

• Leaders need to develop a gracious and un-vindictive spirit

Leaders are inclined to be aggressive, pushy people. They would not be leaders if they were not made that way. James and John were ambitious by nature. Paul had burning natural zeal long before he came to salvation. Elijah was ambitious by nature and grieved when he was 'no better than his fathers.' For all of such people, there is need to develop a more gracious and un-vindictive spirit. It was precisely this lesson that David had to learn.

1. Something happens when David is apparently at the mercy of Saul

• A narrow escape – evidence of God's faithful protection from the hand of Saul

First **something happens when David is apparently at the mercy of Saul**. Jonathan had assured David that he would never perish at Saul's hand¹. Soon his assurance was dramatically tested. After the ingratitude of the people of Keilah came betrayal by the people of Ziph. Without provocation on David's part they offered to hand him over to the Saul². Saul is still deceiving himself with regard to God's approval and gives a religious-sounding comment, 'may you be blessed by the LORD...' ³. He gives them further instructions⁴ and promises that when the trap is thoroughly set he will return⁵. The Ziphites go off to carry out his wishes⁶ and in due course Saul and his men come after David⁷. It seems that Jonathan's assurance is misplaced. At one point Saul and David are going round the same mountain⁸, with Saul and his men only a short distance behind David. Suddenly Saul receives a message which demands his attention elsewhere⁹. He has to leave¹⁰ and David escapes and goes elsewhere¹¹. The story of David's narrow escape was so notable, the mountain was renamed after the incident. It was striking proof that Jonathan's promise will prove true. God will never forsake David. He will be protected from the hand of Saul every time.

- 1 23:17
- 2 23:19-20
- 3 23:21
- 4 23:22-23a
- 5 23:23b
- 6 23:24a
- 7 23:24b-25
- 8 23:26
- 9 23:27
- 10 23:28
- 11 23:29

2. Then something happens when Saul is at the mercy of David

• The reverse situation

Then something happens when Saul is at the mercy of David. The previous events had left some questions open. We know what Saul would have done if he had caught up with David. But the question is: what would David be like if the situation were reversed and he had Saul in his hands and was able to do what he liked with Saul? And how did he feel about the people of Ziph who, without any provocation on David's part had done their best to deliver him over to the cruelties of Saul?

We shall soon get the answer to our questions, because as the story of David moves forward we find the initiative actually moving away from Saul and into the hands of David. Gradually it is not David who is at the mercy of Saul¹ but Saul who is at the mercy of David.

• David's men are urging him to get rid of his enemy once and for ever

Saul heard that David was at En Gedi¹ and went in pursuit². He chooses to enter the very cave where David and his men are hiding³. David's men think the opportunity for Saul to be killed has at last come⁴. Now the situation is entirely reversed. David can do whatever he wishes with Saul, and his men are urging him to get rid of his enemy once and for ever.

- 1 as in 23:19-28
- 2 24:1
- 3 24:2
- 4 24:3
- 24:4a

• *David resists the temptation to take revenge- but demonstrates what he could have done*

David is tempted by his men to get his revenge on Saul, but he is restrained by the thought that it was God who put Saul on the throne. Saul is 'the Lord's anointed.' If God put Saul on the throne, it must be God who puts him off the throne. David will not remove his adversary. He will do no more than cut off the corner of Saul's robe^{□1} and so demonstrate what he could have done. But even this, as he thinks about it further, he comes to regret. Even cutting Saul's robe was more than he should have done^{□2}. He immediately repents and takes the opportunity to explain what he had learned^{□3} and to rebuke his men for the way they felt^{□4}.

□1 24:4b

□2 24:5

□3 24:6

□4 24:7a

• *What has happened has led David into learning strong and clear lessons about forgiveness, non-vindictiveness and leaving judgement to God*

After Saul had left^{□1}, David calls out to Saul, treats him with respect^{□2}, and reveals to him what has happened^{□3}. He appeals to the LORD to judge his cause^{□4}. This is the point. What has happened has led David into learning strong and clear lessons about forgiveness, non-vindictiveness and leaving judgement to God. He is learning to do nothing at all about his enemies in any personal way. When later in David's life, after he has become king and we find David being extraordinarily forgiving, we shall know when and where he learned these lessons. (When he was unforgiving - 1 Kings 2 - it was at a time when he was just about to die and his personal feelings were not involved, but it was important to advise his son to uphold the security of the kingdom.)

□1 24:7b

□2 24:8

□3 24:9-11

□4 24:12-15

3. This incident reveals the power of mercy

• *Saul is deeply moved but this did not last for long*

This incident reveals the power of mercy. For David's restraint has an effect on Saul. He is deeply moved^{□1} and momentarily brought to acknowledge the rightness of David's words^{□2}. He feels that David's outlook is remarkable. 'Who has ever found an enemy and sent the enemy safely away?'^{□3}. Certainly not Saul! For a short time it convinced him that David's genuineness is worthy of reward^{□4} and that he will indeed be the next king^{□5}. Saul actually asks mercy for his own descendants^{□6} and receives a promise to that effect from David^{□7}. For a while it brings to an end Saul's pursuit of David^{□8} - but Saul's spiritual convictions do not last long.

□1 24:16

□2 24:17-18

□3 24:19a

□4 24:19b

□5 24:20

□6 24:21

□7 24:22a

□8 24:22b

• *Learning not to be vindictive is a lesson all Christians have to learn but especially those with the kind of drive that makes them hopeful for leadership in God's kingdom. David is called to be king and is hoping that his kingship will come to him. But 'Mercy, kindness, love ... preserves the king... his throne is upheld by it'□1. He has to learn to show mercy. It will be something vitally needed throughout his kingship. God has shown much mercy to him. He must live by that same mercy in his relationship even to someone like Saul.*

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□1 Proverbs 20:28



Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His *Preaching Through The Bible* (PTTB) books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.



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