

# 1 SAMUEL—WEEK 19

## DAVID AND SAUL FINALLY PART WAYS



F. Michael Slay

*A DEEP Study*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

*The Cover Picture is David and Goliath by Titian (1487–1576)  
On display in the church of Santa Maria della Salute in Venice, Italy*

David has another encounter with Saul and he again spares Saul's life. This one is even bolder than the one in the cave. Saul is even more repentant and says so, but David doesn't buy it.

So David takes off for Gath, where he lies to Achish about his raids, where he's wiping out whole Philistine cities.

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! Samuel, Week 19 — David and Saul Finally Part Ways

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1 1 Samuel 26:1–12 (ESV)

*Then the Ziphites came to Saul at Gibeah, saying, “Is not David hiding himself on the hill of Hachilah, which is on the east of Jeshimon?” So Saul arose and went down to the wilderness of Ziph with three thousand chosen men of Israel to seek David in the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul encamped on the hill of Hachilah, which is beside the road on the east of Jeshimon. But David remained in the wilderness. When he saw that Saul came after him into the wilderness, David sent out spies and learned that Saul had indeed come. Then 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.*

*Then David said to Ahimelech the Hittite, and to Joab’s brother Abishai the son of Zeruiah, “Who will go down with me into the camp to Saul?” And Abishai said, “I will go down with you.” So David and Abishai went to the army by night. And there lay Saul sleeping within the encampment, with his spear stuck in the ground at his head, and Abner and the army lay around him. 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.” But David said to Abishai, “Do not destroy him, for who can put out his hand against the LORD’s anointed and be guiltless?” And David said, “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. The LORD forbid that I should put out my hand against the LORD’s anointed. But take now the spear that is at his head and the jar of water, and let us go.” So David took the spear and the jar of water from Saul’s head, and they went away. No man saw it or knew it, nor did any awake, for they were all asleep, because a deep sleep from the LORD had fallen upon them.*

While David’s close encounter with Saul in the cave could possibly be attributed to dumb luck, this time it’s obviously supernatural. David just happened to be in the cave when Saul wandered in, but here David does the wandering. This encounter isn’t forced on David. He seems supremely confident in his actions.

That pairs nicely with his decision to, yet again, spare Saul’s life. At that moment, he knows he’s in the middle of a great blessing from the LORD, so he’s not about to abandon his allegiance to the command to not strike the LORD’s anointed. David shows his thinking when he says, “*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.*”

The last sentence of today’s passage confirms that this encounter is being blessed supernaturally. *No man saw it or knew it, nor did any awake, for they were all asleep, because a deep sleep from the LORD had fallen upon them.*

David seems to have a feel for the LORD’s presence.

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Christians should seek this feeling. Practice being “God aware” all the time. This is not just to keep us on our toes and prevent us from sinning; it’s a form of listening. God speaks when we pay attention.

In effect, this means being in constant prayer. Prayer isn’t just about us talking.

2 1 Samuel 26:13–17

*Now David went over to the other side, and stood on the top of a hill afar off, a great distance being between them. 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?”*

*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. 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.”*

*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.”*

Once again, David does the nutzoo thing and reveals himself to his pursuers—this time revealing to all that he has Saul’s spear and water jug.

And, once again, it works. Saul refers to him as “*my son David.*”

David’s faith has grown to the point where he is counting on the LORD’s favor. That can be wrong, even dangerously arrogant, but in this case it isn’t.

The sequence of events has grown David’s faith.

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Have you ever felt encouraged in a desperate prayer? I have. When things felt the bleakest, and prayer was my sole recourse, sometimes it just seemed to click.

*“I have been driven many times upon my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had no where else to go. My own wisdom and that of all about me seemed insufficient for that day.” — Abraham Lincoln*

These occasions have often left me embarrassed for my lack of faith. That is not to say that God’s response always matched my expectations. He has a way of doing things His way, not mine, and also very much in His timing.

But a pattern has emerged over the years that has changed me. I can see what I like to call “the footprints of an unseen hand.” Prayer makes a difference you can see.

But if you’re looking for a God who is your personal go-fer, you won’t see anything. That’s not how it works. God knows what He’s doing and we don’t. His response to prayer is boundlessly creative.

Pray like you’re talking to your Lord, not your servant, and you’ll get eye-opening action.

3 1 Samuel 26:18–25

*And he said, “Why does my lord thus pursue his servant? For what have I done, or what evil is in my hand? 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.’ 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.”*

*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.”*

*And David answered and said, “Here is the king’s spear. Let one of the young men come over and get it. 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.”*

*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.*

David has the upper hand in this conversation in an amusing way. All of Saul’s men are wondering how they failed to detect the intruder. The cave incident didn’t have that element; Saul was alone then.

The cave incident makes sense to them, but this one doesn’t. A military camp doesn’t get penetrated like this. It’s a total failure of discipline, even function. So, they’re all standing there thinking, “What the ...?”

Their failure makes a mockery of the whole mission.

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So Saul repents even more deeply than the last time, saying, “*Indeed I have played the fool and erred exceedingly.*” A king calling himself a fool has to be some kind of record.

There’s a relationship between full-up repentance and seeing oneself as a fool. People who think they just need to try harder don’t get it. True repentance is unbearably painful. It’s no minor “oops.”

You can feel Paul’s full-up repentance in his epistles. But there’s something else; he knows he’s forgiven. This combination gave his preaching amazing power.

Peter had the same unbearable pain, and that prepared him for a totally committed ministry. Saint Patrick and Martin Luther have similar stories. Many great saints do.

If you’re going through a time of intense regret, shame, embarrassment, and/or repentance, take heart. The LORD is up to something. No pain, no gain.

4 1 Samuel 27:1–7

*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.” Then David arose and went over with the six hundred men who were with him to Achish the son of Maach, king of Gath. 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. And it was told Saul that David had fled to Gath; so he sought him no more.*

*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?” So Achish gave him Ziklag that day. Therefore Ziklag has belonged to the kings of Judah to this day. Now the time that David dwelt in the country of the Philistines was one full year and four months.*

If David believed what Saul had just said, all this wouldn’t be necessary. But he doesn’t. Saul’s pronouncements, even his blessings, are worthless.

David knows that Saul won’t last forever, so he decides to wait it out somewhere safe. The text mentions that David and his men have their families with them. That’s to show the things that David had to weigh in his decision to go the safe route. With their families at risk, this decision isn’t cowardly; it’s prudent.

David still has the same courage he had when he charged at Goliath.

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Having just demonstrated his courage for the N’t time to Saul and his men, David isn’t worrying about what other people think of him. There’s an important lesson in that.

In *The Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis depicts human traits from a devil’s point of view. It’s a series of letters from a senior “tempter” (Screwtape) to a junior “tempter” about how to tempt and mislead his “patient.” In letter 12, he mocks how a patient can care too much about what other people think of him.

*“On your own showing you first of all allowed the patient to read a book he really enjoyed, because he enjoyed it and not in order to make clever remarks about it to his new friends. ... Such things, I grant you, have nothing of virtue in them; but there is a sort of innocence and humility and self-forgetfulness about them which I distrust. The man who truly and disinterestedly enjoys any one thing in the world, for its own sake, and without caring twopence what other people say about it, is by that very fact fore-armed against some of our subtlest modes of attack. You should always try to make the patient abandon the people or food or books he really likes in favour of the “best” people, the “right” food, the “important” books. I have known a human defended from strong temptations to social ambition by a still stronger taste for tripe and onions.”*

Screwtape is pointing out that our caring “twopence” about what other people think about us is a point of vulnerability. It’s one thing to seek the advice of others. It’s quite another to crave their approval.

5 1 Samuel 27:8–12

*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. 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. 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.” 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. So Achish believed David, saying, “He has made his people Israel utterly abhor him; therefore he will be my servant forever.”*

David’s deception works. *Achish believed David.* But is such deception okay?

This passage doesn’t weigh in on that; it simply reports what happened accurately. Since this is about war and about people that Saul was commanded by God to destroy, one can make arguments in favor of what David is doing here.

However, there are plenty of places where God condemns lying—e.g., the Ten Commandments—and David will eventually become totally repentant about this nasty habit of his.

*Remove from me the way of lying  
And grant me Your law graciously.* — Psalm 119:29

But for now, he gets away with it and is even blessed in the process.

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This sounds ridiculous until we remember Romans 5:6–8.

*For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

The gospel hinges on the concept of rewarding people who don’t deserve it. That’s what grace is all about. Yes, David is lying and lying is wrong. This could be an example of extenuating circumstances, but that’s not certain.

And that’s not necessary. God blessing David in this situation is appropriate as part of a larger plan to get him to the throne and to get him to write Psalm 119.

People often commit terrible wrongs in the course of coming to salvation and service to the Lord. Nothing tops Peter’s triple denial of Christ—which comes perilously close to blasphemy.

Yet, not only did the Lord forgive Peter, his sin was a big part of the plan.

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. How often do you sense the LORD's presence?
2. Do some prayers annoy you?
3. Have you ever experienced painful repentance?
4. When should we care about what others think about us?
5. When has God blessed you undeservedly?

*Items for prayer:*