Research on: David sparing Saul’s life

I Sam. 26:1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 12, 14, 15, 16-19, 21, 25

**DAVID**:

“The youngest son of Jesse of Bethlehem, David was secretly anointed by Samuel while Saul was still reigning. Knowing nothing of this Saul called him to court and loved him dearly until jealousy

changed his affection into hatred. David was finally forced to flee and for several years led a sort of"Robin Hood" existence, pursued almost incessantly by the King. But David remained loyal to Saul, refusing to take his life on two occasions. (David had a long and very eventful life which I don’t have room to share here.)

“After his defeat of the Amalekites, David was resting at his residence in Ziklag, which had been bestowed upon him by Achish, King of Gath. He was stricken with grief when he received word that Saul and Jonathan had been killed by the Philistines at the Battle of Mount Gilboa. He composed a beautiful hymn of lamentation to his worst enemy, King Saul, and his best friend, Crown Prince Jonathan: "Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided." Then the Lord told David to go to Hebron where he was crowned King of Judah, the Confederacy of Southern Tribes.” (The Old Testament Made Easy, 258).

**ABNER:** first appears as the son of Ner, Saul's uncle, and the commander of Saul's army. Abner was Saul’s first cousin, and he made him commander-in-chief of his army. He then comes to the story again as the commander who introduced [David](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_(biblical_king)) to Saul following David's killing of [Goliath](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goliath). He is not mentioned in the account of the disastrous [battle of Gilboa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Gilboa) when Saul's power was crushed. Seizing the youngest but only surviving of Saul's sons, [Ish-bosheth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ish-bosheth), Abner set him up as king over [Israel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Israel_(united_monarchy)) at [Mahanaim](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahanaim), east of the [Jordan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jordan_River). [David](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_(biblical_king)), who was accepted as king by [Judah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Judah) alone, was meanwhile reigning at [Hebron](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebron), and for some time war was carried on between the two parties. Abner had married Rizpah, Saul's concubine, and this, according to the views of Oriental courts, might be so interpreted as to imply a design upon the throne. Rightly or wrongly, Ish-bosheth so understood it, and he even ventured to reproach Abner with it. Abner, incensed at his ingratitude, opened negotiations with David, by whom he was most favorably received at Hebron. He then undertook to procure his recognition throughout Israel; but after leaving his presence for the purpose was enticed back by Joab, and treacherously murdered by him and his brother Abishai, at the gate of the city, partly, no doubt, from fear lest so distinguished a convert to their cause should gain too high a place in David's favor, but ostensibly in retaliation for the death of Asahel. David in sorrow and indignation, poured forth a simple dirge over the slain hero. ([2 Samuel 3:33,34](http://biblehub.com/2_samuel/3-33.htm)) (Source – Wikipedia and Bible Hub.com)

**ABISHAI**: was the eldest son of the sister of King David (David’s nephew). He was the brother of Joab, a military leader under David. Abishai was the only one who accompanied David when he went to the camp of [Saul](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saul_the_King) and took the spear and water bottle from Saul as he slept ([1 Sam 26:5-12](http://tools.wmflabs.org/bibleversefinder/?book=1%20Sam&verse=26:5-12&src=HE)).

He had the command of one of the three divisions of David's army at the battle with [Absalom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Absalom) ([2 Sam 18:2,5,12](http://tools.wmflabs.org/bibleversefinder/?book=2%20Sam&verse=18:2,5,12&src=HE)). He was the commander of the second rank of the three ["mighty men"](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_David%27s_Warriors) ([2 Sam 23:18,19](http://tools.wmflabs.org/bibleversefinder/?book=2%20Sam&verse=23:18,19&src=HE); [1 Chr 11:20,21](http://tools.wmflabs.org/bibleversefinder/?book=1%20Chr&verse=11:20,21&src=HE)). On one occasion, he withstood 300 men and slew them with his own spear ([2 Sam 23:18](http://tools.wmflabs.org/bibleversefinder/?book=2%20Sam&verse=23:18&src=HE)).

Abishai slew the [Philistine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philistine) [giant](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giant_(mythology)) Ishbi-benob, who threatened David's life ([2 Sam 21:15-17](http://tools.wmflabs.org/bibleversefinder/?book=2%20Sam&verse=21:15-17&src=HE)). He once killed 300 men with his spear and helped with the killing of Absalom. Once, his brother, Asahel, who could run as fast as a gazelle, fought in battle with Abner, the general of Israel's army, and was killed by the back of his spear. Abishai, at this point, is so enraged at the murder of Asahel that he kills Abner at the later time with Joab, his brother.

1 And the Ziphites came unto Saul to Gibeah, saying, Doth not David hide himself in the hill of Hachilah, *which is* before Jeshimon?

“ verses 1, 2. the Ziphites came unto Saul to Gibeah—This people seem to have thought it impossible for David to escape, and therefore recommended themselves to Saul, by giving him secret information. The knowledge of their treachery makes it appear strange that David should return to his former haunt in their neighborhood; but, perhaps he did it to be near Abigail's possessions, and under the impression that Saul had become mollified. But the king had relapsed into his old enmity” (Barnes, [www.biblehub.com)](http://www.biblehub.com)).

“And the Ziphites came unto Saul to Gibeah,.... Of Benjamin, called sometimes Gibeah of Saul, because it was the place of his birth and residence; hither Saul had returned after his last interview with David; whether, notwithstanding what had passed between him and David, he had privately encouraged the Ziphites to watch David, and give him information of him where he was, and when it was a proper opportunity to seize him; or whether the Ziphites were so officious as of themselves to acquaint him with it, is not certain; the latter is probable, since having attempted to betray David, they might fear, that should he come to the throne, he would remember it, and therefore they might be desirous of having him cut off by the hand of Saul” (Gill’s Exposition, [www.biblehub.com)](http://www.biblehub.com)).

“Verse 1. - The Ziphites came unto Saul. There are so many points of similarity between this narrative and that contained in [1 Samuel 23:19-24](http://biblehub.com/1_samuel/23-19.htm); [1 Samuel 24:1-22](http://biblehub.com/1_samuel/24-1.htm), that it has been argued that in these two accounts we have substantially the same fact, only modified by two different popular traditions, and not recorded until a late subsequent period, at which the narrator, unable to decide which was the true form of the story, determined upon giving both. The main points of similarity are -   
  
(1) The treachery of the Ziphites ([1 Samuel 26:1](http://biblehub.com/1_samuel/26-1.htm); [1 Samuel 23:19](http://biblehub.com/1_samuel/23-19.htm)).   
  
(2) David's position in the hill Hachilah ([1 Samuel 26:1, 3](http://biblehub.com/1_samuel/26-1.htm); [1 Samuel 23:19](http://biblehub.com/1_samuel/23-19.htm)).   
  
(3) Saul's march with 3000 men ([1 Samuel 26:2](http://biblehub.com/1_samuel/26-2.htm); [1 Samuel 24:2](http://biblehub.com/1_samuel/24-2.htm)).   
  
(4) The speech of David's men ([1 Samuel 24:4](http://biblehub.com/1_samuel/24-4.htm); [1 Samuel 26:8](http://biblehub.com/1_samuel/26-8.htm)).   
  
(5) David's refusal to lay hands on the anointed of Jehovah ([1 Samuel 24:6](http://biblehub.com/1_samuel/24-6.htm); [1 Samuel 26:9, 11](http://biblehub.com/1_samuel/26-9.htm)).   
  
(6) Saul's recognition of David's voice ([1 Samuel 24:16](http://biblehub.com/1_samuel/24-16.htm); [1 Samuel 26:17](http://biblehub.com/1_samuel/26-17.htm))” (Pulpit Commentary, www.biblehub.com).

3 And Saul pitched in the hill of Hachilah, which *is* before Jeshimon, by the way. But David abode in the wilderness, and he saw that Saul came after him into the wilderness.

“ verse 2: **Then Saul arose, and went down to the wilderness of Ziph.**—We assume, then, that after the marriage of David with Abigail he and his armed band returned again to his old neighborhood in the south—in the desert of Judah—the district named after the Hill of Hachilah being, no doubt, in all respects well adapted for the permanent encampment of such a large band as David’s now most certainly was. David, who had been forced on a previous occasion to leave it on account of the hot pursuit of Saul, aided by the Ziphites, who knew the country and its resources so well, probably now supposed, after the protestation of Saul at En-gedi, that he would now at least be left in peace. But he forgot with whom he had to do—forgot the state of mind of his determined foe, and how likely it was that the old mania would return with redoubled force. The Ziphites, however, who knew Saul, and the feeling respecting David which existed at the court of Saul, repeated their old tactics, and sent, as on a previous occasion, to suggest that with their help the obnoxious chieftain and his free lances could be destroyed. The temptation was too great to be resisted; so probably, with the advice of Abner, Saul took the field again. The 3,000 seem to have been the standing force which Saul kept round him in the Gibeah garrison.

“verse 3 **But David abode in the wilderness.**—The former incident, when David spared Saul’s life, happened long after the information of the Ziphites brought the king to the hill “Hachilah, on the south of Jeshimon.” *Then*David, on hearing of the march of Saul and his army, retired into the wilderness of Maon. Saul pursued him, and David and his force were then only saved from destruction owing to the news of a formidable Philistine invasion. This intelligence called Saul’s forces away from the pursuit of David. David, unmolested, drew off his band, and sought refuge *at* En-gedi (1 Samuel 23). After the Philistine invasion had been repulsed, Saul again commenced operations against David; and marched his force to En-gedi, in one of the caves of which took place the scene where David for the first time spared the king’s life (1 Samuel 24). *Now,*after the information of the Ziphites had brought down Saul and his soldiers from Gibeah, David does not flee in haste to Maon, and thence to En-gedi, nor is Saul called away to any Philistine invasion; but David abides in the wilderness, and his scouts come and tell him that Saul *in very deed*([1Samuel 26:4](http://biblehub.com/1_samuel/26-4.htm)) was come after him in force.” (Ellicott’s Commentary, www.biblehub.com).

5 And David arose, and came to the place where Saul had pitched: and David beheld the place where Saul lay, and Abner the son of Ner, the captain of his host: and Saul lay in the trench, and the people pitched round about him.

“(5) **And David arose.**—Immediately after the scouts informed him of the purpose of Saul, and of the near proximity of the royal army David seems to have resolved upon that night adventure which resulted in the episode told in this twenty-sixth chapter.

**In the trench.**—The English Version has, “in the midst of his carriages”; “by the wagon rampart”; The LXX. translate the Hebrew word by “covered chariots.” The meaning is, no doubt, that the king lay down within the barricade or rampart formed by the baggage wagons” (Ellicott’s Commentary, [www.biblehub.com)](http://www.biblehub.com)).

“Saul lay in the trench, and the people pitched round about him—Among the nomad people of the East, the encampments are usually made in a circular form. The circumference is lined by the baggage and the men, while the chief's station is in the center, whether he occupy a tent or not. His spear, stuck in the ground, indicates his position. Similar was the disposition of Saul's camp—in this hasty expedition he seems to have carried no tent, but to have slept on the ground. The whole troop was sunk in sleep around him” (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown, [www.biblehub.com)](http://www.biblehub.com)).

7 So David and Abishai came to the people by night: and, behold, Saul lay sleeping within the trench, and his spear stuck in the ground at his bolster: but Abner and the people lay round about him.

“Abishai - He was son of Zeruiah, David's sister, but probably about the same age as David. He because very famous as a warrior [2 Samuel 23:18](http://biblehub.com/2_samuel/23-18.htm), but was implicated with his brother Joab in the murder of Abner in retaliation for the death of their brother Asahel [2 Samuel 3:30](http://biblehub.com/2_samuel/3-30.htm)” (Barnes Notes, www.biblehub.com).

9 And David said to Abishai, Destroy him not: for who can stretch forth his hand against the Lord’s anointed, and be guiltless?

“Saul had three thousand men with him; David had left his little troop ‘in the wilderness,’ and seems to have come with only his two companions, Ahimelech and his own nephew, Abishai, to reconnoitre. He sees, from some height, the camp, with the transport wagons making a kind of barricade in the centre-just as camps are still arranged in South Africa and elsewhere,-and Saul established therein as in a rude fortification. A bold thought flashes into his mind as he looks. Perhaps he remembered Gideon’s daring visit to the camp of Midian. He will go down, and not only into the camp, but ‘to Saul,’ through the ranks and over the barrier. What to do he does not say, but the two fierce fighters beside him think of only one thing as sufficient motive for such an adventure. Abishai volunteers to go with him; no doubt Ahimelech would have been ready also, but two were enough, and three would only have increased risk. So they lay close hid till night fell, and then stole down through the sleeping ranks with silent movements, like a couple of Indians on the war-trail, climbed the barricade, and stood at last where Saul lay, with his spear, as the emblem of kingship, stuck upright at his head, and a cruse of water for slaking thirst, if he awoke, beside him” (MacLaren’s Expositions, [www.biblehubcom)](http://www.biblehubcom)).

“**Against the Lord’s anointed.**—David—taught, no doubt, by the prophet Samuel—looked upon the person of Saul as made sacred and inviolable by the royal anointing. Through the anointing Saul had become the possession of Jehovah; only Jehovah, then, could lawfully take away that sacred life. This he elaborates in the next verse. It is possible that these exalted sentiments respecting the Divine rights of kings were not uttered by David while standing in the dark night among Saul’s soldiers by the sleeping king, but subsequently, when he and Abishai were talking the incident over together” (Ellicott’s Commentary, [www.biblehubcom)](http://www.biblehubcom)).

“Verses 9-11. - David forbids the deed as before ([1 Samuel 24:6](http://biblehub.com/1_samuel/24-6.htm)), because of Saul's office. As we there saw, this was an ingrained principle in David's mind on which he constantly acted. Present with equal strength in Saul's mind, it was the cause of moral ruin to the one, and of a noble forbearance and self-control to the other. . . What David means is that he will leave the matter entirely to God, but that if Saul's death is to be a violent one, he must fall honorably, not by the hand of a subject, but in battle with Israel's enemies” (Pulpit Commentary, [www.biblehubcom)](http://www.biblehubcom)).

12 So David took the spear and the cruse of water from Saul’s bolster; and they gat them away, and no man saw *it,* nor knew *it,* neither awaked: for they *were* all asleep; because a deep sleep from the Lord was fallen upon them.

“**The spear.**—The spear was Saul’s especial sign of royalty. “This taking away of the spear from Saul’s head as he slept was an omen of the transfer of his royalty to David. . . **And the cruse of water.**—“A very ancient usage explains why the cruse of water is here brought into such special prominence. According to this custom, some high dignitary always had in keeping a costly ewer for the king’s necessary ablutions, and it was specially his duty to take it with him, and present it to the king during campaigns or other journeys, so that its disappearance would involve almost as great a disgrace to the king as the loss of his sceptre” (Ellicott’s Commentary, [www.biblehubcom)](http://www.biblehubcom)).

“His spear. . . at his bolster. “Bolster” literally, the place where his head is, or at his head.  It was the tall spear which ever seems to have been in Saul’s hand, or placed close to him. We read of it in battle in his hand, and in the council chamber and at the state banquet it was within his reach, and now it was evidently reared upright beside the sleeping king” (Ellicott’s Commentary, [www.biblehubcom)](http://www.biblehubcom)).

“Those who should have been his guards lay sleeping round him, for a ‘deep sleep from Jehovah was fallen upon them.’ What a vivid, strange picture it is, and how characteristic of the car eless discipline of unscientific Eastern warfare!” (MacLaren’s Expositions, [www.biblehubcom)](http://www.biblehubcom)).

14 And David cried to the people, and to Abner the son of Ner, saying, Answerest thou not, Abner? Then Abner answered and said, Who *art* thou *that* criest to the king?

“**Who art thou that criest to the king?**—The Vulg. rightly interprets with “Who art thou that criest and disquietest the king?” that is, disturbs the king’s rest with your shouting” (Ellicott’s Commentary, [www.biblehubcom)](http://www.biblehubcom)).

“13-20. Then David … stood on the top of an hill afar off … and cried to the people—(See on [252]Jud 9:7). The extraordinary purity and elasticity of the air in Palestine enable words to be distinctly heard that are addressed by a speaker from the top of one hill to people on that of another, from which it is separated by a deep intervening ravine. Hostile parties can thus speak to each other, while completely beyond the reach of each other's attack. It results from the peculiar features of the country in many of the mountain districts” (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown, [www.biblehub.com)](http://www.biblehub.com)).

15 And David said to Abner, *Art* not thou a *valiant* man? and who *is* like to thee in Israel? wherefore then hast thou not kept thy lord the king? for there came one of the people in to destroy the king thy lord.

“**Wherefore then hast thou not kept?**—The whole of this bitter sarcastic address seems to imply that a deadly feud existed between David and Saul’s captain and kinsman, Abner. If this be the case, the royal generosity and nobility of David’s character was well shown in his subsequent friendship with this Abner, and in his deep sorrow for the great captain’s untimely death” (Ellicott’s Commentary, [www.biblehubcom)](http://www.biblehubcom)).

“David said to Abner, Art not thou a valiant man: … wherefore then hast thou not kept thy lord the king?—The circumstance of David having penetrated to the center of the encampment, through the circular rows of the sleeping soldiers, constituted the point of this sarcastic taunt. This new evidence of David's moderation and magnanimous forbearance, together with his earnest and kindly expostulation, softened the obduracy of Saul's heart” (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown, [www.biblehub.com)](http://www.biblehub.com)).

16 This thing *is* not good that thou hast done. *As* the Lord liveth, ye *are* worthy to die, because ye have not kept your master, the Lord’s anointed. And now see where the king’s spear *is,* and the cruse of water that *was* at his bolster.

“This thing is not good that thou hast done,.... Yea, it was very bad, a great fault, and very blameworthy, if he had neglected to set a watch over the king, whose business it was as a general; the words are expressed in a figure called "meiosis", in which less is said than was intended:

as the Lord liveth, ye are worthy to die, because ye have not kept your master, the Lord's anointed; if a watch was set, and these had fallen asleep, and neglected their duty, or had deserted their post; which to do was a capital crime, and deserving of death; wherefore he does not say this of Abner, but of the watch:

and now see where the king's spear is, and the cruse of water that was at his bolster; which he then held up as proofs and evidences of the truth of what be said, that one had been in the camp and had carried off these, and who could as easily have destroyed the king as to have taken these away; and as he came hither with an intent to destroy him, would have done it, had he not been prevented by David; all which likewise plainly proved the negligence of Abner, in not setting a watch about his master, or the negligence of the watch that was set” (Gill’s Exposition, www.biblehub.com).

17 And Saul knew David’s voice, and said, *Is* this thy voice, my son David? And David said, *It is* my voice, my lord, O king.

“And Saul knew David's voice,.... Though Abner at first did not, as appears by his words, but Saul did, by being this time thoroughly awake through the discourse that passed between David and Abner: and said, is this thy voice, my son David? the same question he put before, when he followed him out of the cave; see Gill on [1 Samuel 24:16](http://biblehub.com/1_samuel/24-16.htm),

and David said, it is my voice, my lord, O king; he not only owns him to be king, whom he sought not to depose, but his own liege lord and sovereign, whose commands he was ready to obey” (Gill’s Exposition, www.biblehub.com).

18 And he said, Wherefore doth my lord thus pursue after his servant? for what have I done? or what evil *is* in mine hand?

“**What have I done?**—The whole address of David to Saul is intensely reverent, even loving. The conspicuous trophy of his late “night raid” was in his hand; we can imagine the first rays of the morning sun lighting up the glittering royal spear grasped by David. Saul could not help recognising that at least the son of Jesse sought not his life” (Ellicott’s Commentary, [www.biblehubcom)](http://www.biblehubcom)).

“And he said, wherefore doth my lord thus pursue after his servant?.... Suggesting that it was both below him to do it, and against his interest; for David was his servant, and he would gladly have continued in his service, and done his business, but he drove him from it, and pursued him as a traitor, when he had not been guilty of any offence to his knowledge: and therefore puts the following questions:

for what have I done? or what evil is in mine hand? what crime had he committed, that he was pursued after this manner, and his life sought for? what had he done worthy of death? having a clear conscience, he could boldly ask these questions” (Gill’s Exposition, www.biblehub.com).

19 Now therefore, I pray thee, let my lord the king hear the words of his servant. If the Lord have stirred thee up against me, let him accept an offering: but if *they be* the children of men, cursed *be* they before the Lord; for they have driven me out this day from abiding in the inheritance of the Lord, saying, Go, serve other gods.

“[**1 Samuel 26:19**](http://biblehub.com/1_samuel/26-19.htm). *If the Lord hath stirred thee up against me —*If he hath, by the evil spirit which he hath sent, or by his secret providence, directed thy rage against me for the punishment of thine or my sins; *let him accept an offering —*Let us offer up a sacrifice to him to appease his wrath against us. *They have driven me —*From the land which God hath given to his people for their inheritance, and where he hath established his presence and worship. *Saying, Go, serve other gods —*This was the language of their actions. For by driving him from God’s land, and the place of his worship, into foreign and idolatrous lands, they exposed him to the peril of being either ensnared by their counsels or examples, or forced by their power to worship idols” (Benson Commentary, [www.biblehub.com)](http://www.biblehub.com)).

21 Then said Saul, I have sinned: return, my son David: for I will no more do thee harm, because my soul was precious in thine eyes this day: behold I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly.

“Then said Saul, I have sinned,.... Which is more than he acknowledged before, and yet, it is to be feared he had no true sense of his sin, and real repentance for it; but, like Pharaoh, his guilty conscience for the present forced this confession from him; see [Exodus 9:27](http://biblehub.com/exodus/9-27.htm),

return, my son David: meaning to his own house, or rather to his palace, since he had disposed of his wife to another man:

for I will no more do thee harm: or seek to do it by pursuing him from place to place, as he had done, which had given him a great deal of trouble and fatigue:

because my soul was precious in thine eyes this day; and therefore spared, when he could have taken it away; which showed that his life was dear to him, of great worth and value in his account; and therefore he would neither take it away himself, nor suffer another to do it:

behold, I have played the fool, and erred exceedingly: in seeking after his life, and pursuing him again, when he had such a convincing proof of his sincerity and faithfulness, and of his cordial affection for him, when he only cut off the skirts of his garment in the cave, and spared his life” (Gill’s Exposition, [www.biblehub.com)](http://www.biblehub.com)).

“Saul repeated his good words and good wishes. But he showed no evidence of true repentance towards God. David and Saul parted to meet no more” (Matthew Henry’s Commentary, www.biblehub.com).

25 Then Saul said to David, Blessed *be* thou, my son David: thou shalt both do great *things,* and also shalt still prevail. So David went on his way, and Saul returned to his place.

“*Blessed be thou, my son David —*Saul perceived that it was in vain to contend any longer against David, whom he saw God intended for great things. And so strong was his conviction now of this, as well as of his own sin and folly, that he could not forbear blessing him, foretelling his success, applauding him, and condemning himself, even in the hearing of his own soldiers. And this, it seems, was their last interview. After this they saw each other no more” (Benson Commentary, [www.biblehub.com)](http://www.biblehub.com)).

“So David went on his way—Notwithstanding this sudden relenting of Saul, David placed no confidence in his professions or promises, but wisely kept at a distance and awaited the course of Providence” (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown, [www.biblehub.com)](http://www.biblehub.com)).