

CHAPTER 26

INTRODUCTION TO FIRST SAMUEL 26

This chapter relates that Saul, upon the information of the Ziphites, went out again with an armed force to seek David, (~~0201~~1 Samuel 26:1-3); of which David having intelligence, and of the place where he pitched, came with one of his men and reconnoitred his camp, and finding Saul and his men asleep, took away his spear, and the cruse of water at his head, and departed, without taking away his life, though solicited to it by his servant, (~~0204~~1 Samuel 26:4-12); which spear and cruse of water he produced to the reproach of Abner, Saul's general, and as a testimony of his sincere regard to Saul, and that he had no design upon his life, (~~0203~~1 Samuel 26:13-20); of which Saul being convinced, blessed David, and returned home again, (~~0202~~1 Samuel 26:21-25).

Ver. 1. *And the Ziphites came unto Saul to Gibeah*, etc.] Of Benjamin, called sometimes Gibeah of Saul, because it was the place of his birth and residence; hither Saul had returned after his last interview with David; whether, notwithstanding what had passed between him and David, he had privately encouraged the Ziphites to watch David, and give him information of him where he was, and when it was a proper opportunity to seize him; or whether the Ziphites were so officious as of themselves to acquaint him with it, is not certain; the latter is probable, since having attempted to betray David, they might fear, that should he come to the throne, he would remember it, and therefore they might be desirous of having him cut off by the hand of Saul:

saying, doth not David hide himself in the hill of Hachilah, [which is] before Jeshimon? the same place where he was when the Ziphites before gave information of him, (~~0230~~1 Samuel 23:10); here he might choose to be, supposing that the Ziphites now would not meditate anything against him, since Saul had declared he would be king after him, and had made him swear that he would not cut off his posterity; and as he thought it his wisdom to provide against the worst, knowing the inconstancy of Saul, he might judge this the most proper place of safety, and from whence he could, on occasion, easily retreat into the wilderness; and it may be also,

because it was near to Abigail's estate and possessions, which were now a good resource for him.

Ver. 2. *Then Saul arose*, etc.] Immediately, glad of an opportunity to seize on David, having the same disposition towards him as ever; and perhaps had repented he had not laid hold on him when he followed him out of the cave:

and went down to the wilderness of Ziph: or towards it:

having three thousand chosen men of Israel; young men, so called, because usually chosen for business, and for war particularly, rather than old men; the same number he took with him when he sought him at Engedi, (^{424E}1 Samuel 24:2);

to seek David in the wilderness of Ziph; where or whereabouts he was informed by the Ziphites he was.

Ver. 3. *And Saul pitched in the hill of Hachilah, which [is] before Jeshimon, by the way*, etc.] To the wilderness; the very same place where the Ziphites suggested David was:

but David abode in the wilderness; not in the hill of Hachilah, but in the wilderness of Ziph itself:

and he saw that Saul came after him into the wilderness; he understood, by some information he had, that Saul had set out from Gibeah, and was coming to seek for him in the wilderness of Ziph; perhaps Jonathan had given him intelligence; however, he was not quite certain, as appears by what follows.

Ver. 4. *David therefore sent out spies*, etc.] To observe if he was coming or come, and where he was, that he might not be surprised by him; for though David knew the Lord was and would be his protection, he thought proper to be upon his guard, and to make use of means for his safety:

and understood that Saul was come in very deed; that he was most certainly come, and come to some certain place; which he himself went to reconnoitre, as in (^{424F}1 Samuel 26:5).

Ver. 5. *And David arose, and came to the place where Saul had pitched*, etc.] Came near it, within sight of it; so that he could take a view of it with his naked eye, and observe where and in what manner he was encamped:

and David beheld the place where Saul lay, and Abner the son of Ner, the captain of his host; where he and his general had their quarters in the camp:

and Saul lay in the trench; or circuit; not in the foss or ditch thrown up, in which an army sometimes lies entrenched; but this is to be understood either of the camp itself, so called, as Ben Gersom, Abarbinel, and Ben Melech think, because it lay in a circular form, that all comers to it on every side might be seen; or else a sort of fortress all around the camp, made of carriages joined together; and as the word signifies a carriage, cart or chariot, it may design the chariot in which Saul slept, as kings have been used to do when not in their houses; and to this the Septuagint agrees, which uses a word that Procopius Gazaeus says signifies one kind of a chariot, and is used of a chariot drawn by mules, in the Greek version of (^{236D}Isaiah 66:20); Grotius observes, kings used to sleep in chariots where there were no houses; (see Gill on "^{497D}1 Samuel 17:20"); though he rather seems to have slept, "sub die", in the open air:

and the people pitched round about him; both for the sake of honour, and for his greater security; this shows it could not be the loss he laid in, for then they could not pitch around him.

Ver. 6. *Then answered David*, etc.] Or addressed himself to the two following persons:

and said to Ahimelech the Hittite; who was either an Hittite by birth, but was become a proselyte, or he was an Israelite that had dwelt among the Hittites, and so had this name given him; the former seems most probable; some say ^{f512} this was Uriah the Hittite:

and to Abishai the son of Zeruiah, brother to Joab; Zeruiah was the sister of David, (^{412D}1 Chronicles 2:15,16); and these were two sons of hers, who very probably joined David at the cave of Adullam, (^{402D}1 Samuel 22:1);

saying, who will go down with me to Saul to the camp? that is, which of you two?

and Abishai said, I will go down with thee; the other being timorous, or Abishai being most forward spoke first.

Ver. 7. *So David and Abishai came to the people by night*, etc.] Josephus ^{f513} wrongly says, that he took with him both Abishai and Ahimelech; he

chose to have but one, for the greater secrecy. This was a bold enterprise, for two men to go into a camp of three thousand men, though it was in the night; when though they might suppose the greater part of them were asleep, yet they could not well suppose this of all, and especially of the guards or sentinels; but no doubt David was moved to this, not merely by the dint of his natural courage, but by the Spirit of God, by whom he might be assured of protection, and that Saul and the people were cast into a deep sleep by the Lord, as they were, (⁰²⁶²1 Samuel 26:12); and this the Lord moved him to, that he might have an opportunity a second time to convince Saul of his innocence, and that he had no design upon his life:

and, behold, Saul lay sleeping within the trench; (see Gill on “⁰²⁶⁵1 Samuel 26:5”);

and his spear stuck in the ground at his bolster; ready to take up and defend himself, should he be surprised; or this was his sceptre, which he always carried about with him, as an ensign of royalty, and by which very probably David knew which was Saul’s tent or couch, where he slept:

but Abner and the people lay round about him; as in (⁰²⁶⁵1 Samuel 26:5).

Ver. 8. *Then said Abishai to David,* etc.] Seeing Saul fast asleep, and a spear so near him:

God hath delivered thine enemy into thine hand this day: or at this time, properly it was night:

now therefore let me smite him, I pray thee, with the spear; with Saul’s own spear, which was stuck in the ground at his bolster. He remembered that David would not put forth his hand to stay him before, when he had an opportunity; and since now another offered, he did not move it to him to do it, but begged leave to do it himself; which he might think would be granted, since there was such a remarkable hand of Providence in it, which seemed to direct to such a step:

even to the earth at once, and I will not [smite] him the second time; signifying, that he would give such a home blow or thrust, that the spear should pierce through him, and fasten him to the ground, that there would be no need to repeat it.

Ver. 9. *And David said to Abishai, destroy him not,* etc.] He laid his commands upon him not to hurt him:

for who can stretch forth his hand against the Lord's anointed, and be guiltless? since Saul was king, and appointed to that office by the Lord, and was anointed by his order for it, and invested with it by him, his person was sacred, and not to be touched; nor could his life be taken away by any without being guilty of a very great crime indeed, which it might be justly expected the Lord would resent and punish.

Ver. 10. *And David said furthermore*, etc.] In order to make Abishai easy, and prevent his doing what he proposed:

[as] the Lord liveth; which was the form of an oath, made to assure Abishai of the truth of what follows, and therefore he need not be hasty to put Saul to death, since it would not be long before he should die, in one or other of the three following ways: either

the Lord shall smite him; suddenly, which the Jews call cutting off, or death by the hand of heaven, by the immediate hand of God:

or his day shall come to die; the time appointed for him to die a natural death, of some disease common to men:

or he shall descend into battle, and perish; which was commonly reckoned death, casual or accidental, and in which last way Saul did die, (^{<ORIB>1} Samuel 31:3,4).

Ver. 11. *The Lord forbid that I should stretch forth mine hand against the Lord's anointed*, etc.] Or suffer any about him to do it; he speaks of it with the utmost detestation and abhorrence:

but, I pray thee, take thou now the spear that [is] at his bolster; not to smite him with, as he desired, but to carry off, and was no other than his sceptre; (see Gill on "^{<ORIB>1} Samuel 20:33");

and the cruse of water; which stood in the same place, as appears by (^{<ORIS>1} Samuel 26:12). Some take this to be a pot to make water in; others an hourglass, to know the time of night, in which not sand, but water, flowed for that purpose: but rather this was for his refreshment should he be hot and thirsty in the night, or to purify him from any nocturnal pollution that might happen; for, according to Clemens of Alexandria ^{f514}, it was a custom of the Jews often to purify themselves in bed: though Fortunatus Scacchus ^{f515} thinks Saul had this pot or cup for a religious use; which he had with him, and with it gave thanks to God, the author of all good, whenever he

sat down to a meal; such as the golden cup Philip king of Macedon always had under his pillow when he slept^{f516}:

and let us go; and do nothing more; which would be sufficient to convince they had been there, and to show what was in their power to do, had they been so inclined.

Ver. 12. *So David took the spear, and the cruse of water, from Saul's bolster*, etc.] Abishai either refusing to take them, since he might not take away his life; or it may be rather David thought better of it, and took them himself, lest Abishai should be tempted, when so near to Saul, and his spear in his hand, and should thrust him with it; though David may be said to take them by the hands of Abishai:

and they gat them away; with the above things along with them:

and no man saw [it], nor knew [it]; saw them in the camp, or knew what they did:

neither awaked; at their talking together, at the motion of their feet, and taking away the spear and cruse:

for they [were] all asleep; which was very extraordinary, that among three thousand men none should be awake, not even the sentinels; which might seem impossible in a natural way, but it is accounted for by what follows:

because a deep sleep from the Lord was fallen upon them; or “a sleep of the Lord”^{f517}; a very great one, an uncommon one; so great trees, mountains, etc. are called trees and mountains of God; or, according to our supplement, it was from the Lord, he was the cause and author of it; he cast them into this sleep, or caused it to fall upon them, and locked them up in it, that they might not hear David and his servant when they came among them.

Ver. 13. *Then David went over to the other side*, etc.] To a hill on the other side, opposite to Hachilah, where Saul lay encamped; or “passed over the passage”^{f518}, the valley that lay between the two hills, and perhaps passed over a brook that ran in the valley, which is not unusual; so Josephus^{f519} says, that he went over a brook and came to the top of a mountain:

and stood on the top of an hill afar off; he chose the top of an hill, that his voice might be heard at a distance, as it might in a clear air, and still night;

and to be afar off, that he might the better make his escape, should an attempt be made to pursue him:

a great space [being] between them; a large valley lying between the two hills.

Ver. 14. *And David cried unto the people*, etc.] To the army of Saul with a loud voice, that he might be heard:

and to Abner the son of Ner; particularly to him, because he was general of the army:

saying, answerest thou not, Abner? it seems he had called to him more than once, and he had returned no answer; perhaps not being thoroughly awake, or not knowing whose voice it was, and from whence it came:

then Abner answered and said, who [art] thou [that] criest to the king? but it does not appear that David called to the king, only to the people, and to Abner their general, and therefore may be better rendered, “by the king” ^{f520}; that is, near him, or “before him” ^{f521}, in his presence. Kimchi and Ben Melech explain it, upon the king, or over him; and the Targum is, at the head of the king; the meaning is, how he could act such a part as to call so loud within the king’s hearing, as to disturb the king’s rest, and awake him out of his sleep.

Ver. 15. *And David said to Abner, [art] not thou a [valiant] man?* etc.] Or a man ^{f522}, a man of great fame for courage and valour, a man of great authority, who had the next post in the army under Saul, but had not behaved like a man, worthy of his character and office:

and who [is] like to thee in Israel? none that bare so great a name, or was in so high an office, who therefore should have been careful to have acted according to both:

wherefore then hast thou not kept thy lord the king? took care to have set a guard about his person while he slept; which perhaps was neglected through a contempt of David and his men, as being in no fear of them:

for there came one of the people in to destroy the king thy lord; that is, there had been one in the camp that night, who had entered there with that view to have destroyed him, had he an opportunity, and which did offer; this was true of Abishai, who no doubt went down with David into the camp with that intent, though David did not, and therefore he says, “one of

the people”, not more; for though two went in, only one with that view: David observes to them the danger the king was in, his carefulness of him to preserve his life, to whom only it was owing, and the negligence of Abner, and those under his command.

Ver. 16. *This thing [is] not good that thou hast done*, etc.] Yea, it was very bad, a great fault, and very blameworthy, if he had neglected to set a watch over the king, whose business it was as a general; the words are expressed in a figure called “meiosis”, in which less is said than was intended:

[as] the Lord liveth, ye [are] worthy to die, because ye have not kept your master, the Lord’s anointed; if a watch was set, and these had fallen asleep, and neglected their duty, or had deserted their post; which to do was a capital crime, and deserving of death; wherefore he does not say this of Abner, but of the watch:

and now see where the king’s spear [is], and the cruse of water that [was] at his bolster; which he then held up as proofs and evidences of the truth of what he said, that one had been in the camp and had carried off these, and who could as easily have destroyed the king as to have taken these away; and as he came hither with an intent to destroy him, would have done it, had he not been prevented by David; all which likewise plainly proved the negligence of Abner, in not setting a watch about his master, or the negligence of the watch that was set.

Ver. 17. *And Saul knew David’s voice*, etc.] Though Abner at first did not, as appears by his words, but Saul did, by being this time thoroughly awake through the discourse that passed between David and Abner:

and said, [is] this thy voice, my son David? the same question he put before, when he followed him out of the cave, (see Gill on “⁶⁻⁰²⁴⁶1 Samuel 24:16”):

and David said, [it is] my voice, my lord, O king; he not only owns him to be king, whom he sought not to depose, but his own liege lord and sovereign, whose commands he was ready to obey.

Ver. 18. *And he said, wherefore doth my lord thus pursue after his servant?* etc.] Suggesting that it was both below him to do it, and against his interest; for David was his servant, and he would gladly have continued in his service, and done his business, but he drove him from it, and pursued

him as a traitor, when he had not been guilty of any offence to his knowledge: and therefore puts the following questions:

for what have I done? or what evil [is] in mine hand? what crime had he committed, that he was pursued after this manner, and his life sought for? what had he done worthy of death? having a clear conscience, he could boldly ask these questions.

Ver. 19. *Now therefore, I pray thee, let my lord the king hear the words of his servant,* etc.] Whether David waited for an answer to his question is not certain; probably he did, and observing none returned, desired audience of what he had further to say:

if the Lord have stirred thee up against me; if he had put it into his heart to persecute him after this manner, for some sin he had committed against him, though not against Saul: did that appear to be the case,

let him accept an offering; my offering, as the Targum; or my prayer, as Jarchi; I would offer a sin offering according to the law, to make atonement for my offence, and might hope it would be accepted; or I would make my supplication to God, and entreat him to forgive mine iniquity, and so an issue be put to these troubles; or should it be a capital crime deserving of death he was guilty of, he was content to die, and satisfy for his fault in that way; or if both of them had sinned, in any respect, he proposed to join in an acceptable sacrifice to God, and so reconciliation be made, and matters adjusted in such a religious way; if it was the evil spirit from the Lord that had entered into Saul, or God had suffered a melancholy disorder to seize him, which had put him upon those measures, let an offering agreeable to the will of God be offered, or supplication made for the removal of it:

but if [they be] the children of men; that incited him to such violent methods, as Abner his general, or Doeg the Edomite, and others:

cursed [be] they before the Lord; an imprecation of the vengeance of God upon them:

for they have driven me out this day from abiding in the inheritance of the Lord; meaning not from his own house and fatally, nor from the palace of Saul, but from the land of Canaan the Lord had given to his people Israel for an inheritance, and from the worship of God in it, which made it dear and precious to him; he knew if Saul went on pursuing him in this manner,

he must be obliged to quit the land, and go into a foreign country, as he quickly did; so the Targum renders it the inheritance of the people of the Lord: by being driven out of the land which was their inheritance, he should be deprived of their company and conversation, and of all social worship; the consideration of which was cutting to him, and caused the above imprecation from him on those who were concerned in it, and who in effect by their actions were

saying, go, serve other gods; for by being forced to go into an idolatrous country, he would be in the way of temptation, and be liable to be corrupted by ill examples, and to be persuaded and enticed into idolatrous practices; and if he was kept from them it would be no thanks to them, they did all they could to lead him into them; and if he was preserved, it would be owing to the power and grace of God; the Targum is,

“go David among the people that worship idols;”

the Jews have a saying, that he that dwells without the land of Israel, it is as if he had no God and as if he served an idol ^{f523}.

Ver. 20. *Now therefore let not my blood fall to the earth before the face of the Lord*, etc.] For should it be spilled, God, who is omniscient, will see it, and take notice of it; and being righteous, and to whom vengeance belongs, he will avenge it: some render it, “my blood shall not fall to the earth before the face of the Lord” ^{f524}; I am continually under his eye and care, and he will protect and defend me; and in vain is it for thee to pursue after me; I shall never fall into thine hands, though I may be obliged to quit my country, and go into an idolatrous nation, against my will:

for the king of Israel is come out to seek a flea; which leaps from place to place and is not easily taken: or this may denote what a mean, poor, weak, insignificant person David was; and how much it was below Saul to come out with an army of chosen men in pursuit of him; so the Targum,

“the king of Israel is come out to seek one that is weak or feeble:”

as when one doth hunt a partridge in the mountains; as kings for their delight used to do, as Abarbinel observes; but this being a business of pleasure, and this a bird of worth, some other is thought to be here intended. Indeed the is represented as worth no more than an “obolus”, or five farthings, though fifty drachmas or drachms were ordered to be paid for one ^{f525}; the Septuagint renders the word an “owl”: the word is “kore”,

and from the etymology of it one would think it was the raven or crow. Jarchi on (^{<2471>}Jeremiah 17:11) takes it to be the cuckoo, though here the partridge as others; Bochart ^{f526} will have it to be the woodcock, snipe, or snite ^{f527}. Some choose to read the words,

“as the kore or partridge on the mountains hunts;”

which, it is said, hunts and seeks after the nests of other birds, and sits on their eggs ^{f528}; (see ^{<2471>}Jeremiah 17:11); so Saul hunted after David, though he could not take him; several naturalists ^{f529} observe, that the partridge is very difficult to be taken by the hunter.

Ver. 21. *Then said Saul, I have sinned*, etc.] Which is more than he acknowledged before, and yet, it is to be feared he had no true sense of his sin, and real repentance for it; but, like Pharaoh, his guilty conscience for the present forced this confession from him; (see ^{<1007>}Exodus 9:27);

return, my son David: meaning to his own house, or rather to his palace, since he had disposed of his wife to another man:

for I will no more do thee harm: or seek to do it by pursuing him from place to place, as he had done, which had given him a great deal of trouble and fatigue:

because my soul was precious in thine eyes this day; and therefore spared, when he could have taken it away; which showed that his life was dear to him, of great worth and value in his account; and therefore he would neither take it away himself, nor suffer another to do it:

behold, I have played the fool, and erred exceedingly: in seeking after his life, and pursuing him again, when he had such a convincing proof of his sincerity and faithfulness, and of his cordial affection for him, when he only cut off the skirts of his garment in the cave, and spared his life.

Ver. 22. *And David answered and said, behold the king's spear!* etc.] And which perhaps was his sceptre, and which David therefore would not keep, lest it should be thought or said that he had deprived him of an ensign of his royalty, and be interpreted as a token of his design to seize his crown and throne:

and let one of the young men come over and fetch it; for notwithstanding the acknowledgment Saul had made of his sin and folly, David did not choose to carry the spear to him; not caring to trust him, and put himself

into his hands, lest the evil spirit should return and come upon him suddenly, and alter his disposition and carriage; nor would he send any of his men with it, whose lives were dear to him, lest they should be seized as traitors, but desires one of Saul's men might be sent for it.

Ver. 23. *The Lord render to every man his righteousness, and his faithfulness*, etc.] Or recompense every man that deals justly and faithfully with others, as he had done with Saul; or the Lord, who is just and faithful to his promises, reward the men that act the good and upright part; and this was a prayer of faith; for David doubted not that, though Saul might fail, yet God could not;

for the Lord delivered thee into [my] hand this day; or, “into an hand”^{f530} into the hand of Abishai, who had it in his power to slay him, when he went and took the spear that was at his bolster, and would have done it, but David suffered him not:

but I would not stretch forth my hand against the Lord's anointed; nor suffer another to stretch forth his hand against him; so careful and tender was he of his life.

Ver. 24. *And, behold, as thy life was much set by this day in mine eyes*, etc.] Or “magnified”^{f531}; and made great account of, as being the life of the king of Israel, and the Lord's anointed, and so spared:

so let my life be much set by in the eyes of the Lord; he does not say in the eyes of Saul, as it should have been by way of retaliation, and as it might have been expected he would have said; but he had no dependence on Saul, nor expected justice to be done him by him; but he prays that his life might be precious in the sight of Lord, and taken care of, and protected by him, as he believed it would:

and let him deliver me out of all tribulation; for as yet he did not think himself quite out of it, notwithstanding all that Saul had said, but believed the Lord would deliver him in due time; from him alone he looked for it, and on him he depended.

Ver. 25. *Then Saul said to David, blessed [be] thou, my son David*, etc.] He desired God to bless him, and pronounced him blessed himself, believing he would be a happy and prosperous man:

thou shall both do great [things]; he had done great things already, in slaying Goliath, obtaining victories over the Philistines, and escaping the hands of Saul, and keeping out of them with so small a force; and he should do greater things yet:

and also shalt still prevail; against Saul and all his enemies; the Targum is,
 “even in reigning thou shalt reign, and even in prospering thou shalt prosper;”

he believed he would be king, so he had said before, (¹⁰²⁰1 Samuel 24:20);

so David went on his way: to the wilderness again very probably, putting no trust and confidence in Saul, knowing how fickle and unstable he was:

and Saul returned to his place; to Gibeah, where his palace was.