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David Spares Sha’ul’s Life
First Samuel 24: 1-22

David spares Sha’ul’s life DIG: What brought Sha’ul to En Gedi? To this particular cave? Why did David cut off a corner of Sha’ul’s robe? Why did he feel guilty about it? Why didn’t David kill Sha’ul? What pressures did he have that might have justified killing him? Why did David prostrate himself before Sha’ul? What kind of kingdom could David have ruled if he had gained the throne by bloodshed? Was Sha’ul’s repentance sincere? Did David think so? What irony do you see in verses 21-22? How are their roles reversed?

REFLECT: Have you ever been talked into taking revenge on someone? If so, how did you feel afterwards? Is there an authority figure in your life that you have a difficult time submitting to? How would David act in your position? How is David a good example for our leaders and us? Are you as content as David seemed to be to simply let YHVH effect His will, His way, in His time? Or, are you likely to play Holy Spirit and “help God out” in some way? Can you think of an example? How can you tell if someone is sincere in wanting to “turn over a new leaf?” By your own standards, how do you do on that sincerity test? David returned good for evil. What are some opportunities you have to do this? Why is it so often so hard to do?

ADONAI forbid that I should [harm] my lord, ADONAI’s anointed.

Chapters 24 and **26** are virtually mirror images of each other, beginning with **Sha’ul’s** receiving a report about **David’s** latest hiding place **(24:1** and **26:1)**. Focusing **David’s** refusal to lift a hand against **Sha’ul**, **ADONAI’s anointed (24:6, 10** and **26:11)**, and concluding with the words of a remorseful **Sha’ul** and **his** returning home from pursuing **David (24:17-22** and **26:21, 25).** The two chapters form a frame around the central **Chapter 25**, where the crude and ill-tempered **Nabal** functions as an alter ego of the rejected **Sha’ul**. Additionally, the divine protection that keeps **David** from shedding innocent blood runs as a unifying thread throughout all three chapters.[405]

The first time David spares Sha'ul's life: After Sha'ul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, "David is in the Desert of En-Gedi." So Sha'ul took three thousand able young men from all Isra'el and set out to look for David and his men near the Crags of the famous **Wild Goats of En-Gedi.** The reference to **wild goats** stresses the inaccessibility of the site. **The whole countryside is full of caverns that might have served as hiding places for David and his men (24:1-2).** The chase was on! **He came to the sheep pens along the way; a cave was there.** These were **caves** that had a stonewall at the entrance that provided protection for sheep. **And Sha'ul went in to relieve himself (24:3a).** The Torah was very strict when it came to matters of sanitation, especially in the army camp **(Deuteronomy 23:12-14)**. Each soldier was required to leave the camp to relieve himself, and he had to carry a small shovel among his weapons so he could dig a hole to cover his feces. This meant that **Sha'ul** was away from the camp and would therefore be quite vulnerable. **He** naturally wanted privacy and felt that **he** was not in danger. The fact that **he** walked right into **David's** hiding place not only proved that **his** spies were incompetent, but also that **ADONAI** was still in control.[406]

David and his men were far back in the darkest part of the very same **cave,** unbeknownst to **Sha'ul. Sha'ul** couldn't see **them**, but **they** could see **his** every move. Not all of **David's** four hundred **men** were in **the cave** because **he** had spread **them** out amongst the various **caves of En-Gedi**. **And David's men** said: **Look! The day has come that ADONAI told you about when he said to you, "I will turn your enemy over to you, and you will do to him whatever seems good to you."** But when did **God** say this? Were they referring to **Samuel's** words to **Sha'ul** in **15:26-29**, or to **YHVH's** message to **Samuel** in **16:1**? Perhaps the idea came from **Jonathan's** words in **20:15**, which some of **the men** might have heard personally. It's likely that the leaders of the 600 **men** discussed these matters among themselves, for their future was wrapped up in **David's** future. They interpreted this opportunity to **kill Sha'ul**, but they obviously came to some false conclusions **(24:3b-4a)**.[407] But **David** was too wise in the truth of **God's** Word to interpret this event as a signal for **him** to **kill Sha'ul** (see the commentary on **Exodus, to see link click Dp – You Shall Not Murder**).



Then David crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Sha'ul's robe. This would be tangible proof that **David** had the opportunity to **kill him**. But sometime **afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe**, which was an act of disrespect**.** Evidently **David's men** had asked **him**, "Why didn't **you kill Sha'ul** when **you** had the chance?" So **he said to his men, "ADONAI forbid that I should [harm] my lord, ADONAI's anointed, as raise my hand against him!** At this point **Sha'ul** is totally outside the will of **God** and in total rebellion against **God**. But since a prophet anointed **Sha'ul, YHVH** was **the One** who needed to deal with **him** and not **David**. **After all, he is the LORD's anointed. By saying this, David stopped his men** from any other criticism for **his** refusal to **kill Sha'ul and would not let them do anything to him. Sha'ul got up, left the cave** with **his** life intact **and went on his way** not realizing just how close **he** came to death **(24:4b-7 CJB).**[408] This incident resulted in **David** writing **Psalm 57** (see **Dc – When David Fled From Sha'ul into the Cave**).

David's Speech: Then David went out of the cave and called out to Sha'ul from a distance: **"My lord the king,"** giving **him** the utmost respect**. When Sha'ul looked behind him, David bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. David** still respected **Sha'ul's** position as **the king of Isra'el**. **He said to Sha'ul, "Why do you listen to men say, 'David is bent on harming you?' This day you have seen with your own eyes how the LORD delivered you into my hands in the cave. Some urged me to kill you, but I**

spared you; I said: **I will not lay my hand on my master because he is YHVH's anointed" (24:8-10).**

Then **David** presented **his** proof that **he** had the opportunity to **kill Sha'ul**. **See, my father** (a term of respect, but reminding **the king** that **he** is, after all, **Sha'ul's son-in-law**), **look at this piece of your robe in my hand! I cut off the corner of your robe** (a symbol of **God cutting the Kingdom** from **Sha'ul**) **but did not kill you.** Continuing to protest **his** innocence, **David** reasons: **See that there is nothing in my hand to indicate I am guilty of wrongdoing or rebellion. I have not wronged you, but you are hunting me down to take my life.** Unwilling to submit **their** dispute to human arbitration, **David** prays that the only fair and impartial **Judge**, **Ha'Shem Himself may judge between you and me. And may the LORD avenge the wrongs you have done to me, but** no matter how many times **I** have the opportunity, **my hand will not touch you. As the old saying goes, "From evildoers come evil deeds, so my hand will not touch you,"** which simply meant that if **David** was wicked there would be evidence of **his** wickedness **(24:11-13). Yeshua** put it this way: **By their fruit you will recognize them (Mt 7:16a).** But **Sha'ul** can cite no evidence. There is no guilty **fruit** from **David's** hand.

Then **David** showed how ridiculous **Sha'ul's** pursuit had been. **Against whom has the king of Isra'el come out? Who are you pursuing? A dead dog? A flea?** The phrase **dead dog** was a humiliating term of reproach in those days **(First Samuel 17:43; Second Samuel 3:8, 9:8, 16:9),** so **David** was humbling **himself** before **YHVH** and the **king**. **David** closed his defense by saying: **May ADONAI consider my cause and uphold it; may He vindicate me by delivering me from your hand (24:14-15). David** was about 27 years old at this time.

Sha'ul's Confession and Request: Now **Sha'ul** must answer. **When David finished saying this Sha'ul asked, "Is that your voice, David my son?" Sha'ul's** heart was touched even though **his** mind was failing. **And he wept aloud (24:16). He wept** because he must now face what he has long known. **He wept** because he must now confront the truth he has long avoided. **He** must acknowledge that **David** would be victorious, and not only that, but **he** must face the fact that **his** whole effort to be faithful, powerful or righteous, had failed. But the reality was that ultimately **he** failed because **YHVH** was with **David**.

Sha'ul was temporarily sorry for **his** actions, but **his** sorrow did not lead to

repentance. **"You are more righteous than I," he said.** The evidence was: **You have treated me well, but I have treated you badly. You have just now told me about the good you did to me; the LORD delivered me into your hands, but you did not kill me. When a man finds his enemy, does he let him get away unharmed?** This showed that **David** was not **Sha'ul's** enemy. **May YHVH reward you well for the way you treated me today (24:17-19).** This is the voice of a beaten man who wants out of the struggle.

Then surprisingly **Sha'ul** confessed that **he** knew **David** would be the next **king**. **I know that you will surely be king and that the kingdom of Isra'el will be established in your hands.** Earlier **Samuel** had told **Sha'ul** that because of **his** rebellion against **God**, **his "kingdom"** would not endure but would be given to **a man after the LORD's own heart (13:14).** That was about thirty years earlier, and by this time **Sha'ul** had figured out that **David** would be **his** successor because **God** was with **him**. But even then **Sha'ul's** major concern was **his** own name and **descendants**, not the spiritual welfare of the people: **Now swear to me by the LORD that you will not kill off my descendants or wipe out my name from my father's family.** How tragic it was that **Sha'ul's** own sins destroyed **his** family, all but Jonathan's crippled son whom **David** took care of (see **the Life of David Da – David and Mephiboseth**).

David's response is brief and understated. **So David gave his oath to Sha'ul.** The narrator does not elaborate. **Then Sha'ul**, having secured the promise **he** needed, **returned home** to Gibeah. **He** had gotten from **David** all **he** could expect to receive.[409] **However David and his men went up to** the stronghold at **Masada (24:20-22).** Despite **his** emotional tears and speech, **Sha'ul** would soon take up the chase again.

David's decision not to kill **Sha'ul** when **he** had the chance was one of the highest spiritual pinnacles of **his** entire life. **He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city (Proverbs 16:32 NKJV).** What a difference it made to his future that **David** honored **ADONAI** during **his** time of trial. And how important is it for us that we pass the tests of faith that **God** sets before us, for in many cases our future testimony and the effectiveness of our ministry may be on the line.[410]

*Dear heavenly **Father**, praise **You** that when things look out of control and impossible to figure out, **You** already have the answer all ready. Not only do **You** know the best answer, **You** have the wisdom and power to guide every situation.*

***You** are always in control, even when everything looks **impossible**. **For nothing will be impossible with God (Luke 1:37).** Thank **You** that **You** see into hearts **(First Samuel 16:7)** and can discern **repentance** that is true or false. **For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal (Second Corinthians 7:10-11b).** Thank **You** for being my loving heavenly **Father** who is always in control. Even when I cannot see the outcome, I can **trust** in **You**. **This I know – that God is for me. In God – I keep praising His word – in ADONAI – I keep praising His word – in God I trust, I will not be afraid (Psalm 56:9c-11a).** In **Messiah Yeshua's** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*