

1 Samuel 26-27 – “From Victory to Vulnerability”

1. Saul Seeks David Again – 26:1-4

26:1-2 - *Now the Ziphites came to Saul at Gibeah, saying, “Is David not hiding in the hill of Hachilah, opposite Jeshimon?”² Then Saul arose and went down to the Wilderness of Ziph, having three thousand chosen men of Israel with him, to seek David in the Wilderness of Ziph.*

The Ziphites come onto the scene again, and once again, they’re betraying David. This happened back in **1 Samuel 23:19**, *“Then the Ziphites came up to Saul at Gibeah, saying, “Is David not hiding with us in strongholds in the woods, in the hill of Hachilah, which is on the south of Jeshimon?”*

- Now what’s got the Ziphites so bent out of shape against David. Why are they conspiring with Saul to get David? The Ziphites are a tribe in the family of Judah; their kinsmen of David. Why are they doing this?
- The biblical account is unclear as to why the Ziphites are helping Saul. It could be that they feared Saul more than they wanted to help David. Since David was hiding in their neck of the woods, maybe Saul would have thought the Ziphites were helping him. So to get in front of that narrative, they just go to Saul and let him know where David is.
- That obviously has to add a little more salt to the wound here for David. To be betrayed by people that you’ve done no wrong to. To have them conspire with the one who’s trying to take your life? It’s certainly been troublesome times for David, but God is leading him right into another test to train David to trust God and allow Him to take care of business.

It’s funny that it wasn’t too long ago that Saul was saying to David, *“For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him get away safely? Therefore may the Lord reward you with good for what you have done to me this day”* (**1 Samuel 24:19**).

But Saul is riddled with pride and sin, and he wants David gone. So he doesn’t let this mercy of David really transfer to his heart, rather he’s ready to go after David once again and seek to bring him down.

- You know, we’ve been shown great mercy and grace by the Lord. For some, this has not really transferred to their own heart and brought about an internal change. If you as a believer are not walking in that mercy and grace to others, have you fully recognized the grace and mercy that’s been given to you? The more that we know this, the more we will show this.

Saul has moments where he recognized this mercy, but it hasn't changed his heart. So in response to hearing where David is, Saul takes 3000 **chosen men**. These are some skilled guys ready for battle. David has his 600 men. He's outnumbered 5 to 1. Saul is not taking any chances, he wants David killed.

26:3-5 - And Saul encamped in the hill of Hachilah, which is opposite Jeshimon, by the road. But David stayed in the wilderness, and he saw that Saul came after him into the wilderness. ⁴ David therefore sent out spies, and understood that Saul had indeed come. ⁵ So David arose and came to the place where Saul had encamped. And David saw the place where Saul lay, and Abner the son of Ner, the commander of his army. Now Saul lay within the camp, with the people encamped all around him.

The hill of Hachilah is where David was hiding out before when the Ziphites ratted on him to Saul (23:19). But this time David stayed in the wilderness. Saul also went into the wilderness to track David, so David sent out spies to see of his whereabouts.

David saw the place where Saul was camping out with his troops. Saul was surrounded by his army as was the usual thing to do to provide the greatest amount of protection for the king.

So with Saul and his troops camped out and getting some rest, David has an idea...

2. David and Abishai Take Action, Though Peaceably – 26:6-11

26:6 - Then David answered, and said to Ahimelech the Hittite and to Abishai the son of Zeruiah, brother of Joab, saying, “Who will go down with me to Saul in the camp?” And Abishai said, “I will go down with you.”

David's life is getting a little boring, he's ready for some daredevil action. He's like, 'Let's take a little stroll through the camp of Saul. There's only 3000 of them. What's the worst that can happen?'

I mean, this does not sound like a good strategy. And yet Abishai is like, 'I'm in! Sounds like fun!' These are the kinds of friends you want to have by your side. Well, maybe friends with a little more sensibility to them wouldn't be bad either.

Now Ahimelech is identified as a Hittite, because a Hittite was not from Israel. "The Hittites were a powerful, military people who ruled central Asia Minor during

the second millennium B.C.”¹ Ahimelech was probably a hired mercenary soldier for David. Remember, Bathsheba’s husband Uriah was a Hittite (2 Samuel 11:6) and was one of David’s fighting men in the army.

Abishai is the son of Zeruiah, who is David’s sister (1 Chronicles 2:16). She had 3 sons, Abishai, Joab and Asahel – they’re nephews of David. Joab and Abishai would both be mighty military men for David. Abishai often came to the defense of David and helped to protect his life on multiple occasions. He was known for killing a giant that threatened David’s life (2 Sam 21:15-17) and for killing 18,000 Edomites (1 Chron 18:12).

26:7-11 - *So David and Abishai came to the people by night; and there Saul lay sleeping within the camp, with his spear stuck in the ground by his head. And Abner and the people lay all around him. ⁸ Then Abishai said to David, “God has delivered your enemy into your hand this day. Now therefore, please, let me strike him at once with the spear, right to the earth; and I will not have to strike him a second time!” ⁹ But David said to Abishai, “Do not destroy him; for who can stretch out his hand against the Lord’s anointed, and be guiltless?” ¹⁰ David said furthermore, “As the Lord lives, the Lord shall strike him, or his day shall come to die, or he shall go out to battle and perish. ¹¹ The Lord forbid that I should stretch out my hand against the Lord’s anointed. But please, take now the spear and the jug of water that are by his head, and let us go.”*

It would have been easy to think that God was now finally delivering Saul to David. Nobody is waking up, David and Abishai have been able to sneak in undetected. This has got to be of the Lord. Besides, Saul has not been keeping his word. It seemed like he was going to leave David alone after their last encounter, but here is again up to no good.

Fool me once, shame on you, fool me twice, shame on me.

Now David is given an opportunity to have Saul killed and he doesn’t even need to be the one that has blood on his hands. Abishai is ready to do it! This will really test now what’s in David’s heart and what he is going to rely on.

David answers well and says, ***Do not destroy him; for who can stretch out his hand against the Lord’s anointed, and be guiltless?*** (26:9).

¹ Radmacher, E. D., Allen, R. B., & House, H. W. (1997). *The Nelson Study Bible: New King James Version* (1 Sa 26:6). T. Nelson Publishers.

David is starting to see that it's not his job to do the Lord's work. God raised up Saul for a purpose and a position, and it's God that should remove him. This is the Lord's anointed. And you may not like the person, but you respect the position, or the office. David saw things this way and he realized that the Lord needs to deal with Saul. That's why David said in vs. 10, ***the Lord shall strike him.***

- You see, David is beginning to learn that he doesn't need to step out and take matters into his own hands, he can trust the Lord to carry out His purposes and plans. It's the Lord's job to remove a person like Saul. In the meantime, David will keep on serving God and walk in a guiltless way before Him.
- What a wonderful way that is to live life. To know when we're being wronged, or challenged, we can just give it to the Lord. He's the One we trust; He's the one that will correct and change the things we see as unjust.

26:12 - So David took the spear and the jug of water by Saul's head, and they got away; and no man saw or knew it or awoke. For they were all asleep, because a deep sleep from the Lord had fallen on them.

The spear was seen as a symbol of authority, kind of like a sceptre. Taking the spear of Saul would have been greatly significant and humiliating. It also was risky in that the spear and jug of water may have made a bit of noise or been a possible disturbance to the army.

And as David and Abishai tiptoed through the camp, I'm sure they were wondering, how is nobody waking up? This is so unusual. And it was, but here we begin to see what was really going on behind the scenes and in the realm of the spirit: ***a deep sleep from the Lord had fallen on them.***

- That's so awesome. God was protecting and providing for David. Again, how many of us would have been quick to say, there's no way we can go into that camp without disturbing someone. Yet these guys went. They didn't have a word that the Lord supernaturally knocked them out. They have no indication of this. Yet they went. They walked by faith and not by sight.
- How many times has God been at work in your life in ways that you passed off as nothing more than coincidence or fluke.
- I think it's going to be cool to one day get that heavenly highlight reel of our lives and see all the ways that God was at work in our lives where we just thought the outcome was natural rather than supernatural.

3. David Confronts Abner and Saul – 26:13-20

26:13-16 - *Now David went over to the other side, and stood on the top of a hill afar off, a great distance being between them. ¹⁴ And David called out to the people and to Abner the son of Ner, saying, “Do you not answer, Abner?” Then Abner answered and said, “Who are you, calling out to the king?” ¹⁵ So David said to Abner, “Are you not a man? And who is like you in Israel? Why then have you not guarded your lord the king? For one of the people came in to destroy your lord the king. ¹⁶ This thing that you have done is not good. As the Lord lives, you deserve to die, because you have not guarded your master, the Lord’s anointed. And now see where the king’s spear is, and the jug of water that was by his head.”*

So David got some distance between him and Saul’s camp. And then he called out to them. Abner and Saul can’t quite make out who would have the nerve to call out to the king like this. David is too far away to really see clearly, but then David responds with some great taunts to Abner: ***Are you not a man?*** Basically, it’s like he’s saying, ‘What a wuss you are Abner. You should have been protecting your king, but you’ve allowed someone to come into the camp and he could have easily killed the king.’ David even backs this up by showing him the king’s spear and jug of water. Proof that we were there and did no harm to the king.

David shares all this to show Saul he has no intent on doing him harm, but also throws in that Abner is the one that deserves to die because of his negligence.

26:17-20 - *Then Saul knew David’s voice, and said, “Is that your voice, my son David?” David said, “It is my voice, my lord, O king.” ¹⁸ And he said, “Why does my lord thus pursue his servant? For what have I done, or what evil is in my hand? ¹⁹ Now therefore, please, let my lord the king hear the words of his servant: If the Lord has stirred you up against me, let Him accept an offering. But if it is the children of men, may they be cursed before the Lord, for they have driven me out this day from sharing in the inheritance of the Lord, saying, ‘Go, serve other gods.’ ²⁰ So now, do not let my blood fall to the earth before the face of the Lord. For the king of Israel has come out to seek a flea, as when one hunts a partridge in the mountains.”*

Saul calls out to David and the hypocrisy just wants to make you vomit. ***Is that your voice, my son David?*** I’ve missed you bud! Right.

Remember when they had this similar exchange last time in Chapter 24, David responded to Saul by calling him father. But now that Saul gave his daughter Michal to another, David is no longer tied to Saul in the same way and does not answer with *father*. He says, ***my lord, O king***, again, showing respect and reverence for the position he holds as the Lord's anointed.

But David asks why Saul is so intent on pursuing him, when David has already shown no intent of harm against Saul. If the Lord is behind this in some way in stirring up Saul's heart, then David is happy to bring an offering to Him. If it's people that are getting Saul riled up, then they should be accursed. Because they are not acting truthfully or justly.

David saw that these enemies would have been satisfied to have David driven out of the land and have to serve foreign gods. He humbly asked Saul to not allow his life to be taken and for his blood to fall to the earth before the face of the Lord.

David concludes that Saul has been putting a lot of energy into something he shouldn't be focused on. You don't go on the hunt for a flea, it's trivial and minute, it's a waste to do that. And yet, this is what Saul has been doing toward David.

4. Saul Displays False Sorrow Again – 26:21-25

26:21 - Then Saul said, "I have sinned. Return, my son David. For I will harm you no more, because my life was precious in your eyes this day. Indeed I have played the fool and erred exceedingly."

It's been said that Saul penned the perfect autobiography in those words, ***I have played the fool and erred exceedingly***. Saul recognized this but he did not allow himself to be changed by these truths. He lived a life where he repeatedly did the things he knew would not bring him any blessing or good. That's what being a fool is. It's to repeat the same mistakes but expect different results. Saul's problem was that he just failed to walk in obedience to God. He was driven by self-will and it led him to bitterness and insanity.

God is working through this time in David's life to rid him of self-will and walk in obedience to God's will. David is in the midst of king's school and he's just had another test by which he passed with flying colours.

Though Saul seems repentant, David is no longer buying it. He responds simply with come and get your stuff...

26:22-25 - And David answered and said, “Here is the king’s spear. Let one of the young men come over and get it. ²³ May the Lord repay every man for his righteousness and his faithfulness; for the Lord delivered you into my hand today, but I would not stretch out my hand against the Lord’s anointed. ²⁴ And indeed, as your life was valued much this day in my eyes, so let my life be valued much in the eyes of the Lord, and let Him deliver me out of all tribulation.” ²⁵ Then Saul said to David, “May you be blessed, my son David! You shall both do great things and also still prevail.” So David went on his way, and Saul returned to his place.”

These are Saul’s last words to David, this is the last time they’ll see each other.

I love how Saul says to David, ***you shall both do great things and also still prevail***. It’s a reminder that in life, there’s challenges that will be in front of us not for us to prove our might, but to lead us to the Lord’s might. It’s not meant to glory in our progress or prowess, but to boast in God’s goodness.

- When Jacob wrestled with the Angel of the Lord, the angel said to him, *“Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed.”*
- Sometimes we can find ourselves struggling, and it may feel like we’re struggling with God, and we might wonder: *what are you doing to me God?!?*
- But God is not meaning to make like a struggle for you, but it’s through the struggle that we learn to submit and surrender to His will and His work in our lives.
- Jacob crossed over the ford of Jabbok when he began to wrestle with this Angel of the Lord. Jabbok means ‘emptying’, and it’s often what the Lord is accomplishing in us in the struggle. He’s emptying us of ourselves. When we continue to fight and resist thinking we’re going to get through it on our own, we only increase the struggle. But when we surrender and let the Lord be the One leading us, we no longer are going to feel the same struggle. That’s why Jacob (heel catcher, supplanter, conniver) had his name changed to Israel afterwards. Israel means ‘governed by God’. This is a much better place to be when we give the reigns to God and let Him lead us.

- Through all these experiences and struggles that David has been through, their purpose was to bring David to reliance on the Lord and not on self. He will learn and he will prevail. Not prevail in self, but prevail in submission to the Lord.

Chapter 27, and the rollercoaster of life continues...

5. David Flees to the Philistines Again – 27:1-4

27:1-4 - *And David said in his heart, “Now I shall perish someday by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape to the land of the Philistines; and Saul will despair of me, to seek me anymore in any part of Israel. So I shall escape out of his hand.”² Then David arose and went over with the six hundred men who were with him to Achish the son of Maach, king of Gath.³ So David dwelt with Achish at Gath, he and his men, each man with his household, and David with his two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the Carmelitess, Nabal’s widow.⁴ And it was told Saul that David had fled to Gath; so he sought him no more.*

David moves back in with the Philistines. He should have been able to move forward knowing that the Lord was going to take care of him. God has given him enough assurance of His future plans for David.

Samuel has told him he’s going to be the next king, Jonathan has said it, Saul has even said it. But David is getting sidetracked by what he’s seeing before him rather than seeing what’s beyond him. And really, he’s walking in this doubt and fear at this point.

- This again gives me some semblance of comfort, seeing guys like David (a hero of the faith) having flaws and failures. It’s been said, the best men are men at best. It’s true.
- Yet God’s not looking for us to be great, He’s looking for us to rely on His greatness. I’m thankful that God can take a person like me or you and do a work through us.

Now we should never see David’s actions as an allowance for shortcomings and backsliding. This isn’t something God approves of because of a tough trial we’re going through. David could have thought based on the outcome (vs. 4) and refuge he would find (vs. 5) that this was all working out for the good. But again, the end does not justify the means. And because you may be feeling comfortable

does not always mean you're carrying out the Lord's will. We need to always first and foremost see the Word as our guide.

- Jonah was one who felt pretty comfortable sitting in the boat sailing as far away from Ninevah as he could go. He was so comfortable he was sleeping. But that comfort didn't mean he was doing the right thing. He first needed to obey the Word of the Lord.
- And this is the plight that David is in. He's not walking with trust in the Lord or obedience to the Word of the Lord. And regardless of how you feel or the outcome, it doesn't make it right.

And so we will see that David is going to be in a place that will cause him to lie, be deceptive, and put other people in harms way. No matter what kind of immediate relief your decision or your action may have, if it's contrary to God's way it will leave you bitter and bummed out. That's what sin does. That's what the enemy wants you to think – that if you do this or have that it will be pleasurable. And it may for a time, but it will leave you empty and bitter. David will experience this. Not a good witness being made by this future king and one labeled as a man after God's own heart.

- In fact, it's at this time in his life where we don't have any record of communion or communication with the Lord. There's no Psalms being written during this time. It's a dry season in David's life.

Where did all this begin? **In his heart.** He **said in his heart, 'Now I shall perish someday by the hand of Saul.'** The heart is a powerful piece of our life that dictates often the flow of our lives.

Also, when we begin to do what seems right to ourselves, without looking at what God says, you're going to make some boneheaded moves. Our subjective feelings must always be countered by the objective truth of God's Word.

Where does David go? To Gath – Goliath's hometown. *Hi everybody remember me? I killed your champion!* You'd think he'd want to avoid this place so as to not stir up any controversy – but he's walking in the flesh right now, which will often lead to bad decisions. He's even retreated here before and found out in a hurry this was not a wise idea, so he began to act like an insane person so they would leave him alone (1 Sam 21:10-15).

Why was Achish more receptive of David this time around? It didn't go so well last time. Most likely because Achish knew that David and Saul were enemies. If

David is running from the king of Israel, then he'll probably be happy to ally with him. Common enemies can make quick friends of people. This is what Achish was banking on. Plus, David brought 600 men with him. Achish was probably enticed by the potential extra man-power he would now have on his side in battle.

6. David Dwells in Ziklag – 27:5-7

27:5-7 - *Then David said to Achish, “If I have now found favor in your eyes, let them give me a place in some town in the country, that I may dwell there. For why should your servant dwell in the royal city with you?”⁶ So Achish gave him Ziklag that day. Therefore Ziklag has belonged to the kings of Judah to this day.⁷ Now the time that David dwelt in the country of the Philistines was one full year and four months.*

Rather than cramping the king's style in the royal city, David asked for a place where he and his men may dwell in the country. So they were given Ziklag.

- Ziklag is down in the south region. It's not part of the 5 chief cities of the Philistines (Gath, Gaza, Ekron, Ashkelon, and Ashdod). So David would have had a lot of freedom to come and go and conduct his business without a lot of people seeing what he's doing.
- And it's while he's stationed at Ziklag that he is indeed taking care of business.

7. David Attacks Israel's Enemies and Deceives the Philistines – 27:8-12

27:8-9 - *And David and his men went up and raided the Geshurites, the Girzites, and the Amalekites. For those nations were the inhabitants of the land from of old, as you go to Shur, even as far as the land of Egypt.⁹ Whenever David attacked the land, he left neither man nor woman alive, but took away the sheep, the oxen, the donkeys, the camels, and the apparel, and returned and came to Achish.*

David starts taking out some of these remnant nations that were hold overs from the land of Canaan. Some were desert tribes who were enemies of Israel. They were to be utterly destroyed, but we see the job was never carried to completion. And they continued to be thorns in their side. So David begins to finish the work God instructed them to do. This would be a huge help to the long-term success of Israel.

27:10-12 - Then Achish would say, “Where have you made a raid today?” And David would say, “Against the southern area of Judah, or against the southern area of the Jerahmeelites, or against the southern area of the Kenites.” ¹¹ David would save neither man nor woman alive, to bring news to Gath, saying, “Lest they should inform on us, saying, ‘Thus David did.’ ” And thus was his behavior all the time he dwelt in the country of the Philistines. ¹² So Achish believed David, saying, “He has made his people Israel utterly abhor him; therefore he will be my servant forever.”

When Achish would check in with David, David would lie to him and make it sound that David was attacking Israelite territory. David would be sure to not leave any witnesses that could give Achish a conflicting report.

It’s a terrible place that David find himself in. He’s got to lie and deceive, and we read that he did this the whole 16 months he was in Philistine country (27:11).

- The problem with living this sort of deceptive life is that you need to have a good memory. Otherwise at one point or another you’re going to contradict yourself (i.e. *wait a second, I thought you said you were over there yesterday? I thought you said you were doing this?*).
- Now I’m not trying to teach you how to lie successfully, but be sure that when you begin to travel down that path, you will become entangled in your own deceit. Sin will catch up with you.
- And in David’s backsliding he becomes more ruthless. It’s a downward spiral that sucks you in further and further if you don’t recognize it and repent of it.

This account in 1 Samuel 26-27 is meant to reveal that the challenges of life can quickly uproot us or detour us if we’re not walking by faith in the Lord.

The safest place for any of us is not where life feels easiest, but where we are walking the closest with God.

Points to Ponder:

1. Trusting in God produces faith and composure. Whereas not trusting in God produces fear and compromise. What’s being demonstrated in your life?
2. Victory yesterday doesn’t guarantee faith today. Are you living on past victories, or leaning on present trust?
3. Fear often begins quietly in the heart. What is circulating in your heart – fear, feelings, or God’s Word?