

## Week 12: *The Contrast Continues: David Spares Saul Again*

### Hook



**Main Point: A godly person continues to persevere in trial and temptation.**

Rome is famous for its ruins, architectural marvels from the ancient world. From the Colosseum to the aqueducts, there are many incredible constructions from the Roman Empire. However, not everything built in Rome was made to last. One cautionary tale is that of Atilius and his amphitheater in Fidenae. In AD 27, he commissioned a new stadium to be built, but despite his wealth, he aimed for a quick construction over a sturdy one. Atilius urged the builders to use cheap materials (mainly wood) to build the stadium, and it was erected on unstable foundations. Most of the information about the disaster tells a singular story: When 50,000 people flocked to Atilius's stadium to watch a gladiator fight, 20,000 audience members fell to their death as the seating collapsed. Many of the remaining patrons were severely injured. Following the incident, the senate banned anyone from building a stadium unless their wealth exceeded 400,000 sesterces, and the stadium had to pass a safety inspection. This is considered one of the greatest tragedies in sports history.<sup>1</sup>

**Q: In what ways does taking shortcuts in production often effect the final product?**

**Q: How are we tempted to take shortcuts in our walk with Christ?**

**Transition:** A godly character is formed through a consistent walk with Christ and through perseverance in trial (James 1:2–4). Let's look at how David, in the face of temptation and trial, refused to take a shortcut.

**RECAP:** In this section of our study (weeks 8–17), David was on the run from Saul. It's a long period in our study and in the text because it was a long period in David's life – eight years. The text will continue to contrast Saul and David, showing David's integrity and trust in the Lord. Last week, David started to avenge his honor with Nabal, but the Lord used Abigail to stop him. This week, we'll see David being given the opportunity to kill Saul again, and again choosing not to do it.

It is during this time that David wrote most of the psalms that are labeled in relation to events in his life (Psalms 56, 34, 57, 142, 52, 63, 54). Other psalms may have been written during this time as well, but they are not specifically labeled as such. This season of David's life, particularly, taught him to lean on God as his refuge and fortress.

## **Week 12: David: The Contrast Continues: David Spares Saul Again**

### **Book**

**Main Point: A godly person continues to persevere in trial and temptation.**

#### **1 Samuel 26:1–12 [Read]**

**Talking Point 1:** Godly people continue to do what is right even when it's hard.

**Q: Why was Saul vulnerable to an attack from David?**

**Q: Why didn't David believe God had given him this opportunity to kill Saul?**

The Ziphites again told Saul where David was hiding, because he was in their territory again, on the same hill, Hachilah (26:1; 23:19). Again, David had a chance to kill Saul. Again, one of his advisors told him it must be that the Lord had delivered his enemy into his hand. And again, David refused to lay a hand on him because he was the Lord's anointed. We know this is not a repeat of the same story because the scenario is different. Instead of relieving himself in a cave, Saul was sleeping in his camp.<sup>2</sup>

For a king to be in such a vulnerable position in his own camp would be extremely unusual. Normally, a night watchman would have been awake to protect those who were sleeping.<sup>3</sup> But the Lord had put all of Saul's army into a deep sleep (26:12). It makes sense for Abishai to deduce that God had done this so David could kill Saul and take over the throne. It was a logical deduction. Why else would God put Saul and his army into this supernaturally deep sleep?

But David disagreed. He held firm to what he had said the last time. Saul would not die by his hand. God might strike Saul as he had struck Nabal, or he might die in battle, but David would not be the one to kill him, nor would he let any of his men do it for him (26:9). Abishai and his brother, Joab, were David's nephews. Joab became David's general (1 Chronicles 11:6).<sup>4</sup> Abishai was a skilled warrior (1 Chronicles 18:12); he claimed he wouldn't have to strike Saul twice (26:8). This line is significant because Saul had hurled that same spear at David twice and missed (18:11; 19:10).

David's encounter with Nabal had only strengthened his resolve that the Lord would avenge his honor; he didn't need to take matters into his own hands. God had struck Nabal; if He wanted Saul to die, He would strike him, too. Until then, David would continue to trust the Lord, follow His leading, and wait for His timing.

This is the third story in a row in which David faced the temptation to avenge himself. The first time, he was convicted in his inner person (24:6). The second time, the Lord convicted him through Abigail (25:26). This time, he said no right away. But that doesn't mean he had "conquered" this temptation. We must be careful not to think we've

gotten past a certain sin. If we think it's no longer a temptation for us, we can let our guard down. That's when sin creeps up on us without our even realizing it (1 Peter 5:8).

David didn't know how many times he would face this same temptation. Saul had twice promised he wouldn't chase David anymore, yet he had gone back on that promise and continued to pursue him. This could continue for the rest of his life. It would be easy to lose patience and give in just to end it. But a godly person will continue to be the bigger person and continue to do the right thing regardless of how many times he or she is faced with the same situation. God uses these times to grow perseverance in us (Romans 5:3–5; James 1:3). And to those who persevere, He will give the crown of life (Philippians 3:12–14; Hebrews 10:36; James 1:12).

**Q: What temptations do you find yourself repeatedly faced with even though it feels as though you've already learned that lesson? What is God teaching you through it?**

**Q: Describe a situation in which you had to be the bigger person. Why was it hard to do so? What did you learn through it?**

### **1 Samuel 26:13–20 and Psalm 139:7–12 [Read]**

**Talking Point 2:** Godly people are concerned about God's judgment of them, not man's.

**Q: What does it say about David that he continued to try to reason with Saul?**

**Q: How did David focus on the Lord and his relationship with Him?**

In the same way David kept the piece of Saul's robe to prove he could have killed Saul but didn't, this time David took Saul's spear and water jar. Then he went far off from Saul's army, standing on the top of a hill to call out to Saul's army commander, Abner. This was a typical way for armies to challenge one another, each on opposite hills. It is also reminiscent of when Goliath stood on a hill and shouted out to the army of Israel (17:3, 8).<sup>5</sup> Except David was not challenging the army of Israel to battle; he was accusing Abner of not keeping watch over his king.

Whether Abner himself would have been the one to keep watch or not, as commander of the army, he was ultimately responsible for making sure Saul was protected. Had Saul been killed, Abner and whoever was supposed to be on watch that night would have received the death penalty for not protecting him (26:16). The Hebrew word translated "you" here is plural. David was saying the whole army deserved death for not protecting Saul from harm.<sup>6</sup> He was calling attention to the fact that he could have killed Saul but didn't, this time in the most public way possible. The first time, he confronted Saul one on one (24:8). This time, he spoke in front of the whole army and contrasted his own actions with the actions of Abner, who was supposed to be Saul's right-hand man, a position that David himself had previously held (26:15).

Saul recognized David's voice and responded, shifting the story's focus from Abner. He said exactly the same thing he had said the first time – "Is this your voice, my son David?" (24:16; 26:17), again using intimate familial language even though he was pursuing David to kill him. Again, David pleaded his innocence, trying to reason with Saul even though Saul had proven himself to be unreasonable. "What evil is on my hands" has a dual meaning. It means in a general way to say that David had done nothing wrong against Saul this whole time. But it also carries the literal meaning because David was holding Saul's spear in his hands at that moment. He did not kill Saul when he had the chance that very night.<sup>7</sup> Again he argued that it was silly for the king of Israel to use all these resources to pursue him like a "single flea" (26:20). Again, he pleaded to the judgment of the Lord. If it was God who "stirred you up against me," then David would willingly become an offering to the Lord. But if it was man, may they be cursed. David did not accuse Saul of treachery directly, saying he was either incited by God or by people. Again, David showed Saul more grace than he deserved, and he pointed to the Lord to be the judge of Saul's guilt or innocence.

This second time, David added another layer to his speech, pleading with Saul not to let him die away from the presence of the Lord. He accused Saul's supporters of pushing him out of his inheritance, his part of the promised land. Up to this point, David had been fleeing from Saul all around the wilderness of the Holy Land, but if it kept up, he would eventually have to flee to enemy territory, which he did in the very next chapter (27:1). But David didn't focus on the danger of its being enemy territory; he emphasized that it would be out of the presence of the Lord. This is the heart of a man who loved the Lord and delighted in His presence, the heart of a worshipper. This theme runs throughout the Psalms. When David sinned and repented, he begged God not to cast him away from His presence (Psalm 51:11). He wrote that those who walk in the light of God's presence are blessed (Psalm 89:15). Those who live in His presence experience joy and blessing (Psalm 21:6). For "in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11).

It's not that David really thought he could ever be out of God's presence, because he also wrote, "Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to the heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me" (Psalm 139:7–10). In fact, David had experienced God as his refuge as he fled from Saul. He may have felt closer to God when he was on the run than at any other time in his life. But Saul was pushing him out of Israel, out of the physical kingdom of God. David's comment that they were pushing him out of Israel and saying, "Go serve other gods" doesn't mean David would serve other gods if he left Israel. It's a reference to being pushed away from God's presence, which dwelled in the tabernacle among His people, Israel. God is everywhere by nature, but He chose to dwell with His people in Israel in a special way in the Holy of Holies, to walk among them and be their God (Leviticus 26:12). David's biggest concern

wasn't his reputation, his kingship, his power or even his life. His biggest concern was being in the presence of God and fulfilling his role in God's kingdom.

**Q: Why is it hard to let go of what other people think about you and only worry about whether God is pleased with you?**

**Q: In what ways have you experienced the joy of God's presence? How can you pursue being in God's presence?**

### **1 Samuel 26:21–25 and Psalm 1 [Read]**

**Talking Point 3:** Godly people trust in the Lord.

**Q: How did David glorify God in this story? How did he show trust in God?**

**Q: Why do you think Saul continued to call David his son? What does this tell us?**

The last time Saul repented, he and David had an intimate moment when Saul repented with weeping and David promised not to cut off Saul's family when he became king (24:16–22). But here, there was no weeping, no covenant promise, no intimacy. Saul and David didn't even come near each other. David was still standing on a hill opposite Saul's army. Even when he offered Saul's spear back, he didn't make a move toward Saul. He said to send a young warrior over to get it (26:22).

Saul continued to call David "my son," and he even asked David to "return." He was asking David to return to the palace, rejoin Saul's army, even rejoin his family. But David didn't leave that hill. He didn't make one step toward Saul, either physically or with his words. All of David's words in this passage are about God, how God had rewarded him for his righteousness and would protect and deliver him. Not a word about Saul at all. In their last encounter, David had reconciled with Saul but had not returned to his palace or their former relationship. He forgave Saul but didn't trust him. This time, David didn't make even the slightest move toward reconciliation with Saul.

David didn't trust Saul one bit, but he put his trust in the Lord. When Saul said he would no longer do any harm to David if he returned, he used the phrase "because my life was precious in your eyes this day." David responded, using the same phrases, saying, "As your life 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" (26:24). David wasn't counting on Saul to return his kindness and grace. He was turning to the Lord and putting his trust in Him.

Psalm 1 introduces the entire book of Psalms with the imagery of the man who walks in the way of God's law, not the way of the wicked. It's a passage parallel in imagery to a passage in Jeremiah – "He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither" (Psalm 1:3; Jeremiah 17:8). The Jeremiah passage (beginning in v. 5) contrasts "the man who trusts in man" and "the man who

trusts in the Lord.” David had trusted in the Lord this whole time, but at this moment especially, he chose to trust in the Lord over man. He could have returned to the palace and his position of power, but he knew it wouldn’t work out well. Instead, he chose to follow the Lord into the wilderness where he didn’t know what would happen or even where his next meal would come from. But he trusted that the Lord would take care of it. The book of Psalms opens with a description of the one who delights in the law of the Lord, who trusts in Him. This is the heart of the worshipper.

**Q: Describe times when you’ve had to step out in trust of God over man. How did those situations turn out? What did God teach you in them?**

**Q: In what ways does God call you to trust Him in your day-to-day walk with Him?**

**Q: In what areas of your life is the Lord leading you to step out in faith right now?**

## **Week 12: *The Contrast Continues: David Spares Saul Again***

### **Took**

**Main Point: A godly person continues to persevere in trial and temptation.**

David was tempted to take a situation into his own hands and not trust God with it. We Christians face this same struggle, to seek immediate relief from our suffering rather than looking for God's purpose. Rushing construction leads to a weak building, rushing through trials leads to a weak character (Romans 5:3–5). As in the Parable of the Sower, you need deep roots to bear fruit (Matthew 13:5–6). Take time today to acknowledge your trial and look for God's purpose in it.

### **CHALLENGES**

**THINK:** What temptations repeatedly occur in your life? What is God trying to teach you through them? What tools can you use to build perseverance? How can you remember to keep alert and not let your guard down?

**PRAY** for God to grow perseverance in you. Ask Him to keep you alert, awake and sober minded so you will be ready for the attacks from the Evil One. Pray for God's wisdom to know how to prepare yourself for times of temptation.

**ACT:** Turn to God. Think about a difficult situation in your life right now. How can you choose to turn to God in that situation rather than trusting in man or in the things of this world to help you through it? Pray about how God is leading you to act in that situation and then take action that shows your trust in God.

**NEXT TIME in *The Life of David*:** Next week, we'll see David flee to live among the Philistines. Because he no longer hopes that Saul will ever stop chasing him, he chooses to leave the land of Israel to escape. As David is successful among the Philistines, Saul sinks to his deepest sin yet – seeking the help of a medium rather than trusting in the Lord.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://thehistorianshut.com/2018/02/18/the-ominously-smashing-amphitheatre-of-atilius-in-fidenae/>

<sup>2</sup> *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1999).

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