1-5

### SAUL AGAIN PURSUES DAVID

Here,

**1.** Saul gets information of David's movements and acts offensively. The Ziphites came to him and told him where David now was, in the same place where he was when they formerly betrayed him, <0239>1 Samuel 23:19.

Perhaps (though it is not mentioned) Saul had given them intimation, under-hand, that he continued his design against David, and would be glad of their assistance. If not, they were very officious to Saul, aware of what would please him, and very malicious against David, to whom they despaired of ever reconciling themselves, and therefore they stirred up Saul (who needed no such spur) against him, v. 1. For aught we know, Saul would have continued in the same good mind that he was in (~~0247~~ 1 Samuel 24:17), and would not have given David this fresh trouble, if the Ziphites had not put him on. See what need we have to pray to God that, since we have so much of the tinner of corruption in our own hearts, the sparks of temptation may be kept far from us, lest, if they come together, we be set on fire of hell. Saul readily caught at the information, and went down with an army of 3000 men to the place where David hid himself, v. 2. How soon do unsanctified hearts lose the good impressions which their convictions have made upon them and return with the dog to their vomit!

**2.** David gets information of Saul's movements and acts defensively. He did not march out to meet and fight him; he sought only his own safety, not Saul's ruin; therefore he *abode in the wilderness* (v. 3), putting thereby a great force upon himself, and curbing the bravery of his own spirit by a silent retirement, showing more true valour than he could have done by an irregular resistance.

**(1.)** He had spies who informed him of Saul's descent, *that he had come in very deed* (v. 4.); for he would not believe that Saul would deal so basely with him till he had the utmost evidence of it.

**(2.)** He observed with his own eyes how Saul was encamped, v. 5. He came towards the place where Saul and his men had pitched their tents, so near as to be able, undiscovered, to take a view of their entrenchments, probably in the dusk of the evening.

## ~~0246~~ 1 SAMUEL 26:6-12

### DAVID SPARES SAUL'S LIFE

Here is,

**I.** David's bold adventure into Saul's camp in the night, accompanied only by his kinsman Abishai, the son of Zeruiah. He proposed it to him and to another of his confidants (v. 6), but the other either declined it as too dangerous an enterprise, or at least was content that Abishai, who was forward to it, should run the risk of it rather than himself. Whether David was prompted to do this by his own courage, or by an extraordinary impression upon his spirits, or by the oracle, does not appear; but, like Gideon, he ventured through the guards, with a special assurance of the divine protection.

**II.** The posture he found the camp in *Saul lay sleeping in the trench*, or, as some read it, *in his chariot, and in the midst of his carriages*, with *his spear stuck in the ground* by him, to be ready if his quarters should be beaten up (v. 7); and all the soldiers, even those that were appointed to stand sentinel, were *fast asleep*, v. 12. Thus were their eyes closed and their hands bound, *for a deep sleep from the Lord had fallen upon them*; something extraordinary there was in it that they should all be asleep together, and so fast asleep that David and Abishai walked and talked among them, and yet none of them stirred. Sleep, when God gives it to his beloved, is their rest and refreshment; but he can, when he pleases, make it to his enemies their imprisonment. Thus are the *stout-hearted spoiled; they have slept their sleep, and none of the men of might have found their hands, at thy rebuke, O God of Jacob!* <sup><97B></sup> Psalm 76:5, 6. *It was a deep sleep from the Lord*, who has the command of the powers of nature, and makes them to serve his purposes as he pleases. Whom God will disable, or destroy, he binds up with *a spirit of slumber*, <sup><61B></sup> Romans 11:8. How helpless do Saul and all his forces lie, all, in effect, disarmed and chained! and yet nothing is done to them; they are only rocked asleep. How easily can God weaken the strongest, befool the wisest, and baffle the most watchful! Let all his friends therefore trust him and all his enemies fear him.

**III.** Abishai's request to David for a commission to dispatch Saul with the spear that stuck at his bolster, which (now that he lay so fair) he undertook to do at one blow, v. 8. He would not urge David to kill him himself, because he had declined doing this before when he had a similar opportunity; but he begged earnestly that David would give him leave to do it, pleading that he was his enemy, not only cruel and implacable, but false and perfidious, whom no reason would rule nor kindness work upon, and that *God had now delivered him into his hand*, and did in effect bid

him strike. The last advantage he had of this kind was indeed but accidental, when Saul happened to be in the cave with him at the same time. But in this there was something extraordinary; the deep sleep that had fallen on Saul and all his guards was manifestly from the Lord, so that it was a special providence which gave him this opportunity; he ought not therefore to let it slip.

**IV.** David's generous refusal to suffer any harm to be done to Saul, and in it a resolute adherence to his principles of loyalty, v. 9. David charged Abishai not to destroy him, would not only not do it himself, but not permit another to do it. And he gave two reasons for it: —

**1.** It would be a sinful affront to God's ordinance. Saul was the Lord's anointed, king of Israel by the special appointment and nomination of the God of Israel, the power that was, and to resist him was to *resist the ordinance of God*, <sup><S1D></sup>Romans 13:2. No man could do it and be guiltless. The thing he feared was guilt and his concern respected his innocence more than his safety.

**2.** It would be a sinful anticipation of God's providence. God had sufficiently shown him, in Nabal's case, that, if he left it to him to avenge him, he would do it in due time. Encouraged therefore by his experience in that instance, he resolves to wait till God shall think fit to avenge him on Saul, and he will by no means *avenge himself* (v. 10): "*The Lord shall smite him*, as he did Nabal, with some sudden stroke, or he shall *die in battle* (as it proved he did soon after), or, if not, *his day shall come to die* a natural death, and I will contentedly wait till then, rather than force my way to the promised crown by any indirect methods." The temptation indeed was very strong; but, if he should yield, he would sin against God, and therefore he will resist the temptation with the utmost resolution (v. 11): "*The Lord forbid that I should stretch forth my hand against the Lord's anointed*; no, I will never do it, nor suffer it to be done." Thus bravely does he prefer his conscience to his interest and trusts God with the issue.

**V.** The improvement he made of this opportunity for the further evidence of his own integrity. He and Abishai carried away the spear and cruse of water which Saul had by his bed-side (v. 12), and, which was very strange, none of all the guards were aware of it. If a physician had given them the strongest opiate or stupifying dose, they could not have been faster locked

up with sleep. Saul's spear which he had by him for defence, and his cup of water which he had for his refreshment, were both stolen from him while he slept. Thus do we lose our strength and our comfort when we are careless, and secure, and off our watch.

## ~~0263~~ 1 SAMUEL 26:13-20

### DAVID EXPOSTULATES WITH SAUL

David having got safely from Saul's camp himself, and having brought with him proofs sufficient that he had been there, posts himself conveniently, so that they might hear him and yet not reach him (v. 13), and then begins to reason with them upon what had passed.

**I.** He reasons ironically with Abner, and keenly banters him. David knew well that it was from the mighty power of God that Abner and the rest of the guards were cast into so deep a sleep, and that God's immediate hand was in it; but he reproaches Abner as unworthy to be captain of the lifeguards, since he could sleep when the king his master lay so much exposed. By this it appears that the hand of God locked them up in this deep sleep that, as soon as ever David had got out of danger, a very little thing awakened them, even David's voice at a great distance roused them, v. 14. Abner got up (we may suppose it early in a summer's morning) and enquired who called, and disturbed the king's repose. "It is I," says David, and then he upbraids him with his sleeping when he should have been upon his guard. Perhaps Abner, looking upon David as a despicable enemy and one that there was no danger from, had neglected to set a watch; however, he himself ought to have been more wakeful. David, to put him into confusion, told him,

**1.** That he had lost his honour (v. 15): "*Art not thou a man?* (so the word is), a man in office, that art bound, by the duty of thy place, to inspect the soldiery? Art not thou in reputation for a valiant man? So thou wouldst be esteemed, a man of such courage and conduct that there is none like thee; but now thou art shamed for ever. Thou a general! Thou, a sluggard!"

**2.** That he deserved to lose his head (v. 16): "*You are all worthy to die*, by martial law, for being off your guard, when you had the king himself asleep in the midst of you. *Ecce signum — Behold this token.* See where the

king's spear is, in the hand of him whom the king himself is pleased to count his enemy. Those that took away this might as easily and safely have taken away his life. Now see who are the king's best friends, you that neglected him and left him exposed or I that protected him when he was exposed. You pursue me as worthy to die, and irritate Saul against me; but who is worthy to die now?" Note, Sometimes those that unjustly condemn others are justly left to fall into condemnation themselves.

**II.** He reasons seriously and affectionately with Saul. By this time he was so well awake as to hear what was said, and to discern who said it (v. 17): *Is this thy voice, my son David?* In the same manner he had expressed his relentings, <sup>10246</sup>1 Samuel 24:16. He had given his wife to another and yet calls him *son*, thirsted after his blood and yet is glad to hear his voice. Those are bad indeed that have never any convictions of good, nor ever sincerely utter good expressions. And now David has as fair an opportunity of reaching Saul's conscience as he had just now of taking away his life. This he lays hold on, though not of that, and enters into a close argument with him, concerning the trouble he still continued to give him, endeavouring to persuade him to let fall the prosecution and be reconciled.

**1.** He complains of the very melancholy condition he was brought into by the enmity of Saul against him. Two things he laments: —

**(1.)** That he was driven from his master and from his business: "*My lord pursues after his servant*, v. 18. How gladly would I serve thee as formerly if my service might be accepted! but, instead of being owned as a servant, I am pursued as a rebel, and my lord is my enemy, and he whom I would follow with respect compels me to flee from him."

**(2.)** That he was driven from his God and from his religion; and this was a much greater grievance than the former (v. 19): "*They have driven me out from the inheritance of the Lord*, have made Canaan too hot for me, at least the inhabited parts of it, have forced me into the deserts and mountains, and will, ere long, oblige me entirely to quit the country." And that which troubled him was not so much that he was driven out from his own inheritance as that he was driven out from the *inheritance of the Lord*, the holy land. It should be more comfortable to us to think of God's title to our estates and his interest in them than of our own, and that with them we may honour him then that with them we may maintain ourselves. Nor was it so much his trouble that he was constrained to live among strangers as

that he was constrained to live among the worshippers of strange gods and was thereby thrust into temptation to join with them in their idolatrous worship. His enemies did, in effect, send him to *go and serve other gods*, and perhaps he had heard that some of them had spoken to that purport of him. Those that forbid our attendance on God's ordinances do what in them lies to estrange us from God and to make us heathens. If David had not been a man of extraordinary grace, and firmness to his religion, the ill usage he met with from his own prince and people, who were Israelites and worshippers of the true God, would have prejudiced him against the religion they professed and have driven him to communicate with idolaters. "If these be Israelites," he might have said, "let me live and die with Philistines;" and no thanks to them that their conduct had not that effect. We are to reckon that the greatest injury that can be done us which exposes us to sin. Of those who thus led David into temptation he here says, *Cursed be they before the Lord*. Those fall under a curse that thrust out those whom God receives, and send those to the devil who are dear to God.

**2.** He insists upon his own innocency: *What have I done or what evil is in my hand?* v. 18. He had the testimony of his conscience for him that he had never done nor ever designed any mischief to the person, honour, or government, of his prince, nor to any of the interests of his country. He had lately had Saul's own testimony concerning him (<sup><0247></sup>1 Samuel 24:17): *Thou art more righteous than I*. It was very unreasonable and wicked for Saul to pursue him as a criminal, when he could not charge him with any crime.

**3.** He endeavours to convince Saul that his pursuit of him is not only wrong, but mean, and much below him: "*The king of Israel, whose dignity is great, and who has so much other work to do, has come out to seek a flea, as when one doth hunt a partridge in the mountains,*" v. 20 — a poor game for the king of Israel to pursue. He compares himself to a partridge, a vert innocent harmless bird, which, when attempts are made upon its life, flies if it can, but makes no resistance. And would Saul bring the flower of his army into the field only to hunt one poor partridge? What a disparagement was this to his honour! What a stain would it be on his memory to trample upon so weak and patient as well as so innocent an enemy! <sup><0248></sup>James 5:6, *You have killed the just, and he doth not resist you.*

**4.** He desires that the core of the controversy may be searched into and some proper method taken to bring it to an end, v. 19. Saul himself could

not say that justice put him on thus to persecute David, or that he was obliged to do it for the public safety. David was not willing to say (though it was very true) that Saul's own envy and malice put him on to do it; and therefore he concludes it must be attributed either to the righteous judgment of God or to the unrighteous designs of evil men. Now,

(1.) *“If the Lord have stirred thee up against me, either in displeasure to me (taking this way to punish me for my sins against him, though, as to thee, I am guiltless) or in displeasure to thee, if it be the effect of that evil spirit from the Lord which troubles thee, let him accept an offering from us both — let us join in making our peace with God, reconciling ourselves to him, which may be done, by sacrifice; and then I hope the sin will be pardoned, whatever it is, and the trouble, which is so great a vexation both to thee and me, will come to an end.”* See the right method of peace-making; let us first make God our friend by Christ the great Sacrifice, and then all other enmities shall be slain, <sup><1016></sup>Ephesians 2:16; <sup><1017></sup>Proverbs 16:7. But,

(2.) *“If thou art incited to it by wicked men, that incense thee against me, cursed be they before the Lord,”* that is, they are very wicked people, and it is fit that they should be abandoned as such, and excluded from the king's court and councils. He decently lays the blame upon the evil counsellors who advised the king to that which was dishonourable and dishonest, and insists upon it that they be removed from about him and forbidden his presence, as men cursed before the Lord, and then he hoped he should gain his petition, which is (v. 20), *“Let not my blood fall to the earth, as thou threatenest, for it is before the face of the Lord, who will take cognizance of the wrong and avenge it.”* Thus pathetically does David plead with Saul for his life, and, in order to that, for his favourable opinion of him.

## <sup><1021></sup> 1 SAMUEL 26:21-25

### SAUL RELENTS

Here is,

**I.** Saul's penitent confession of his fault and folly in persecuting David and his promise to do so no more. This second instance of David's respect to



him wrought more upon him than the former, and extorted from him better acknowledgements, v. 21.

**1.** He owns himself melted and quite overcome by David's kindness to him: *"My soul was precious in thy eyes this day, which, I thought, had been odious!"*

**2.** He acknowledges he has done very wrong to persecute him, that he has therein acted against God's law (*I have sinned*), and against his own interest (*I have played the fool*), in pursuing him as an enemy who would have been one of his best friends, if he could but have thought so. "Herein (says he) I have *erred exceedingly*, and wronged both thee and myself." Note, Those that sin play the fool and err exceedingly, those especially that hate and persecute God's people, ~~1828~~ Job 19:28.

**3.** He invites him to court again: *Return, my son David*. Those that have understanding will see it to be their interest to have those about them that *behave themselves wisely*, as David did, and have God with them.

**4.** He promises him that he will not persecute him as he has done, but protect him: *I will no more do thee harm*. We have reason to think, according to the mind he was now in, that he meant as he said, and yet neither his confession nor his promise of amendment came from a principle of true repentance.

**II.** David's improvement of Saul's convictions and confessions and the evidence he had to produce of his own sincerity. He desired that one of the footmen might fetch the spear (v. 22), and then (v. 23),

**1.** He appeals to God as judge of the controversy: *The Lord render to every man his righteousness*. David, by faith, is sure that he will do it because he infallibly knows the true characters of all persons and actions and is inflexibly just to render to every man according to his work, and, by prayer, he desires he would do it. Herein he does, in effect, pray against Saul, who had dealt unrighteously and unfaithfully with him (*Give them according to their deeds*, ~~1828~~ Psalm 28:4); but he principally intends it as a prayer for himself, that God would protect him in his righteousness and faithfulness, and also reward him, since Saul so ill requited him.

**2.** He reminds Saul again of the proof he had now given of his respect to him from a principle of loyalty: *I would not stretch forth my hand against the Lord's anointed*, intimating to Saul that the anointing oil was his

protection, for which he was indebted to the Lord and ought to express his gratitude to him (had he been a common person David would not have been so tender of him), perhaps with this further implication, that Saul knew, or had reason to think, David was the Lord's anointed too, and therefore, by the same rule, Saul ought to be as tender of David's life as David had been of his.

**3.** Not relying much upon Saul's promises, he puts himself under God's protection and begs his favour (v. 24): "*Let my life be much set by in the eyes of the Lord, how light soever thou makest of it.*" Thus, for his kindness to Saul, he takes God to be his paymaster, which those may with a holy confidence do that *do well and suffer for it.*

**III.** Saul's prediction of David's advancement. He commends him (v. 25): *Blessed be thou, my son David.* So strong was the conviction Saul was now under of David's honesty that he was not ashamed to condemn himself and applaud David, even in the hearing of his own soldiers, who could not but blush to think that they had come out so furiously against a man whom their master, when he meets him, caresses thus. He foretels his victories, and his elevation at last: *Thou shalt do great things.* Note, Those who make conscience of doing that which is truly good may come, by the divine assistance, to do that which is truly great. He adds, "*Thou shalt also still prevail, more and more,*" he means against himself, but is loth to speak that out. The princely qualities which appeared in David — his generosity in sparing Saul, his military authority in reprimanding Abner for sleeping, his care of the public good, and the signal tokens of God's presence with him — convinced Saul that he would certainly be advanced to the throne at last, according to the prophecies concerning him.

*Lastly,* A palliative cure being thus made of the wound, they parted friends. Saul returned to Gibeah *re infecta* — *without accomplishing his design,* and ashamed of the expedition he had made; but David could not take his word so far as to return with him. Those that have once been false are not easily trusted another time. Therefore *David went on his way.* And, after this parting, it does not appear that ever Saul and David saw one another again.