

# CHAPTER 24

## INTRODUCTION TO FIRST SAMUEL 24

Saul being returned from following the Philistines, renews his pursuit after David, (<sup><0241></sup>1 Samuel 24:1,2); and they meeting in a cave, where David had the opportunity of taking away the life of Saul, which his men pressed him to, yet only cut off the skirt of his robe, (<sup><0243></sup>1 Samuel 24:3-8); which, calling after him, he held up to him to convince him he had his life in his hands, but spared it, (<sup><0249></sup>1 Samuel 24:9,10); upon which he very pathetically reasons with him about the unreasonableness and unrighteousness of his pursuit after him, to take away his life, (<sup><02411></sup>1 Samuel 24:11-15); which so affected Saul, that he confessed he was more righteous than he, and owned that the kingdom would be his, and only desired him to swear to him not to cut off his offspring, which David did, and so they parted, (<sup><02416></sup>1 Samuel 24:16-22).

**Ver. 1.** *And it came to pass, when Saul was returned from following the Philistines*, etc.] Having, as it should seem, got the victory over them, and driven them out of his country, and pursued them to their own:

*that it was told him, saying, behold, David [is] in the wilderness of Engedi*; in the strong holds of it, the high rocks and mountains in it, (<sup><0239></sup>1 Samuel 23:29).

**Ver. 2.** *Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel*, etc.]. Out of his army, with which he had been pursuing the Philistines:

*and went to seek David, and his men, upon the rocks of the wild goats*; which were in the wilderness of Engedi; those rocks were exceeding high and terrible to look at, full of precipices, and so prominent, that to travellers they seemed as if they would fall into the adjacent valleys, that it even struck terror into them to look at them <sup>f473</sup>; called the rocks of wild goats, because these creatures, called from hence “rupicaprae”, or rock goats, (see <sup><1891></sup>Job 39:1); delighted to be there; and are, as Pliny <sup>f474</sup> says, of such prodigious swiftness, that they will leap from mountain to mountain, and back again at pleasure; these mountains David and his men chose for

safety, and the height and craggedness of them did not deter Saul and his men from seeking him there.

**Ver. 3.** *And he came to the sheepcotes by the way, where [was] a cave,* etc.] For the sheep to be led into at noon, to shelter them from the heat: such was the cave of Polyphemus, observed by Bochart <sup>f475</sup>, in which sheep and goats lay down and slept; (see Gill on “~~QRB~~Zephaniah 2:6”);

*and Saul went in to cover his feet;* the Targum is, to do his necessaries; and so Josephus <sup>f476</sup>; and the Jewish commentators generally understand it of easing nature; and as the eastern people used to wear long and loose garments, these, when they performed such an action, they used in modesty to gather them close about them, that no part of the body, their feet, and especially the parts of nature which should be concealed, might be seen; but the Syriac and Arabic versions render it, “and there he lay” or “slept”; which suggest, that his going into the cave was in order to take some sleep and rest, when it was usual to cover the feet, both to prevent taking cold, and the private parts of the body being exposed to view; and this accounts better for Saul not hearing David’s men in the cave, and for his being insensible of David’s cuttings off the skirt of his garment, and best agrees with the use of the phrase in (~~QRB~~Judges 3:24); the only place besides this in which it is used; (see Gill on “~~QRB~~Judges 3:24”);

*and David and his men remained in the sides of the cave;* unseen and unobserved by Saul, even six hundred of them; nor need this seem strange, since in those parts of the world there were caves exceeding large, made so either by nature or art. Vansleb <sup>f477</sup> speaks of a cave in Egypt so extraordinary large, that, without hyperbole, a thousand horses might there draw up in battle array, and of another larger than that; and Strabo says <sup>f478</sup>, that towards Arabia and Iturea are mountains difficult to be passed, and in which are deep caves, one of which would hold four thousand men: and as the mouths of these caves were generally narrow, and the further parts of them large, and also dark, persons at the entrance of them could be seen, when those in the more remote parts could not; and this cave is said to be extremely dark <sup>f479</sup>; which accounts for Saul’s being seen when he came into the cave, whereas David and his men could not be seen by him.

**Ver. 4.** *And the men of David said unto him,* etc.] Some of his principal men, who were about him, and near him, such as Joab and Abishai:

*behold the day of which the Lord said unto thee*: now the time was come that he spoke of to him by Samuel, or Gad, or to himself directly:

*behold, I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand*; and such was Saul, as appeared by his seeking to take away his life; and now he was in the hand of David to take away his life, if he pleased:

*that thou mayest do to him as it shall seem good unto thee*; an opportunity of this kind now offered:

*then David arose*; from that part of the cave in which he was, the further part of it:

*and cut off the skirt of Saul's robe privily*; unawares to him, and unobserved by him, which might be easily done, if Saul was asleep, and it is probable he was; and by the same way it may be accounted for that he did not hear the discourse that passed between David and his men.

**Ver. 5.** *And it came to pass afterward, that David's heart smote him*, etc.] His conscience accused him, and he repented of what he had done:

*because he had cut off Saul's skirt*; which though less than what his servants put him upon, and he might have thoughts of doing, yet was considered by him as a great indignity to his sovereign, and therefore sat uneasy on his mind.

**Ver. 6.** *And he said unto his men*, etc.] When he returned and brought the skirt of Saul's garment in his hand; or else he said this before that, though here mentioned, when they moved it to him to dispatch him, as he had a fair opportunity of doing it:

*God forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the Lord's anointed*; and which he could not think of but with detestation and abhorrence, since he was his sovereign lord and master, and he a subject of his, and was anointed by the order of God, and his person sacred:

*to stretch forth my hand against him*; to take away his life; to cut off the skirt of his garment gave him uneasiness; but to slay him, the thought of it was shocking to him:

*seeing he [is] the anointed of the Lord*; anointed by Samuel to be king, (<sup><000></sup>1 Samuel 10:1), by order of the Lord, (<sup><000></sup>1 Samuel 9:17).

**Ver. 7.** *So David stayed his servants with these words*, etc.] Or pacified them, as the Targum, and made them quiet and easy in that he had not slain him, and reconciled their minds to his conduct, and restrained them from laying hands on him, by observing to them, that he was the anointed of the Lord:

*and suffered them not to rise against Saul; to take away his life*; he not only argued with them, but laid his commands on them that they should not slay him:

*but Saul rose up out of the cave, and went on [his] way*; he rose from his sleep, and went out of the cave unhurt, and proceeded on in the way he came to the sheepcotes, and which led on further, (<sup>021B</sup>1 Samuel 24:3).

**Ver. 8.** *David also arose afterward*, etc.] After Saul was gone:

*and went out of the cave*; where he had been all the time that Saul had been in it:

*and cried after Saul*: with a loud voice: my lord the king; by which titles Saul would know that he was called unto:

*and when Saul looked behind him*; to see who it was that called unto him:

*David stooped with his face to the earth, and bowed himself*: giving reverence and honour to him as a king; (see Gill on "<sup>021B</sup>1 Samuel 20:41").

**Ver. 9.** *And David said to Saul, wherefore hearest thou men's words*, etc.]

The false charges and accusations, that some of Saul's courtiers brought against David, as Doeg the Edomite, and such like sycophants and flatterers, to whom Saul hearkened, and believed what they said, and acted upon it. David chose rather to lay the blame on Saul's courtiers than on himself; and he began with him in this way, the rather to reconcile him to him, and cause him to listen to what he had to say: and represents them as

*saying* to him,

*behold, David seeketh thy hurt?* seeks to take away thy life, and seize upon thy crown and throne; than which nothing was more foreign from him.

**Ver. 10.** *Behold, this day thine eyes have seen*, etc.] Or may see; there is full proof and evidence of it, and which will be presently shown:

*how that the Lord had delivered thee today into mine hand in the cave;* from whence they were both just come:

*and [some] bade [me] kill thee;* some of the men that were with David, some of his officers or principal friends put him upon it, having a fair opportunity, and thinking it no evil, since he was his enemy, and sought his life; or “it said, kill thee”; my heart prompted me to it, that said so at first, as Ben Gersom interprets it; some refer it to God, who in his providence said so, or so it might be understood by David, as if Providence directed him to it, by giving him such an opportunity of doing it:

*but [mine eye] spared thee;* had pity on him, and notwithstanding the suggestions of friends, and of his own heart at first, or the seeming direction of Providence, yet he had mercy on him, and forbore slaying him:

*and I said, I will not put forth my hand against my lord;* and king, whose subject I am:

*for he [is] the Lord’s anointed;* the Lord has raised him to this dignity; invested him with the office of a king, and as such I regard him, and therefore have refrained mine hand from him, from hurting him,

**Ver. 11.** *Moreover, my father,* etc.] So he was in a natural sense, as having married his daughter; and in a civil sense, as he was a king, and was, or ought to have been, the father of his country, and to treat his subjects as his children, and David among the rest:

*see, yea see, the skirt of thy robe in my hand;* look on it again and again; view it with the eyes of thy body intently, that thou mayest be satisfied of it, and behold with the eyes of thy mind and understanding, and consider that I could as easily have had thine head in my hand as the skirt of thy robe; and here see an instance and proof of the integrity and sincerity of my heart, and cordial affections to thee, and an evidence against all the charges and accusations of my enemies, and that I have no ill design upon thy person and life, and am far from seeking thy hurt, as they say:

*for in that I cut off the skirt of thy robe, and killed thee not;* not only did that to show that he was in his power, but did not cut off his head, as he could:

*know thou, and see, that [there is] neither evil nor transgression in mine hand*; this might be a full conviction to him that he had no ill, neither in his heart nor hand, to do unto him:

*and I have not sinned against thee*; done nothing to offend him, never acted against his will, nor disobeyed any of his commands, or had been guilty of one overt act of treason or rebellion, but all the reverse:

*yet thou huntest my soul to take it*; pursued him from place to place, hunted him in the wildernesses of Ziph and Maon, and upon the rocks of Engedi, as a partridge on the mountains, (<sup><0923></sup>1 Samuel 26:20); and lay in wait for him to kill him, as the Targum: he may be thought to have penned the “seventh” psalm at this time, or on this occasion; at least there are some passages in it, which seem to refer to his present circumstances, (<sup><1900></sup>Psalm 7:1-17).

**Ver. 12.** *The Lord judge between me and thee*, etc.] And make it appear who is in the right, and who in the wrong:

*and the Lord avenge me of thee*; if he continued thus to persecute him:

*but mine hand shall not be upon thee*; to kill thee, though it may be in my power again to do it, as it has been; but this I am determined upon, let me suffer what I will, I will not lay hands on thee to do thee any hurt, but leave thee with God to requite all the evil done to me by thee.

**Ver. 13.** *As saith the proverb of the ancients*, etc.] It is an old saying, has been long in use, and may be applied to the present case; or the “proverb of the ancient one”; of the oldest man, the first man Adam, and of all others after him, so Kimchi; or of the Ancient One of the world, the Ancient of days, the Lord himself; so in the Talmud<sup>f480</sup>:

*wickedness proceedeth from the wicked*; as is a man, so are his actions; if he is a wicked man, he will do wicked things; a corrupt tree brings forth evil fruits, an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil things; and as if David should say, if I had been the wicked man as I am represented, I should have committed wickedness; I should have made no conscience of taking away thy life when it was in my power; but my heart would not suffer me to do it:

*but*, or “and”

*my hand shall not be upon thee*; as it has not been upon thee, because of the fear of God in me, so neither shall it be hereafter: or the sense of the proverb may be, the wickedness that comes from a wicked man, that will kill him, or be the cause of his ruin, or he will be slain by wicked men such as himself; and this may be thy case, O king, unless thou repentest: but be that as it may, which I leave with the righteous Judge, this I am determined on, “mine hand shall not be upon thee”; to take away thy life.

**Ver. 14.** *After whom is the king of Israel come out?* etc.] From his court and palace, with an army of men, and at the head of them:

*after whom dost thou pursue?* with such eagerness and fury:

*after a dead dog*; as David was in the opinion, and according to the representation of his enemies, a dog, vile, mean, worthless, of no account; a dead dog, whose name was made to stink through the calumnies cast upon him; and if a dead dog, then as he was an useless person, and could do no good, so neither could he do any hurt, not so much as bark, much less bite; and therefore it was unworthy of so great a prince, a lessening, a degrading of himself, as well as a vain and impertinent thing, to pursue after such an one, that was not worthy of his notice, and could do him neither good nor harm:

*after a flea?* a little contemptible animal, not easily caught, as it is observed by some, and when caught good for nothing. David, by this simile, fitly represents not only his weakness and impotence, his being worthless, and of no account, and beneath the notice of such a prince as Saul; but the circumstances he was in, being obliged to move from place to place, as a flea leaps from one place to another, and is not easily taken, and when it is, of no worth and value; signifying, that as it was not worth his pains to seek after him, so it would be to no purpose, he should not be able to take him.

**Ver. 15.** *The Lord therefore be Judge, and judge between me and thee,* etc.] Signifying he did not desire to be judge in his own cause, but leave it with God to determine it for him in his providence:

*and see, and plead my cause*; look with pity upon him, take his cause in his hand, plead it, and do him justice:

*and deliver me out of thine hand*: which was a prayer of faith, believing he would do it in due time, (see <sup><9076></sup>Psalm 7:6,8-11).

**Ver. 16.** *And it came to pass, when David had made an end of speaking these words unto Saul,* etc.] And wonderful it is that Saul, so full of wrath and fury, and so eager of David's life, should stand still and hear him out, and not fall upon him; this must be owing to the restraining providence of God, and to the surprise Saul was in at the sight of David coming out of the cave, whom he expected not; and especially what awed and quieted him was the sight of the skirt of his robe in his hand, which was a sure token he had his life in his hand, and spared it, which made him listen attentively to all he said:

*that Saul said, [is] this thy voice, my son David?* he changes his language; before, when he spoke of David, it was only the so of Jesse now my son David, as he was by marriage to his daughter, and as appeared by his filial affection to him; and though he was at such a distance from him, that he was not able to discern his countenance, yet he knew his voice, at least supposed it to be his, as his question implies, and which he might conclude from in the whole of his discourse:

*and Saul lifted up his voice and wept;* being affected with the kindness of David to him, and with his deliverance from the danger he was in, and yet without true repentance of his sins; for there may be many tears shed where there is no real repentance, as in the case of Esau.

**Ver. 17.** *And he said to David, thou [art] more righteous than I,* etc.] By which it appears he thought himself righteous, though David was more so; the righteousness of David was so glaring, that his enemy himself being judge acknowledges it, but will not confess his own wickedness, having no true sense of sin, nor real sorrow for it:

*for thou hast rewarded me good;* in times past, and now; heretofore in killing Goliath, fighting his battles for him against the Philistines, driving the evil spirit from him, by playing on the harp before him, and now by sparing his life, only cutting off the skirt of his garment, when he could with equal ease have cut off his head:

*whereas I have rewarded thee evil:* in seeking to take away his life at various times, by casting a javelin at him more than once, sending messengers to kill him, and hunting after him from place to place, to take him and slay him.

**Ver. 18.** *And thou hast showed this day how that thou hast dealt well with me,* etc.] The cutting off of the skirt of his robe only, when his life was in

his hand, was a clear proof and full demonstration of his dealing well with him, and might sufficiently convince him he had no ill design upon him:

*forasmuch as when the Lord had delivered me into thine hand, thou killedst me not*; this was a plain proof and evidence of his kindness to him, which he owns, and also the providence of God in this affair, which had delivered him into the hands of David; by which he might see the Lord was for David, and against him, and might have deterred him from seeking David's hurt hereafter; but it did not.

**Ver. 19.** *For if a man find his enemy, will he let him go well away?* etc.] Or "in a good way"<sup>f481</sup>, in peace and safety, without doing him any hurt; this is not usual among men, and yet this was the present case; David had found his enemy Saul, which Saul tacitly owns, and yet had let him go well away from him, without hurting him:

*wherefore the Lord reward thee good for that thou hast done unto me this day*; he does not promise to reward him himself, but prays the Lord to reward him; and had he been sincere in it, he could not have done better for him. Some connect the former clause with this, after this manner, "if a man find his enemy, and let him go away, the Lord will reward him, the Lord reward thee", etc. so the Syriac and Arabic versions.

**Ver. 20.** *And now, behold, I know well that thou shalt surely be king*, etc.] Not merely by the common report, that he was anointed by Samuel, to which yet he might give credit; but by the providence of God prospering and preserving him, and by his princely spirit and behaviour, and by calling to mind what Samuel had said to him, that his kingdom should be given to a neighbour of his better than he, and so David was by his own confession, (<sup><10247></sup>1 Samuel 24:17); and the cutting off the skirt of his garment might put him in remembrance of the rending of the skirt of Samuel's mantle, upon which he told Saul his kingdom should be rent from him; though some think that was Saul's skirt, and so now he knew thereby, when David cut off his skirt, that the kingdom would be his; and it is a tradition of the Jews<sup>f482</sup>, that Samuel said to him at that time, that he that cut off the skirt of his garment should reign after him:

*and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in thine hand*; and not be rent from him; and yet notwithstanding after this he sought to destroy him.

**Ver. 21.** *Swear now therefore unto me by the Lord*, etc.] By the Word of the Lord, as the, Targum:

*that thou wilt not cut off my seed after me*; as was usually done in despotic governments in the eastern countries, and is at this day, when one is advanced to the throne of another, by whom issue is left, who may be rivals and competitors with him:

*and that thou wilt not destroy my name out of my father's house*; by cutting off his seed, the same thing in different words repeated, for the confirmation of it; children bear the names of their fathers, and by them their memory is perpetuated, and cutting off them is destroying the name of their parents.

**Ver. 22.** *And David sware unto Saul*, etc.] That he would not cut, off his posterity; which oath he religiously observed, in sparing Mephibosheth, (<sup><1207></sup>2 Samuel 21:7), and in punishing the murderers of Ishbosheth, (<sup><1042></sup>2 Samuel 4:12); and as for the seven sons of Saul, delivered up to the Gibeonites, (<sup><1206></sup>2 Samuel 21:6), it may be questioned whether they were his genuine legitimate offspring; and if they were, it was by the appointment and command of God, and according to his will and pleasure they were executed, who is not bound by the oaths of men, and to whom they must be submitted, (<sup><1201></sup>2 Samuel 21:1,14);

*and Saul went home*; to his palace in Gibeah:

*but David and his men got them up unto the hold*; in Engedi, (<sup><1029></sup>1 Samuel 23:29); not trusting to Saul, whose inconstancy, perfidy, cruel hatred, and malice, David full well knew; and therefore thought it not safe to return to his own house, nor to dwell in the open country, but in the wilderness, and among the rocks, and in the caves there, such as were in the wilderness of Engedi; and here, and at this time, he penned the fifty seventh psalm, (see <sup><1571></sup>Psalm 57:1-11).