

*This is not a fully written or transcribed manuscript, but the extended notes written in preparation.*

## It's Like Déjà vu All Over Again

1 Samuel 26:1–25

*The Twenty-Eighth Sermon on First Samuel*

© 2013 Daniel R. Hyde

I love to tell the story;  
'Twill be my theme in glory  
To tell the old, old story  
Of Jesus and His love.<sup>1</sup>

The old story should never get old. No matter how many times we hear the story of Scripture our ears should not grow hard of hearing. Repetitiveness is a biblical pattern and virtue of telling its story so that it sinks in ever more deeply every time.

And critical biblical scholars have picked up on the fact that this chapter is virtually the same as chapter 24, and therefore see this as evidence of a mistake by an editor. Is chapter 26 extremely similar to chapter 24? Absolutely. There go the Ziphites again snitching on David, who is in the same place as he was in chapter 23 (v. 1) and here comes Saul again after David (vv. 2–3; cf. 23:25). And in chapters 24 and 26 David spares Saul's life—again.

But when we find two biblical stories that are so similar, what we have to do is to pay even closer attention. Why? Because it's in the slight details that we see the nuance and further message. For example, in both stories David sneaks up on

---

<sup>1</sup> From the hymn, "I Love to Tell the Story," in *Psalter Hymnal*, #412.

*This is not a fully written or transcribed manuscript, but the extended notes written in preparation.*

Saul. But earlier in chapter 24 the encounter between David and Saul was a “chance” encounter, yet here in chapter 26 it’s a deliberate encounter as David goes to Saul’s tent. In chapter 24 David’s men were unnamed, but here in chapter 26 we get the name of David’s chief warrior, Abishai, who will feature prominently later in David’s life. In chapter 24 the chapter focus was on the relationship between David and Saul, but now in chapter 26 the focus is on David’s relationship to Saul’s chief warrior, Abner.<sup>2</sup>

So what does all this teach us? What more do we learn in chapter 26 about the old, old story of David? We see two things here that we’ve seen before and then we see a third thing that is the goal of all this:

1. *David’s Fearlessness*
2. *David’s Godliness*
3. *The Lord’s Purpose*

## **David’s Fearlessness**

What do we learn here about the old, old story of David? First, we see *David’s fearlessness*. After his first encounter with Saul in chapter 24 and then his growing military prowess in chapter 25, we read that **when [David] saw that Saul came after him into the wilderness, David sent out spies and learned that Saul had indeed come** (vv. 3–4). Do you see what this means? All the way from chapter 18 until now who has been the hunter and who has been the hunted?

---

<sup>2</sup> For these, see Leithart, 145.

*This is not a fully written or transcribed manuscript, but the extended notes written in preparation.*

Saul's been hunting and David's been the hunted. But now the story takes a total twist, a total reversal of roles as it's David who hunts Saul!

You see that especially come into focus with verse 5: **David rose and came to the place where Saul had encamped. And David saw the place where Saul lay, with Abner the son of Ner, the commander of his army. Saul was lying within the encampment, while the army was encamped around him.** It's interesting to see the details about Saul's camp here. Saul sleeps in the center while his three thousand men sleep around him. I mentioned back in chapter 24 that Saul relieved himself in a cave because the law of God required that this could not be done in the camp but only outside the camp. And here, just like as in the book of Numbers where the tabernacle was in the midst of Israel with three tribes on each side, surrounding the holy place, Saul, the holy king is in the middle of the camp. And David fearlessly goes in! And he takes his best with him. He asks Ahimelech and Abishai, **"Who will go down with me into the camp to Saul?"** and it is Abishai who answers the call (v. 6). As they **went...by night** they saw **Saul sleeping within the encampment** and note what else: **his spear was stuck in the ground at his head, and Abner and the army lay around him** (v. 7). And skipping ahead what David does is to take **the spear and the jar of water from Saul's head** (v. 12).

Who is this guy? Is he the same man who's been running and hiding from Saul? I mean, after all, in chapter 24 he and his men weren't just hiding in a cave as Saul was pursuing him, but they were in the furthest corner of a cave in total

*This is not a fully written or transcribed manuscript, but the extended notes written in preparation.*

darkness! Something is happening to David that happens to all God's children over the course of their lives: he is growing in faith. As his faith increases his fear decreases. And it's this grow that I want to see next.

## **David's Godliness**

Notice secondly here *David's godliness*. It's not just that he's growing in faith, which is then aimlessly running out of control, but he's growing in godliness. Godliness, brothers and sisters, gives direction to our faith as we grow. Our faith is like shooting a shotgun when we are young. We shoot and the buckshot goes everywhere, but it does hit something. But as we grow in godliness, we begin to learn precision in our focus and our faith is like shooting with a scope at its target.

How do we see David's growth in godliness? Just like in chapter 24 we read that he is tempted: **Then Abishai said to David, "God has given your enemy into your hand this day. Now please let me pin him to the earth with one stroke of the spear, and I will not strike him twice"** (v. 8). In chapter 24 he was tempted to do the deed himself; now Abishai, his best assassin offers to do it for him! And he would use Saul's infamous spear—mentioned six times in this chapter (vv. 7, 8, 11, 12, 16, 22)—to do so! It's only getting easier for David to forsake the cross and go straight for the crown. But as in chapter 24, David again says, **"Do not destroy him, for who can put out his hand against the LORD's anointed and be guiltless?"** (v. 9) More importantly, listen to how he has grown not only in light of chapter 24, but in light of his rash rage in chapter 25: **"As the**

*This is not a fully written or transcribed manuscript, but the extended notes written in preparation.*

**LORD lives, the LORD will strike him, or his day will come to die, or he will go down into battle and perish” (v. 10).**

David is learning the fruit of the Spirit of patience. He is learning to trust that Lord will do with Saul as he wishes, when he wishes. Unlike the Nabal story when he was so ready just to rush into battle, he is places his faith and hope in justice of God to his enemies and the grace of God for himself. Sounds like a lesson we can learn!

And we see his growth in the lengthy dialog between he and Abner and he and Saul in verses 13–25. David stood on a hill (v. 13) and cried out to Abner,

**Are you not a man? Who is like you in Israel? Why then have you not kept watch over your lord the king? For one of the people came in to destroy the king your lord. This thing that you have done is not good. As the LORD lives, you deserve to die, because you have not kept watch over your lord, the LORD’s anointed. And now see where the king’s spear is and the jar of water that was at his head. (vv. 15–16)**

David asserts not only his innocence, but his godly dealing with Saul, sparing him from death prematurely. But this yelling back and forth only woke up king Saul (v. 17). Again, as in chapter 24, David asks, **“Why does my lord pursue after his servant? For what have I done? What evil is on my hands?”** (v. 18) Is David claiming that he is sinless? Absolutely not. But in this matter he has acted godly and righteously. After Saul confesses, **“I have sinned,”** and that, **“I have acted foolishly”** (v. 21)—there’s that Hebrew word from chapter 25, *nabal*—David presented the spear (v. 22) and said,

**The LORD rewards every man for his righteousness and his faithfulness, for the LORD gave you into my hand today, and I would not put out my hand against the LORD’s anointed. Behold, as your life**

*This is not a fully written or transcribed manuscript, but the extended notes written in preparation.*

**was precious this day in my sight, so may my life be precious in the sight of the LORD, and may he deliver me out of all tribulation.”** (vv. 23-24)

We're seeing the transformation of David into a fearless and godly king. Who is transforming him? The Lord. It's like what Paul says of us: "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18).

## **The Lord's Purpose**

The Lord. He's really the one on display here. David is fearless. But this comes from the Lord being at work in him. David is full of godliness. But this comes from the Lord being at work in him. So it's the Lord who is at work in the old, old story of David. I want to conclude with a third point, which is the goal of the story: *the Lord's purpose*.

Look up at verse 10 again. Listen to how David speaks so confidently in the activity of the Lord: "**As the LORD lives, *the LORD will strike him, or his day will come to die, or he will go down into battle and perish.***" David is confident that the Lord would accomplish his purpose with Saul at some point.

But it's verse 12 that is so key to our story. It's not just that the Lord *would* act in the future, but that he *was* active right then and there. In describing Saul and his men asleep, and David and Abishai's entrance into the camp undetected, the narrator says this astonishing line: "**No man saw it or knew it, nor did any**

*This is not a fully written or transcribed manuscript, but the extended notes written in preparation.*

**awake, for they were all asleep**—but listen to why—**because a deep sleep from the LORD had fallen upon them.** The Lord intervened personally into David's life. And here's how wonderfully he did. That phrase, "deep sleep," is same Hebrew word that is used in Genesis 2:21: "So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man." It's a word that was used of Adam, when the Lord was actively at work in his life to give him a helper. This phrase is also used of Abram in Genesis 15:12: "As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram." When the Lord confirmed his covenant with Abram, he caused a deep sleep.

What's the purpose? Like I said at the beginning of the sermon, when we read a story that seems repetitive we have to look at the details. And this word is one of those details that adds something very powerful to the previous story. What is it? The Lord's purpose for David to be his king was so important that the Lord directly acted to accomplish it! Can you see where we're going now? Why has the Lord been so personally involved in David's life, preserving and protecting him from all harm in this story? What's so special about David? The Lord's purpose for David is to be the forerunner of his greatest, and greater son, Jesus Christ. And when the Lord wanted to send his Son to earth to accomplish his purpose for our salvation, he personally intervened in the life of Mary: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). Amen.