

A Bible Adventure

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To Win an Enemy

A retelling of 1 Samuel 18 and 26

When David returned from smiting the Philistine, women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing with tambourines and musical instruments to meet King Saul.

“King Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands!” they joyfully chanted. “King Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands!”

The people love him! King Saul mused angrily, displeased at the chant. *What more can he get but my kingdom? Better to keep him within arm’s reach.*

The king’s jealousy led him to forbid David to return home and to make numerous attempts on David’s life. On one occasion, King Saul threw a javelin at him. On another, he slyly offered David his daughter Michal’s hand in marriage, asking that

David mutilate over a hundred Philistines as dowry, thinking that if he couldn’t kill David, then perhaps the Philistines would. Nevertheless, David and his men were victorious against the Philistines, and David continued to profess loyalty to King Saul.

Finally, however, after the king made many further attempts on his life, David fled into the wilderness of Ziph, and many oppressed or needy men and women gathered around him, seeking David to lead them.

See “A Giant Challenge” and “Exploits of a King-to-Be” for other stories on King David’s life.

While there in the wilderness, David was surprised to hear that King Saul was coming after him again. He could hardly believe the report, considering he had spared Saul's life in the wilderness cave of En-gedi when he had the means to kill him. This David had done to show the king that he did not intend to ever harm him. He had presumed that from then on, no more trouble would arise between them, yet now Saul was pursuing him as he had many times before.

Even so, David sent out spies to verify that Saul was indeed coming after him

once again. It was true, and the news saddened David.

"Save me, O God, by Your name, and judge me by Your strength," he prayed. "Hear my prayer, O God; give ear to the words of my mouth. ... Behold, God is my helper: the Lord is with them that uphold my soul."

This time, David and his men did not flee. Instead, in the dead of night, they crept toward the place where the king and his soldiers were encamped. King Saul was sleeping within a barricade in the center of the camp with Abner, his chief captain, nearby, while

the rest of the soldiers lay around them. Everyone was asleep.

"Who will go down with me to the king within the camp?" David whispered to two of his bravest men.

"I will," said Abishai.

Without a thought of the risk they were taking, the two men slipped into the enemy camp until they found King Saul, who was still sound asleep within the barricade. His spear was stuck in the ground near his bolster, and a cruse of water stood beside it.

"Let me end him," Abishai whispered, as he looked down at the man who had given David and his men so much trouble. "I will not need a second blow."

"Do not kill him," said David. "Who can injure God's anointed and be guiltless? ... We must leave King Saul's fate in God's hands."

Then, with the same trace of mischief that he had shown in the cave of En-gedi when he had cut off part of the king's garment, David whispered to Abishai, "Take that spear that is at his bolster and the cruse of water, and let us go."

The two men left the camp, and King Saul's soldiers were unaware because the Lord had caused a deep sleep to fall upon them. David then climbed to the brow of a distant hill and shouted across the valley to Saul's men.

"You do not answer, Abner?" he called again.

Abner got up, very much out of sorts.

"Who are you that cries out to the king?" he answered.

"Are you not a valiant man?" taunted David. "And who is

like you in Israel? Then why have you not kept your lord the king safe? ... Now see where is the king's spear and the cruse of water that was at his head. As the Lord lives, you are worthy to die because you have not kept your master, the Lord's anointed."

"Who is it?" Abner muttered, still waking up. "What is he talking about?"

But King Saul recognized David's voice and called back, "Is this the voice of my son David?"

"It is my voice, my lord, O king," he said, and asked

Saul the question that he had asked him many times before. "What have I done? Or what evil is in my hand?"

"I have sinned!" said the king, realizing that David must have been by his bed that night and spared his life. "Return, my son David, for I will no more do you harm. My soul was precious in your eyes today, and I have played the fool and have erred exceedingly."

David, ever ready to forgive, called back, "Behold the king's spear! Let one of the young men come over and fetch it."

"Blessed be you, my son David," King Saul said. "You shall do great things, and you will prevail."

Then David and his men went to Gath, and the king stopped pursuing him, for David had shown his true desire to have peace with his king.

See "Heroes of the Bible: King David" for more on this fascinating Bible character.