

Exegetical Notes – 1 Samuel 24:1-22

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1 Samuel 24:1-22

Verses 1-2

¹After Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, “David is in the Desert of En Gedi.” ²So Saul took three thousand able young men from all Israel and set out to look for David and his men near the Crag of the Wild Goats.

- Saul’s pursuit of David was interrupted by a Philistine invasion of Israel (see 23:26-29). But after the Philistines had been put down, Saul returned to hunting David. He was told that David was in the desert of En Gedi. He took 3,000 of his best men and set out to find David.

Verses 3-4

³He came to the sheep pens along the way; a cave was there, and Saul went in to relieve himself. David and his men were far back in the cave. ⁴The men said, “This is the day the LORD spoke of when he said to you, ‘I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish.’” Then David crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul’s robe.

- Along the way, Saul went into a cave to relieve himself. David and his men were hiding deeper in the cave. David’s men thought that this was God’s way of giving David victory over Saul. David crept up to the place where Saul was. Saul had apparently tossed his outer robe to the side. David cut off the corner of the king’s robe unnoticed by Saul.

Verses 5-7

⁵Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe. ⁶He said to his men, “The LORD forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the LORD’s anointed, or lay my hand on him; for he is the anointed of the LORD.” ⁷With these words David sharply rebuked his men and did not allow them to attack Saul. And Saul left the cave and went his way.

- David was overcome by remorse because he had cut off the corner of the King's robe and, in so doing, he had embarrassed the King and treated "the Lord's anointed," his "master," shamefully. David believed that he had acted in a shameful way towards Saul and so would not allow his men to take advantage of the situation and kill the king. He allowed Saul to leave the cave.

Verses 8-15

⁸ Then David went out of the cave and called out to Saul, "My lord the king!" When Saul looked behind him, David bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. ⁹ He said to Saul, "Why do you listen when men say, 'David is bent on harming you'? ¹⁰ This day you have seen with your own eyes how the LORD delivered you into my hands in the cave. Some urged me to kill you, but I spared you; I said, 'I will not lay my hand on my lord, because he is the LORD's anointed.' ¹¹ See, my father, look at this piece of your robe in my hand! I cut off the corner of your robe but did not kill you. See that there is nothing in my hand to indicate that I am guilty of wrongdoing or rebellion. I have not wronged you, but you are hunting me down to take my life. ¹² May the LORD judge between you and me. And may the LORD avenge the wrongs you have done to me, but my hand will not touch you. ¹³ As the old saying goes, 'From evildoers come evil deeds,' so my hand will not touch you. ¹⁴ "Against whom has the king of Israel come out? Who are you pursuing? A dead dog? A flea? ¹⁵ May the LORD be our judge and decide between us. May he consider my cause and uphold it; may he vindicate me by delivering me from your hand.

- David came out of the cave after Saul had left it. He called out to the king and prostrated himself before Saul. He asked Saul not to listen to false reports about him wanting to harm the king. He then held up the piece of the king's robe he had taken inside the cave and explained that if his intention was to harm the king, he could have killed him that very day. He pointed out that he had spared Saul's life that very day. David told Saul that if he had wronged Saul in anyway, he should be killed, but that he had not done any harm to the king. He asked that his case be submitted to God as his judge. And he pledged that he would never lift his hand against the king for the king was God's anointed one.

Verses 16-21

¹⁶ When David finished saying this, Saul asked, “Is that your voice, David my son?” And he wept aloud. ¹⁷ “You are more righteous than I,” he said. “You have treated me well, but I have treated you badly. ¹⁸ You have just now told me about the good you did to me; the LORD delivered me into your hands, but you did not kill me. ¹⁹ When a man finds his enemy, does he let him get away unharmed? May the LORD reward you well for the way you treated me today. ²⁰ I know that you will surely be king and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hands. ²¹ Now swear to me by the LORD that you will not kill off my descendants or wipe out my name from my father’s family.”

- When Saul realized that David had spared his life, he was overwhelmed. He confessed that David was more righteous than he and that David had treated him honorably. Saul acknowledged that David would be king after him and asked that he not “kill off” his descendants when David became king. (It was the common practice to kill off all the descendants of the old king when a new dynasty was established.)

Verse 22

²² So David gave his oath to Saul. Then Saul returned home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.

- David gave Saul his promise that he would spare Saul’s family when he became king. And Saul broke off his pursuit of David for the moment.
- David did not return to the King’s service, however. He returned to his stronghold.

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