

## **A Flea that Refuses to Bite**

**1 Samuel 26**

**By Dr. Derek Thomas**

Now turn with me once again to 1 Samuel. We find ourselves this evening in chapter 26. In chapter 25 you remember Nabal, whose behavior with David had been quieted by the intervention of a wiser wife, Abigail, by the end of the chapter Nabal is dead and David has married Abigail. And now we turn to chapter 26. Before we read the passage let's look to God in prayer.

*Our Father, we thank You again for the Scriptures. Thank You that You have caused this book to be written for our instruction and edification that we may know the way of salvation. We pray now Lord that as we read it for the blessing of the Spirit that we might read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest and all for Jesus' sake. Amen.*

This God's holy, inerrant Word:

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 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 said Abishai 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.

Then David went over the other side and stood far off on the top of the hill, with a great space between them. And David called to the army, and to Abner the son of Ner, saying, "Will you not answer, Abner?" Then Abner answered, "Who are you who calls to the king?" And David said to Abner, "Are you not a man? Who is like you in Israel? Why then have you not kept watch over your lord the king? For one of the people came in to destroy the king your lord. This thing that you have done is not good. As the Lord lives, you deserve to die, because you have not kept watch over your lord, the Lord's anointed. And now see where the king's spear is and the jar of water that was at his head."

Saul recognized David's voice and said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" And David said, "It is my voice, my lord, O king." And he said, "Why does my lord pursue after his servant? For what have I done? What evil is on my hands? Now therefore let my lord the king hear the words of his servant. If it is the Lord who has stirred you up against me, may He accept an offering, but if it is men, may they be cursed before the Lord, for they have driven me out this day that I should have no share in the heritage of the Lord, saying, 'Go, and serve other gods.' Now therefore, let not my blood fall to the earth away from the presence of the Lord, for the king of Israel has come out to seek a single flea like one who hunts a partridge in the mountains."

Then Saul said, "I have sinned. Return, my son David, for I will no more do you harm, because my life was precious in your eyes this day. Behold, I have acted foolishly, and have made a great mistake." And David answered and said, "Here is the spear, O king! Let one of the young men come over and take it. The Lord rewards every man for his righteousness and his faithfulness, for the Lord gave you into my hand today, and I would not put out my hand against the Lord's anointed. Behold, 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." Then Saul said to David, "Blessed be you, my son David! You will do many things and will succeed in them." So David went his way, and Saul returned to his place.

So far God's holy, inerrant Word.

Well, it's more of the same. For the past ten or so chapters David has been a fugitive on the run, a fugitive from King Saul, his father-in-law. And as we saw in chapter 23 the Ziphites, like leopards that can't change their spots, are doing the same thing again and they're informing King Saul as to David's whereabouts. Saul brings three thousand of his men to this location called the wilderness of Ziph. David is on a hill, the hill of Hachilah, and Saul and his army are encamped some distance away and evidently David is at a place, a vantage point, where he can see the Saul camp and see that Saul himself is right at the center of the camp sleeping and all the men are around him.

Now there are three things I want us to learn from this passage.

### **I. The providence of God.**

The first concerns the providence of God and how David seems to have grown in his understanding and appreciation of the providence of God. In verse 9, Abishai — now Abishai is Joab's brother and both Abishai and Joab are the sons of David's sister. In other words, Abishai is to David, Uncle David. You understand then why David is keen to put the spear in Saul in one move and not two to impress Uncle David. Now David responds. Abishai and David have gone into the camp, everyone is asleep, they're at the body of Saul that is curled up and sleeping and at his head is his spear and there's a water jar. Presumably a special water jar for the king. Somebody no doubt would be tasting the water to make sure that the water wasn't poisoned in any way so it was a specially marked water jar at the head of king Saul. And Abishai, nephew to David, wants to kill Saul. This is an opportunity, this is God's providence just like Saul in the cave in the previous chapter, a couple of chapters before, this is an opportunity. This is God ordering providence, providing an opportunity now to have king Saul destroyed.

And the lesson that David seems to have learned is this: that opportunity does not mean permission. Opportunity doesn't imply permission. Just because God has opened up the possibility of a certain course of action does not make that action right. David and Abishai still need to be governed by moral principles that God has laid down in His Word. And David, just like in the cave at Engedi, so now here again he will not touch the Lord's anointed. David seems to have grown in his appreciation of providence and what it means in seeking guidance, in knowing what it is that God would have us do.

Oswald Chambers made that famous and often cited quotation that “the mark of our spiritual progress is not our ecstasies but our obedience. The mark of spiritual progress is not our ecstasies but our obedience.” And David is teaching his nephew here that just because God has opened up a possibility doesn't make that action right. You remember in the story of Jonah, Jonah is being called by God to minister to the Ninevites. He goes to a boat and the boat is heading in the

exact opposite direction. He sees that as God's providence. God has provided for him a way to do what his heart desires, but it was wrong. It was wrong - a lesson in providence that opportunity does not imply permission.

Now the second thing that David has learned about providence is this: that some things are best left to the sovereignty of God. I imagine, especially here in Jackson, Mississippi that if we didn't know our Bibles and we were reading these stories for the first time and all of a sudden you read in the text that Abishai, nephew Abishai, or David himself sticks that spear in king Saul would any of us shed a tear? I mean be honest. Would any of us shed a tear for king Saul? We would justify it. We would be looking at the Bible for justification. This was an act of war. This was an act of self-defense. We would find some means to justify it.

But do you notice what David says in verse 10 to his nephew? David is going to die. He may die in battle, God may strike him down, he may die of old age, but one way or another he is going to die. I think David has grown in his understanding of the ways of God. He learned that from Nabal, this fool of a man who had behaved so despicably towards David. God struck him down. Within ten days he was dead. It's actually the same word that the author uses here in verse 10 as is used of the death of Nabal. David is growing in his appreciation of the overruling sovereignty of God. Trust in the Lord's sovereignty. In dire circumstances David is learning to trust in the sovereignty of God.

Now there's a third thing that he learned about God's providence and it was this: never underestimate, never underestimate the power of God, the power of God. How is David and his nephew Abishai able to walk into an enemy camp of three thousand men and not one of them heard a thing? Now if we're to believe the text and we've got to believe the text because it's the Bible, David has a long conversation with Abishai. You want to say, "David, can't you wait until you're out of the camp before you have this lesson in God's providence to your nephew right in the middle of the camp? Somebody's going to wake up and hear you." But God, the text specifically tells us at the end of verse 12, "a deep sleep from the Lord had befallen them." The reason why no one woke up, the reason why Abner — and you've got to smile as David taunts the chief of Saul's army, the commander in chief, the one whose sole responsibility it is to look after Saul — and David is taunting him. Don't you think he enjoyed that just a little bit? And Abner, as he wakes him up, Abner is trying to wake up and wondering whose voice is this. God has done something extraordinary.

Now my friends, you either believe that or you don't. There's no middle ground here. You either believe that or you don't. You either believe that science says this cannot happen. You either believe that or you don't. You either believe that God is a supernatural God, that God can do extraordinary powerful things or you don't.

John Flavel, a Puritan, wrote an extraordinarily helpful book on providence. We

still use it today. It was written three hundred and fifty years ago. And in that book he tells a story of a woman he was counseling. She had lost all her assurance. John Flavel was convinced she truly was a believer but she had lost assurance and she took up a glass, a very fine goblet, and she said to John Flavel, "As sure as this glass breaks when I throw it to the ground I will be cast into hell!" And she threw the glass on the floor but it didn't break. You can just imagine how John Flavel made much of that and tried to minister to her soul. God is sovereign. Never underestimate what God can do.

Is that your problem tonight? Some of you have got unimaginable difficulties that you're facing. If we were to make a record of all of the problems and difficulties and trials and sorrows and circumstances in this room alone — are you reckoning my friends on the sovereignty of God, on the power of God? Because when you put that into the equation, everything changes. Everything changes. You put your problem, you put your trial up against the sovereignty of God — everything changes. Don't you get the impression as you read this chapter that David is growing? David is growing in his assessment of who God is and what God can do and that all of our life in all of its totality is surrounded and upheld by this sovereign God.

## **II. The worship of God.**

Now the second thing we learn from this chapter has to do with worship. Not the providence of God but the worship of God. David says, and we drop down now to the conversation that he has with Saul in verses — it begins in verse 17, 18, and 19. And he's talking. He's taunted Abner and now he's talking directly to Saul and he says in verses 18 through 21, he says in verse 18, "Why does my lord pursue after his servant?" Then in verse 19, "Now therefore let my lord the king hear the words of his servant. If it is the Lord who has stirred you up against me." Now, what is David saying? He's saying to Saul — and it's extraordinary. He has been hounded, hither and yon for the last ten chapters by Saul. There've been at least a dozen instances where Saul has deliberately tried to kill him and David is saying — and this is the last conversation that David and Saul will have together. The next thing we read of Saul is he's dead. He says to Saul, "Maybe it's my fault." Look at the text, 19 — "If it is the Lord who has stirred you up against me may He accept an offering."

What's he saying? That there's a remote possibility here in David's assessment of why it is he's passing through this trial that God is trying to teach him something. This may not be a Job situation. He's not saying as Job so often does, "I'm innocent here. I'm the innocent one here. Why is this happening to me because I'm innocent?" No, he's not saying that. He's saying, "It just may be, it just may be that God is doing this to me. God has stirred you up because He's chastising me and I need to make an offering. I need to make a sacrifice. I need to go and offer a bull or a heifer or a goat on behalf of my sin." That's what David

is saying.

I have to be very careful now because some of you have such tender consciences and some of you are on the other side of the scale and need to hear what David is saying. So let me just speak to those of you who need to hear this that perhaps, perhaps what you need to ask yourself is — Is there something in my life that needs to change? I think that in every trial we should at least ask that question. Is this Hebrews 12? “Whom the Lord loves, He chastens.” Perhaps we think that God is so loving and so gracious and so tender and so kind that He doesn't do that sort of thing but my friends you haven't reckoned on how much God loves you because God loves you so much that He will chastise you. That's how much He loves you. He doesn't want you to get away with this because it's a pathway that's leading to destruction and perhaps, perhaps, perhaps we need to ask ourselves — Is there something that I need to do here?

Is God, through this providence, speaking to an area of my life that needs to change? “Maybe,” David is saying, “maybe I need to repent. And if so, I need to offer a sacrifice.” I find that quite remarkable. I know he goes on to suggest, “But if it is men may they be cursed before the Lord for they have driven me out,” but he does at least ask that question. Maybe tonight, maybe, that's the question we need to ask ourselves.

Do you know what it is he goes on to say? He's been driven out. He's been driven to pagan land that's what he's saying. This is Old Testament of course. Where could the presence of God be found in the Old Testament? Well, in the sanctuary and David can't go to the sanctuary. He can't go to the worship services of the Old Testament because he's a fugitive. He's on the run. Now, the point I want to get across to you is this: David is cut up about that. David is, as you would say today, he's bent out of shape because of that because he can't get to the worship house because he can't worship God and come into His presence.

Now, we're on the other side. We're in the New Testament. We're in a place where two or three are gathered together God is there. God is everywhere. But you see, I wonder when you're providentially hindered — you know, if there was super arrogation for Protestants it would be tonight. I mean, the points that you have earned for coming out to evening worship in a storm. Imagine that! Of course there's no such thing, but imagine if you hadn't been able to come. I wonder, I just wonder how much would it bother you. I think we should be bothered when we can't get to worship God with His people. And that's what David is so sore about. He's been driven by these circumstances into pagan land and his heart wants to be, “as the heart longs after water brook so longs my heart after Thee, O Lord.”

### **III. The deliverance of God.**

Well, that's a lesson about worship. There's a lesson about providence, there's a lesson about worship, and then there's a lesson about deliverance. The deliverance of God. And you see it in the very last thing that David and Saul say to each other in verse 24 — “May He deliver me out of all tribulation. May my life be precious in the sight of the Lord and may He deliver me out of my tribulation.” That's a prayer. Oh my goodness that's a prayer that any Christian can pray. You can lift that right out of the Old Testament and plop it down in 2010. Every single one of us can pray that prayer because it's in the Lord's Prayer. Deliver me. Deliver me from tribulation. Deliver me through my tribulation.

Now, what's going on here, really? I mean what's really going on here. What's this story really about? We haven't done this in every sermon, but let's stand back from this chapter just for a moment. Let's ascend. Let's look at this chapter in relationship to the whole book of 1 Samuel. What's it saying? It's a story about an anointed king going into an enemy camp and robbing the strong man of that camp of his spoils and his spear, disarming him effectively. Did that not ring a bell somewhere?

You know, every now and then when you read the Old Testament it's as though the Holy Spirit is saying, you know years from now, years from now Christians will gather together and they'll read this story and they'll say, “Boy, that sounds an awful lot like what Jesus does. It sounds like what Jesus does. Here is an anointed king and he's going into an enemy camp and he's pilfering, he's disarming that enemy.”

Because this is just one of hundreds of stories in the Old Testament and all of them have this common theme — it's forces of darkness, and there are real forces of darkness in Saul. There's more to Saul than just someone for him to see on a Monday morning. I mean there's more than just a few screws loose in Saul's brain here. There's something evil about him. There's something malevolent here. There's real satanic opposition here to David and this is just one of hundreds of stories. What's going on?

Well, what God had said in Genesis 3:15 that there's a principle of opposition, that the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent — there's Abel and there's Cain, there are the Egyptians and there are the Israelites, and so on right through the Old Testament. This is part of God's story, how God is going to bring salvation to pass.

How is He going to do that? By gathering a nation, Israel, by anointing a king like David who, in a few chapters, 2 Samuel chapter 7 there's going to be a covenant and that covenant is going to be spoken of as an everlasting covenant that's going to speak of the coming of Jesus as David's greater son. What's going on here?

Go up higher. You know the captain comes on and sometimes you can hear him and sometimes you can't and he's saying, "You know there's turbulence here. We need to find some altitude where there's — " You don't do enough flying you people! You know you go higher to find that location where there's no turbulence. Well, go higher a little. What's going on? That seed of the serpent in Genesis 3 it grows and it grows and it grows and you go to the very last book of the Bible and what do you find? That slithering serpent has now become a great red fiery dragon in Revelation 12. And the whole Gospel story is about plundering the strong man's house, binding him and plundering his goods. This chapter is just a little glimpse. It's just a little glimpse.

Look at verse 23 of chapter 26. Look at verse 23 and what does David say? "The Lord rewards every man for his righteousness and his faithfulness." Okay, it's the law of what Paul refers to in Galatians 6 that you reap what you sow and David is saying — it's scary what he's saying — he's saying, "I'm righteous," is what he's saying. He's saying, "I have been faithful." David has been righteous, that's true. In not killing Saul he was righteous. In trusting in God's providence he was faithful.

Now, turn to Revelation 19. Revelation 19 and verse 11. Just remember those two words that David used, righteous and faithful. "Then I saw heaven opened and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war." And there right at the very end of the Bible you've got a glimpse of — was David the faithful, righteous one who would save his people and you and me? No, he was not. Absolutely no way. Yes, in this chapter he is righteous and faithful and he wants God to bless that righteousness and faithfulness but in just ten or twelve chapters from now, in 2 Samuel 11 and 12, he will have fallen right down into the pit, committing adultery and judicial murder.

No, David could not be the Savior. He's just a little type of a Savior. He's just a little glimpse. If you read the story and you think, "Boy that reminds me something about Jesus," but it's not quite right because it isn't and that picture only comes into focus. Who is the righteous one?

Who is the true, faithful one sitting on a white horse?

Do you remember when Gandalf calls that horse? Can you see the picture? It's some of the best parts of those movies when the horse, Shadowfax, comes all the way down from the bottom of that field and comes all the way up. Do you remember that part? Some of you are tracking but not everybody.

Revelation 19 — Jesus on a white horse, faithful and true. What's it saying? There's only one hope. There's only one hope. It's exactly the same message as Ligon's this morning. There's only one hope and it's Jesus. It's not David. It's not the messy political world of David. It's Jesus. He is our only hope and He's all we



need. He's all we need.

*Father, we thank You for Your Word and pray now that You would once again just hide it in our hearts that we might relish it and be amazed by the words of grace that come from Your Word to sinners like ourselves. And grant Lord that Christ might be our all in all. For Jesus' sake we ask it. Amen.*

Please stand and receive the Lord's benediction. Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

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