

BaptistWay Bible Series for May 7: Behaving nobly in a dog-eat-dog world

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Behaving nobly in a dog-eat-dog world

- 1 Samuel 24:2-15; 26:6-12

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Have you ever been falsely accused? Perhaps someone has accused you of taking something from them in the workplace. Maybe they perceived your presence as a threat to their advancement, even though nothing could be further from the truth.

Throughout your defense, did your accuser remain unconvinced? Did the accuser interpret wrongly your defensiveness as a cover for guilt? This was the situation in which David found himself.

Recall that 1 Samuel 20 concluded by telling us that when his fears were confirmed—and Jonathan was convinced—that Saul wanted to kill David, David fled. He was an innocent man whose life was in danger.



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Chapters 21-23 further corroborated those fears. David traveled from place to place, with Saul and his men in constant pursuit. Some, like the priests of Nod, helped David in his hiding (21:1-9). They did so at great personal risk. When Saul discovered they had aided David, he killed them. Only Abiathar escaped (23:6-23).

Saul's son Jonathan also met with David. In their meeting, Jonathan, in almost prophetic fashion, assured David Saul would not harm him. He even declared David would indeed become king of Israel. Jonathan then revealed Saul knew this as well (23:15-18). The implication: Saul's jealousy was the root problem. David was the target of that jealousy.

Saul had his supporters, too, though. Doeg the Edomite told Saul of the aid rendered David by the aforementioned priests (22:9), resulting in their deaths. The Ziphites also were all too eager to inform Saul of David's movements (23:19).

Not surprisingly, then, informants like these in both chapters 24 and 26 led Saul to David. These chapters record two memorable exchanges between David and Saul.

Without going into detail here, it is important to note that chapters 24 and 26 share striking parallels. One would do well to read them side by side so as to observe their similar structure and content. A few examples will suffice.

Both chapters relate how Saul learned of David's position. It is reported 3,000 men accompanied Saul. Both times Saul unknowingly came to rest close to where David was hiding, each time in a vulnerable position. David's men interpreted these "chance meetings" as God's way of placing Saul into David's hands. David secretly approached Saul and left with something belonging to him. In chapter 24, he cut a part of Saul's robe; in chapter 26, he took Saul's spear and water jar. David refused to harm Saul each time.

Afterward, he called Saul out to show him he meant him no harm. David sought vindication from God regarding his own innocence and the willingness to pay the consequences if he was guilty. Surprisingly, Saul confessed his own guilt and declared David had treated him better than he had treated David. Saul even offered a blessing on David's future. In 24:20, Saul acknowledged David would become king. Then each chapter ends with David and Saul parting company.

When read together, these stories about separate incidents reveal the character of David in his response to Saul's false accusations. Never had David intended to harm the king. Given two opportunities to rid himself of his enemy, David showed self-restraint.

In the first encounter, though he intended only to show Saul he could have killed him but didn't, David became "conscience stricken" (24:5) for doing nothing more than cutting a portion of Saul's robe. In the second encounter, he stayed the hand of his assistant Abishai who offered to kill Saul for him (26:8-9). Not only would David not harm the king, he would not allow anyone else do so.

Numerous times throughout these two chapters, David voiced the principle by which he operated. Saul was the Lord's anointed, and it was improper to raise one's hand against the Lord's anointed (24:6, 10; 26:9, 11, 23).

In addition, David maintained a respectful attitude toward Saul in these

exchanges. He referred to Saul as “my lord the king” (24:8; 26:17-19) and “my father” (24:11). Ironically, Saul referred to David as “my son” (24:16; 26:17, 21); whereas in previous chapters, he used more distant language (“son of Jesse”). David had resolved to let the Lord deal with Saul in the proper time and fashion.

To be sure, had David killed Saul when he had the opportunity, he quite possibly could have become king sooner. God had promised David the throne, hadn’t he? Maybe God had delivered Saul into his hands on these occasions as David’s men believed. David did not accept this. Also, this would only have served to confirm to Saul’s supporters his accusation that David actively sought the throne. After all, how could David prove he was not trying to kill Saul if he had killed him?

David trusted the Lord to vindicate him (24:15). In the meantime, he proved time and again he never had designs on killing Saul. Despite having the opportunities, he did not follow through. Even later, when Saul would die in battle, opening the way for David to become king of Israel, David chose to grieve rather than rejoice (1 Samuel 31; 2 Samuel 1).

Trust in the Lord. Remember, he said “It is mine to avenge, I will repay” (Deuteronomy 32:35; Romans 12:19). Not only should that bring us comfort; it should remove a great weight from our shoulders.

Discussion questions

- Is David’s response a model for how we should act or just a record of what he did? Explain.
- How might the history of Israel in general and the life of David

specifically been different had he taken matters into his own hands?

- Would David have been justified in killing Saul?
- What is the proper response when we are wrongly accused?
- What further harm can we cause when we fail to act nobly?



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