

I Samuel chapter 26 *“Trusting in Providence”*

Introduction:

It was recorded earlier in this book that Saul had not only previously sought to hunt David down and kill him, but after David spared Saul's life (having had the chance to kill the helpless king in his sleep) Saul had also acknowledged David's innocence, and had even asked Yahweh to bless him (24:16-21). However, though we are not told why, in this chapter we read that once again, Saul's hostility to David was aroused and he was again determined to hunt David down and kill him. This episode was ordained to end as the previous one did, but this one would mark Saul's final pursuit of David.

The striking similarities between the accounts recorded in chapters 24 and 26 have led some scholars to assume that these two stories are variations of the same episode in David's life. However, this conclusion is adopted by scholars who see this book as a composition by one or more editors who wrote centuries after the events took place and who reject the idea that the text was Divinely inspired.

The reality is that there are also many significant differences between the two accounts, and these differences indicate that they are retelling two different occasions where Saul attempted to do basically the same thing, and that God delivered David both times from Saul. One of the most fundamental differences between the two chapters is seen in how the account in chapter 24 highlighted David's restraint when given an opportunity to harm or kill Saul, while chapter 26 highlighted David's ability to put himself in the position to kill Saul. In addition to this, there is a wealth of geographical information in these two chapters. The inclusion of these details indicates that the author wrote on the basis of his or someone else's personal knowledge of these events, and this then supports the historicity of the two distinct accounts. Though the two stories about David sparing Saul's life are distinct from one another, at their thematic core the accounts are parallel. By recording both of these incidents, the narrator established beyond all doubt that Saul's hostility toward David was completely unjustified, because David never sought to harm Saul or to end his reign prematurely.

From a literary standpoint, this chapter has the following chiasmic structure:

- A. Saul searches for David, who then responds (vv.1–5).
- B. David keeps his man Abishai from killing Saul (vv.6–12).
- B. David rebukes Saul's man Abner for not protecting Saul (vv.13–16).
- A. Saul talks to David, who then responds (vv.17–25).

I. David's Actions in Response to Saul's Pursuit: (26:1-13)

In verse one we read, *“Now the Ziphites came to Saul at Gibeah, saying, ‘Is David not hiding in the hill of Hachilah, opposite Jeshimon?’* The use of the Hebrew definite article here with the proper noun, *“Ziphites”* (which is grammatically unusual in Hebrew, and different from the last reference to them in chapter 23) indicates that this is a specific reference to the same Ziphites that

assisted Saul in regard to his pursuit of David on the previous occasion. These allies of Saul were from the tribe of Judah; they were a clan of that tribe that were descendants of Caleb. They continued to supply the king with valuable intelligence reports concerning David's whereabouts. Perhaps they were motivated by jealousy; David's marriage to the richest member of the Calebite clan (as recorded in chapter twenty-five) may have been perceived as a usurpation of rights reserved for one of their own. In this second incident, the Ziphites went to Saul at Gibeah and informed him that David was hiding on the hill of Hakilah, which faces Jeshimon. This site has not yet been located by archeologists but given the information we are given here, the area that is referred to as being on the east side of Jeshimon, was the area between the hill country of Judah and the Dead Sea. This general area was in a triangular region between Hebron, Ziph, and Engedi.

The common Hebrew verb "bô", which means to come or enter, is a unifying feature of this section, appearing in all but one of verses one through five.

Since there were strongholds at Hakilah (23:19), it was an especially secure place for a fugitive to hide and was therefore doubtless used often by David and his men.

In regard to the translation of this verse, the idea in the NIV translation "*overlooking Jeshimon*" is likely to be preferred over the above translation "*opposite Jeshimon*".

In verse two we read, "*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.*" We read here that once again Saul, having learned from the Ziphites the place where David was hiding went with three thousand chosen men to the hill of Hakilah (23:19) in the Desert of Ziph to search for David. When the text says that Saul and his men "*went down*" it reflects the geographic reality that they were descending from high ground at Gibeah to the lower elevation of the desert of Ziph. Though the hunt for David was not in precisely the same place as the previous one (ch.24) it was within the same general vicinity. Saul was accompanied by three thousand soldiers just as he was when he had pursued David the last time.

In verses three and four we read, "*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. David therefore sent out spies, and understood that Saul had indeed come.*" Saul had his soldiers camp at a site that provided security, which included a strategic view of the region, and plenty of room for the mobility for his troops. Meanwhile, as Saul was establishing his camp, David remained hidden from the view of Saul and his men. Next, David sent scouts to learn what they could about Saul's encampment, and to verify specifically where Saul was.

In verse five we read, "*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 Hebrew wording indicates that David made himself aware of the precise place where Saul was laying in the camp. In light of what he had

learned from his scouts, David sneaked into Saul's encampment under the cover of darkness to get an even closer look at how Saul's forces were arranged within the camp. While in the camp, David was able to identify the key personnel leading the forces as well as the exact location and arrangement of the camp. The arrangement of Saul's camp, combined with the location of the camp at the top of a hill, would have provided Saul with maximum protection. With this information, David was now in a position to use a favored military tactic that Saul also had employed, that of making a predawn raid on a hostile camp (11:11). According to the description here, Saul was in the middle of his encampment, surrounded by all his soldiers. Understanding this aspect of the situation demonstrates the courage that David displayed in doing what he did. By entering the camp this way, David was placing himself in a very dangerous situation. This was different from the previous episode, because that time David approached Saul when he was unattended in a cave. In that previous episode (ch.24), David did not seek an encounter with Saul, but in this second incident, David was taking a more aggressive approach, actively seeking a confrontation with Saul in order to demonstrate his innocence and challenge the king's unjust treatment of him.

In verse twelve the narrator will put this event in its spiritual context by telling us the primary reason why David was able to gain easy access to Saul, but at this juncture it seems fair to observe that in the outworking of God's providence it is apparent that Saul and Abner failed to take the precaution of stationing sentries who were to stay awake and guard the camp.

In verse six we read, "*Then David answered, and said to Ahimelech the Hittite and to Abishai the son of Zeruah, brother of Joab, saying, 'Who will go down with me to Saul in the camp?' And Abishai said, 'I will go down with you.'*" Here the narrator backs up to inform us that David brought someone with him when he went into Saul's camp. It is recorded that before David departed on this mission, he asked two of his men if they would go with him into the camp. The two men are identified as "*Ahimelech the Hittite*" and "*Abishai the son of Zeruah, the brother of Joab*". The first man, "*Ahimelech the Hittite*" is never mentioned anywhere else in the Bible. His personal name was a common one at the time, so he is further identified as "*the Hittite*". Though Ahimelech had a Hittite background, his name was Semitic; this, added to the fact that he was in David's circle of trusted associates, suggests that his family had adopted Israelite cultural and religious practices, including the worship of Yahweh. Failing this, it would be hard to understand why David would have permitted this man to be part of his group (Deut.7:1-4; 20:17). David's companion here is not to be confused with Ahimelech the priest (ch.21). Another member of David's men who was ethnically a Hittite, was Uriah. It is not clear whether Ahimelech and Uriah were associated with the Anatolian Hittites whose empire extended into what is now modern Syria (an empire that thrived in the 14th and 13th centuries B.C., but which fell around 1200 B.C., about 200 years prior to David's time). Another, more likely possibility is that they were part of one of the smaller tribe of Hittites that had migrated into Palestine. These most likely had migrated from the powerful Hittite city states in

northern Syria, the two most notable of which were at Carchemish on the Euphrates, and Kadesh on the Orontes. These last vestiges of the Hittite culture were later destroyed by the Assyrians in the eighth century B.C. We know that these peoples had a presence in Canaan because there are numerous admonitions in earlier portions of the OT that the Hittites were among the people who were to be driven out of Canaan (Gen.15:20; Deut.7:1). The second man was Abishai. He is described as “*the son of Zeruiah*”. Zeruiah was David’s sister (I Chronicles 2:15–16). Therefore, Abishai was David’s nephew. Both Abishai and Joab figure prominently in the narratives of Second Samuel, especially after David becomes king following Saul’s death. Here we are told that Abishai volunteered to go with David.

In verse seven we read, “*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.*” David’s objective in this nocturnal expedition was to make an incursion into the very center of the camp. We are told that the two men arrived after dark when everyone was asleep, and that they left before anyone in the camp woke up (vs.12). After the two men had made their way past the perimeter to Saul, they found his “*spear*” stuck in the ground near his head. As has been observed in previous chapters, this weapon should more accurately be translated as a “*javelin*”, and it was likely both a symbol of his authority (like a scepter) and a weapon. It was close to Saul’s head so he could quickly grab it in an emergency. And Saul was situated close to Abner and his soldiers. Abishai expressed that he was willing to kill Saul for David, since David was reluctant to do it himself. And from a natural perspective this would have seemed like a reasonable thing to do, since Saul was out to kill David and his men. And it would have been quite an ironic death, since it should be remembered that this was the same weapon that Saul had used twice before in his attempts to kill David (18:10-11; 19:9-10). Therefore, in this account, the detail that the javelin was close at hand, and Abishai’s offer to kill the king both highlight the temptation that David was faced with for a second time. The weapon represented an opportunity to easily and quickly rid himself of the relentless enemy that lay helpless before him.

In verse eight we read, “*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.’*” Here we read that Abishai verbalized the temptation that David was faced with, offering to make the deed that much easier for David. The reader is meant to recognize that both times when David was in this situation, it was suggested to him by someone else he should take advantage of the God-given opportunity to kill Saul (24:4). From his perspective, Abishai envisioned himself as the instrument of David’s Divine deliverance. And Abishai had a sense of urgency in his offer, which was conveyed by his use of the words “*Today*” and “*Now*”. In speaking the way he did, he was echoing—probably unwittingly—the narrator’s description of Saul’s murderous intentions against David (18:10–11). Abishai was not characterized by restraint, rather he was always quick to act (i.e. his later proposals to kill Shimei on the spot; II Sam.16:9–10; 19:21–23). He was also confident about his own strength,

claiming that he would be able to execute Saul without having to “*strike him a second time*” (and we read a similar description of the brute strength of Abishai’s brother Joab against the hapless Amasa in II Sam.20:10). Abishai interpreted their remarkable success in penetrating the defenses as proof that “*God has delivered your enemy into your hands*” (v. 8).

In this account David’s graciousness is to be seen as a contrast with Saul’s blood-thirsty viciousness. Whereas David refused to do harm to Saul, Saul had several times attempted to kill David and did so even though David hadn’t done anything wrong against Saul. Therefore, Abishai illustrates the more natural response, wanting to slay an enemy who wanted to slay them. This then further highlights David’s godliness, he resisted the temptation to do the natural thing, intending instead to live in submission to God’s revealed will. This complements a theme that runs throughout this book, the idea that the people of Israel were to look in faith to Yahweh as their deliverer, rather than thinking they could deliver themselves.

In verses nine and ten we read, “*But David said to Abishai, ‘Do not destroy him; for who can stretch out his hand against the LORD’s anointed, and be guiltless. 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.’*” As in his previous encounter with Saul (ch.24), David would not allow any of his men to press their advantage against the unsuspecting Saul. David refused to do this because Saul was Yahweh’s anointed. David understood that it would be tantamount to sacrilege to kill Yahweh’s anointed one. David’s point to Abishai was that only Yahweh had the right to take Saul’s life in light of the role he possessed. Earlier in this book Israel’s king had been referred to as “*anointed*” (2:10, 35; 12:3, 5; 16:6), but this precise phrase “*the LORD’s anointed*” appeared for the first time in the account of Saul’s previous attempt to hunt down David and kill him, and in that account it was used three times (24:6, 10). This title now appears four times in this account (vs.9, 11, 16, 23), and then twice more in II Samuel (1:14, 16). The sense of the title may have a similar sense as the title “*the priests of the LORD*” (I Sam.22:17, 21). For that expression is the only other time we find a title that is used that includes the Divine name to refer to a human being who had a role in serving Yahweh in some capacity. Then, David even went on to swear an oath on the life of Yahweh that he would not slay Saul, nor allow any of his men to do so. David recognized the situation as a divine trial—an opportunity to demonstrate restraint and goodwill toward one of Yahweh’s anointed servants. Therefore, Saul was more than just another human foe. It was not David’s place to punish a servant of Yahweh. Next, through a series of three clauses, David described the potential ways that Saul might die (these were given as contrasts to what Abishai had suggested). David said that Yahweh might strike him (meaning give him a fatal disease, as he did to Nabal-25:38), or Yahweh might choose, when the appropriate time came to let Saul die a natural death, or he might perish in battle. In whichever way that Saul would eventually die, it would be Yahweh’s prerogative to take Saul’s life according to His own sovereign will. It is noteworthy that the author used the Hebrew verb translated as “*strike*” (nagap) here that he used in the previous chapter (25:38) to

describe how Yahweh struck Nabal dead for his resistance to God's chosen servant. The point seems to be that the author wanted the reader to see that David had recently experienced Yahweh's vindication of him, and that situation gave him renewed confidence that Yahweh would eventually deliver him from Saul. Therefore, contrary to what some commentators suggest, David was not predicting the way that Saul would eventually die, he was listing various possibilities that expressed the theological reality that would be behind whatever circumstances took place at the time of his death. Eventually, this book reveals that the circumstance of Saul's death was a battle at Gilboa (31:3-6).

In verses eleven and twelve we read, "*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.*" 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." A javelin was generally used by the infantrymen in the front ranks. This would not normally be where a king would be positioned during a battle in the ancient world. The fact that Saul always seems to have the javelin near at hand is one of the factors that suggests that it was more than just a weapon, it was also an insignia of his role as king. The jug of water may well have been one of the small disk-shaped vessels known from this period that featured two handles flanking the mouth so that they could be attached to a strap. Depriving a man of his water and weapon in this region would have normally constituted a threat to his life. However, in this situation, taking these specific articles would have been a meaningful way in that age to convey the idea that David had Saul's life in his hands when he was in Saul's encampment. Of course, taking these items would also prove that David had been close enough to kill Saul, had he wanted to do so. Ultimately, it was David's fear of displeasing Yahweh that motivated him not to harm Saul. But though he would not physically harm Saul, he would humiliate Saul and illustrate Saul's injustice if it would result in Saul stopping his pursuit. In verse eleven it is recorded that David told Abishai to take the javelin and water jug. However, in the very next verse (vs.12) it is recorded that David took those things. This seeming conflict does not indicate a contradiction in the narrative. Rather, the second statement exists to emphasize that responsibility for the taking of the objects ultimately rested with David, because the conflict in this account was one that was primarily between Saul and David.

We are told that David and Abishai were able to leave the camp unseen and unheard. But the narrator wanted the reader to understand that this ultimately happened not because of David's skill or stealth; rather, as in previous crises (17:46-47; 23:12-14), Yahweh was at work on David's behalf. In this situation we are told that Yahweh caused everyone in Saul's camp to fall into a "*deep sleep*". The expression "*deep sleep*" was used in Genesis to refer to the state that God put Adam in to remove his rib in order to create Eve (Gen.2:21), and it was also used to describe the state that Abraham was in when God enacted the covenant ritual with him (Gen.15:12). This demonstrated yet again that Yahweh was with David.

In verse thirteen we read, “*Now David went over to the other side, and stood on the top of a hill afar off, a great distance being between them.*” David went down the hill of Hakilah and then ascended another hill “*some distance away*”. The idea is that after David crossed a ravine that was between Saul’s position and another hill, David shouted to Abner, who as the head of Saul’s forces was entrusted with guarding the king. So here, the account heightens the reader’s awareness of the danger involved in David’s situation, by noting how he put a safe distance between himself and Saul’s army before choosing to awaken the king. What follows would be the last verbal exchange between David and Saul. The physical setting where the two men were separated by a wide gorge was emblematic of the relational distance between them because of the divergent paths each man had chosen to travel (David seeking to live his life according to God’s Law, Saul seeking to live his life in pursuit of his own self-interests).

II. David’s Words in Response to Saul’s Pursuit: (19:14-25)

In verse fourteen we read, “*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?’*” In the predawn darkness David’s voice echoed across the canyon as he began his confrontation of Saul. David began the confrontation by first addressing Saul’s army and Abner. Abner was Saul’s cousin and his most powerful aide. David’s call to the camp had awakened Saul, Abner, and the army from their supernaturally induced slumber. The overall address was directed toward Saul, but David included Abner in his challenge because Abner, in that culture, as the general of Saul’s army, would have been viewed as a representative of both the king and his army, and thus indirectly what was said to Abner would relate to Saul. As those in the camp were slowly regaining consciousness, David began to taunt them with a series of four questions and a pronouncement of judgment. David’s first question is recorded in this verse. The first part of the question “*Do you not answer, Abner?*” implies that he had to call several times, perhaps because the men had a difficult time awaking from sleep. In response, Abner inquired about the identity of this one who would dare to disturb the king’s sleep.

In verse fifteen we read, “*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.’*” David did not answer Abner’s question, rather he went on to ask two additional questions. David’s second question was “*Are you not a man? And who is like you in Israel?*” This two-part question was rhetorical and related to Abner’s unique role as the one entrusted with guarding the life of the king. It identified him as a distinguished individual in Israel who was essentially without peer. Elsewhere we get the insight that David apparently respected Abner (II Sam.33:1-35) and given what we read about him in the two books of Samuel, it seems evident that he had impeccable credentials.

The third question was “*Why then have you not guarded your lord the king? For one of the people came in to destroy your lord the king*”. Here David

contemptuously asked why Abner had failed to adequately protect the king. The reader knows that since God was with David and not with Saul, Abner could not possibly succeed in his responsibility to protect Saul from David, no matter how qualified he might have been for the role. This was because no person can successfully resist the sovereign will of God. But David's confrontation of Abner (and by extension Saul) was necessary so that the entire army who heard David's speech would recognize how they had failed and might also recognize that this was because they were at odds with God's purposes.

In verse sixteen we read, "*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.*" As David elaborated on his confrontation of Abner, he tauntingly chided him for his carelessness in allowing the king's spear and water jug to be taken (26:13-16). The statement "*you deserve to die*" would more literally be rendered as "*you sons of death*", however, the English translation above accurately conveys the meaning that David intended. David was expressing that the negligence of Abner and the army in not adequately guarding the king was a capital crime for which they should be put to death. As evidence of the charge he was raising against them, David challenged Abner to confirm the absence of the king's javelin and water jug which had been resting near his head. The words "*as Yahweh lives*" was an emphatic way of stressing the truthfulness of David's verdict that they all should be executed for their negligence.

The final section of chapter twenty-six consists of a conversation between Saul and David, with Saul beginning and ending the interchange but with David doing most of the talking. Saul's words are recorded in verses 17a, 21 & 25; while David's words are recorded in verses 17b-20, 22-24.

In verse seventeen we read, "*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.'*" At this point in the exchange, Saul, now awake, spoke in response to David. His first words were phrased as a tentative answer to Abner's initial question (regarding whose voice was calling out in the darkness). Saul asks if the voice is that of David. Saul's question here is a verbatim echo of a previous one (24:16) strengthening the parallel that exists between the events of these two chapters. David's answer to Saul was expressed in a very common and respectful way. This is confirmed by ancient documents that archeologists have found from that period in the ancient Near East. Because in them we find that the authors of those documents used identical wording to what David said here. The wording in those ancient documents are relevant because they express greetings from underlings addressed to their kings. However, what David said here represents a change in how David responded to Saul, when compared to how he addressed Saul the last time they spoke. On that earlier occasion, David had addressed Saul not only as his lord and king (24:8), but as his father (24:11). This time, David did not address Saul as his father. Though here David expressed clearly his allegiance, and submission to Saul, he was no longer seeking to restore an intimate relationship with him.

In verse eighteen we read, “*And he said, ‘Why does my lord thus pursue his servant? For what have I done, or what evil is in my hand?’*” Next, David raised a series of questions designed to probe and resolve the conflict that was separating the two men. First, David asked why Saul was pursuing him. David’s next two questions assumed that Saul’s answer to the first question would be that David had done something worthy of death. But if David had committed some awful crime, he asked Saul to tell him what that crime had been. David asked this in the firm conviction that he was innocent of any wrongdoing toward Saul. There is interesting wordplay in these verses. Here in verse eighteen David asked, “*what evil is in my hand*”. This expression is mirrored in verse twenty-three where David tells Saul that Yahweh delivered Saul “*into my hands*” and by his statement that he refused to “*lay a hand*” on Yahweh’s anointed. By tying these things together through multiple uses of the word “*hand*”, David was saying that though he had done no evil to Saul, Yahweh acted in judgment on Saul for his sins against David.

In verse nineteen we read, “*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’*”. David set forth two possible sources of Saul’s dogged pursuit of him. First, God may have incited Saul against him. If this first scenario was the case, then it meant that God sent Saul after David to punish David for his sin. Some interpreters have suggested that David was saying that God had caused Saul to be gripped by deception as a punishment for Saul’s blatant disobedience. This conclusion doesn’t fit the context, for if it were God’s punishment on Saul then it wouldn’t make sense for David to speak of himself making an offering to God. Therefore, the sin that David speaks about as a possibility would be his own. David’s response then (if that was what was happening) would be that he would make a freewill offering to Yahweh to restore his broken relationship God, expressing the hope that God would have mercy on him, and in that way, he would bring an end to the strife between him and Saul. The second scenario was that it was caused by other men. If this was the cause, it was David’s prayer that God would curse them (meaning bring judgment upon them).

David then described the effect Saul’s pursuit was having on him, he was being driven from sharing in the inheritance of Yahweh, and in effect was being told to “*Go, serve other gods*”. The idea in these statements is that what had been set in motion was resulting in David losing access to his rightful share in the inheritance that belonged to all Israel. But what precisely would David have understood as his share of the “*inheritance of Yahweh*”. In broad terms the inheritance that Yahweh gave to Israel was the gift of having a covenant relationship with Him, and this was inseparably linked with the gift of the land of Canaan as their home in which they could enjoy the benefits of that Covenant. For an individual it would be their ancestral land, and their personal involvement in the Covenant. The point David was making here was that Saul’s ongoing pursuit of him would inevitably drive him out of the land of Canaan. When that happened, it would deprive him of partaking

of any of the blessings that belonged to all of God's chosen people. But in what way were his pursuers suggesting he serve other gods? David's responsibility under the Covenant (like that of all Israelites) was to serve Yahweh in harmony with the instructions provided in the Mosaic Law (Ex.20:2-4; 23:25; Deut.6:13; 10:12, 20; 11:13; 13:4). Since the land of Israel was Yahweh's heritage, the worship of Yahweh was completely limited to the area within the borders of the Promised Land. In purely practical terms then, expulsion from the Promised Land would mean that David would no longer have access to places where Yahweh could be legitimately worshipped. David was not trying to make the point that he thought that Yahweh was in any way restricted to Israel's land. It was simply a reality that there would be no sanctuaries where David could worship (in the OT worship was focused on appropriate places in which one could do this, unlike what applies now under the New Covenant). In a sense, the only option then for him and his men would be to worship and serve the gods of whatever other nation would accept them, adopting the ways of the people with which they were forced to dwell.

In essence David was appealing for some opportunity to be given to him so that he and his men would not have to leave Canaan, for he was aware of all the dangers associated with being exiled: personal, political, and religious. He longed for another way, but he was being hunted like an animal and there seemed to be no other choice if Saul would not cease his pursuit.

In this statement a new element is introduced that is different from the account of Saul's previous pursuit of David (ch.24). That element is the anticipation of David's departure from Canaan, something that would soon take place if Saul did not cease his unrelenting pursuit of David (ch.27).

The reader knows something that David did not, it was the evil in Saul's own heart, and the influence of the evil spirit that plagued him that caused Saul's hatred of David. Saul would remain unrepentant until the day of his death, and apparently the evil spirit stayed with him till then as well.

In verse twenty we read, "*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.*" The initial words express David's plea that he not be forced to die outside the Promised Land. In the next phrase, David compares Saul's pursuit of him to trying to hunt down a single flea. This imagery stresses the absurdity of Saul's enterprise, a powerful king expending all of his time and energy and squandering precious national resources trying to accomplish something trivial. The final metaphor compared Saul's pursuit of David with hunting a partridge. Since the sand partridge is the only partridge found in the desert areas west of the Dead Sea, David's comparison of it to himself is particularly apt. This variety of partridge would not fly from danger unless abruptly startled, instead it would tend to run on the ground. The hunting technique of that day was to keep the bird continuously on the run until it was exhausted, when it could be captured with ease. This was exactly Saul's strategy in his pursuit of David. Incidentally, there is also a pun here based on the literal meaning of the Hebrew word for "*partridge*".

The Hebrew word means “*a caller on the mountain*”. The pun was that at that moment, David was literally one calling to Saul from a mountain.

In verse twenty-one we read, “*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’*”. So evident to Saul was David’s goodwill, and God’s intervention on David’s behalf that he could only confess his own wickedness. Saul’s admission here that he had “*sinned*” (along with his earlier admission of this – 24:17), represents the most important evidence of David’s innocence that is given in these accounts. Therefore, just as before, David’s actions and words brought Saul to a temporary state of repentance and reconciliation. This time, however, the words rang hollow, even though they were accompanied by words of vigorous self-condemnation and the promise not “*to harm*” David “*again*.” Ironically, Saul’s admission, “*I have played the fool*” echoes the wording of Samuel’s earlier rebuke of Saul (13:13), therefore, Saul here was acknowledging that Samuel’s assessment of him was correct. It is likely that Saul’s invitation to David was genuine at this point, but Saul’s state of mind and his emotional state were so unstable that David would have been foolish to accept the invitation to return with Saul.

In verse twenty-two we read, “*And David answered and said, ‘Here is the king’s spear. Let one of the young men come over and get it.’*” David then wisely instructed Saul to send over only a single individual to retrieve Saul’s spear. Some interpreters have speculated why it was that David did not mention retrieving the water jug. The reality is there is no way to know, and since the narrator did not include a reference to it, it must not have been important to the point he wanted to make in this portion of the book.

In verses twenty-three and twenty-four we read, “*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. 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*”. Although David had valued Saul’s life, he did not ask Saul to reciprocate. Instead, he placed in God’s hand whatever worth his life might have. These gracious words from David were accompanied by a brief discourse on the law of spiritual sowing and reaping. These would be the last recorded words spoken by David to his royal father-in-law. The major premise in David’s closing words is that Yahweh rewards a man when he chooses to act in righteousness and faithfulness. David’s words here echoed his confident affirmation before his victory over Goliath (17:37), where David twice used the verb “*deliver*”. This verbal link characterized David as one who trusted in Yahweh’s protective power in contrast to Saul.

In verse twenty-five we read, “*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.*” In Saul’s last recorded words to his son-in-law, he declared David “*blessed*” and confidently predicted a glorious future for David. Having uttered those words, both men parted ways, never to see each other

again in life. The sphere in which Saul was expressing that David would succeed was in his future role as king (reflecting the same idea that was stated the last time Saul had repented of wrongly pursuing David – 24:20).

What we read in the following chapter proves that David's choice not to return with Saul was a wise one. In that chapter we read that Saul gave up his pursuit of David only because David retreated to the territory of the Philistines where Saul could not reach him (27:4).

Conclusion:

For the reader, this account reiterates the important theme that God does indeed vindicate His oppressed people when they turn to Him. Therefore, the application is that when such vindication is delayed, believers must resist the temptation to vindicate ourselves, rather we should see such situations as opportunities to wait on God's time and place for that vindication.